# A Double-Barrelled Detective Story

by Mark Twain

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## A DOUBLE BARRELLED DETECTIVE STORY

## By Mark Twain

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# PART I

“We ought never to do wrong when people are looking.”

## I

The first scene is in the country, in Virginia; the time, 1880. There has been a wedding, between a handsome young man of slender means and a rich young girl—a case of love at first sight and a precipitate marriage; a marriage bitterly opposed by the girl’s widowed father.

Jacob Fuller, the bridegroom, is twenty-six years old, is of an old but unconsidered family which had by compulsion emigrated from Sedgemoor, and for King James’s

purse's profit, so everybody —some maliciously— the rest merely because they believed it. The bride is nineteen and beautiful. She is intense, high-strung, romantic, immeasurably proud of her Cavalier blood, and passionate in her love for her young husband. For its sake she braved her father's displeasure, endured his reproaches, listened with loyalty unshaken to his warning predictions, and went from his house without his blessing, proud and happy in the proofs she was thus giving of the quality of the affection which had made its home in her heart.

The morning after the marriage there was a sad surprise for her. Her husband put aside her proffered caresses, and said:

"Sit down. I have something to say to you. I loved you. That was before I asked your father to give you to me. His refusal is not my grievance—I could have endured that. But the things he said of me to you—that is a different matter. There—you needn't speak; I know quite well what they were; I got them from authentic sources. Among other things he said that my character was written in my face; that I was treacherous, a dissembler, a coward, and a brute without sense of pity or compassion: the 'Sedgemoor trade-mark,' he called it—and 'white-sleeve badge.' Any other man in my place would have gone to his house and shot him down like a dog. I wanted to do it, and was minded to do it, but a better thought came to me: to put him to shame; to break his heart; to kill him by inches. How to do it? Through my treatment of you, his idol! I would marry you; and then—Have patience. You will see."

From that moment onward, for three months, the young wife suffered all the humiliations, all the insults, all the miseries that the diligent and inventive mind of the husband could contrive, save physical injuries only. Her strong pride stood by her, and she kept the secret of her troubles. Now and then the husband said, "Why don't you go to your father and tell him?" Then he invented new tortures, applied them, and asked again. She always answered, "He shall never know by my mouth," and taunted him with his origin; said she was the lawful slave of a scion of slaves,

and must obey, and would—up to that point, but no further; he could kill her if he liked, but he could not break her; it was not in the Sedgemoor breed to do it. At the end of the three months he said, with a dark significance in his manner, “I have tried all things but one”—and waited for her reply. “Try that,” she said, and curled her lip in mockery.

That night he rose at midnight and put on his clothes, then said to her,

“Get up and dress!”

She obeyed—as always, without a word. He led her half a mile from the house, and proceeded to lash her to a tree by the side of the public road; and succeeded, she screaming and struggling. He gagged her then, struck her across the face with his cowhide, and set his bloodhounds on her. They tore the clothes off her, and she was naked. He called the dogs off, and said:

“You will be found—by the passing public. They will be dropping along about three hours from now, and will spread the news—do you hear? Good-by. You have seen the last of me.”

He went away then. She moaned to herself:

“I shall bear a child—to him! God grant it may be a boy!”

The farmers released her by-and-by—and spread the news, which was natural. They raised the country with lynching intentions, but the bird had flown. The young wife shut herself up in her father’s house; he shut himself up with her, and thenceforth would see no one. His pride was broken, and his heart; so he wasted away, day by day, and even his daughter rejoiced when death relieved him.

Then she sold the estate and disappeared.

## II

In 1886 a young woman was living in a modest house near a secluded New England

village, with no company but a little boy about five years old. She did her own work, she discouraged acquaintanceships, and had none. The butcher, the baker, and the others that served her could tell the villagers nothing about her further than that her name was Stillman, and that she called the child Archy. Whence she came they had not been able to find out, but they said she talked like a Southerner. The child had no playmates and no comrade, and no teacher but the mother. She taught him diligently and intelligently, and was satisfied with the results—even a little proud of them. One day Archy said,

"Mamma, am I different from other children?"

"Well, I suppose not. Why?"

"There was a child going along out there and asked me if the postman had been by and I said yes, and she said how long since I saw him and I said I hadn't seen him at all, and she said how did I know he'd been by, then, and I said because I smelt his track on the sidewalk, and she said I was a durn fool and made a mouth at me. What did she do that for?"

The young woman turned white, and said to herself, "It's a birthmark! The gift of the bloodhound is in him." She snatched the boy to her breast and hugged him passionately, saying, "God has appointed the way!" Her eyes were burning with a fierce light, and her breath came short and quick with excitement. She said to herself: "The puzzle is solved now; many a time it has been a mystery to me, the impossible things the child has done in the dark, but it is all clear to me now."

She set him in his small chair, and said,

"Wait a little till I come, dear; then we will talk about the matter."

She went up to her room and took from her dressing-table several small articles and put them out of sight: a nail-file on the floor under the bed; a pair of nail-scissors under the bureau; a small ivory paper-knife under the wardrobe. Then she returned, and said,

“There! I have left some things which I ought to have brought down.” She named them, and said, “Run up and bring them, dear.”

The child hurried away on his errand and was soon back again with the things.

“Did you have any difficulty, dear?”

“No, mamma; I only went where you went.”

During his absence she had stepped to the bookcase, taken several books from the bottom shelf, opened each, passed her hand over a page, noting its number in her memory, then restored them to their places. Now she said:

“I have been doing something while you have been gone, Archy. Do you think you can find out what it was?”

The boy went to the bookcase and got out the books that had been touched, and opened them at the pages which had been stroked.

The mother took him in her lap, and said,

“I will answer your question now, dear. I have found out that in one way you are quite different from other people. You can see in the dark, you can smell what other people cannot, you have the talents of a bloodhound. They are good and valuable things to have, but you must keep the matter a secret. If people found it out, they would speak of you as an odd child, a strange child, and children would be disagreeable to you, and give you nicknames. In this world one must be like everybody else if he doesn’t want to provoke scorn or envy or jealousy. It is a great and fine distinction which has been born to you, and I am glad; but you will keep it a secret, for mamma’s sake, won’t you?”

The child promised, without understanding.

All the rest of the day the mother’s brain was busy with excited thinkings; with plans, projects, schemes, each and all of them uncanny, grim, and dark. Yet they lit up her face; lit it with a fell light of their own; lit it with vague fires of hell. She was

in a fever of unrest; she could not sit, stand, read, sew; there was no relief for her but in movement. She tested her boy's gift in twenty ways, and kept saying to herself all the time, with her mind in the past: "He broke my father's heart, and night and day all these years I have tried, and all in vain, to think out a way to break his. I have found it now—I have found it now."

When night fell, the demon of unrest still possessed her. She went on with her tests; with a candle she traversed the house from garret to cellar, hiding pins, needles, thimbles, spools, under pillows, under carpets, in cracks in the walls, under the coal in the bin; then sent the little fellow in the dark to find them; which he did, and was happy and proud when she praised him and smothered him with caresses.

From this time forward life took on a new complexion for her. She said, "The future is secure—I can wait, and enjoy the waiting." The most of her lost interests revived. She took up music again, and languages, drawing, painting, and the other long-discarded delights of her maidenhood. She was happy once more, and felt again the zest of life. As the years drifted by she watched the development of her boy, and was contented with it. Not altogether, but nearly that. The soft side of his heart was larger than the other side of it. It was his only defect, in her eyes. But she considered that his love for her and worship of her made up for it. He was a good hater—that was well; but it was a question if the materials of his hatreds were of as tough and enduring a quality as those of his friendships—and that was not so well.

The years drifted on. Archy was become a handsome, shapely, athletic youth, courteous, dignified, companionable, pleasant in his ways, and looking perhaps a trifle older than he was, which was sixteen. One evening his mother said she had something of grave importance to say to him, adding that he was old enough to hear it now, and old enough and possessed of character enough and stability enough to carry out a stern plan which she had been for years contriving and maturing. Then she told him her bitter story, in all its naked atrociousness. For a while the boy was

paralyzed; then he said,

“I understand. We are Southerners; and by our custom and nature there is but one atonement. I will search him out and kill him.”

“Kill him? No! Death is release, emancipation; death is a favor. Do I owe him favors? You must not hurt a hair of his head.”

The boy was lost in thought awhile; then he said,

“You are all the world to me, and your desire is my law and my pleasure. Tell me what to do and I will do it.”

The mother’s eyes beamed with satisfaction, and she said,

“You will go and find him. I have known his hiding-place for eleven years; it cost me five years and more of inquiry, and much money, to locate it. He is a quartz-miner in Colorado, and well-to-do. He lives in Denver. His name is Jacob Fuller. There—it is the first time I have spoken it since that unforgettable night. Think! That name could have been yours if I had not saved you that shame and furnished you a cleaner one. You will drive him from that place; you will hunt him down and drive him again; and yet again, and again, and again, persistently, relentlessly, poisoning his life, filling it with mysterious terrors, loading it with weariness and misery, making him wish for death, and that he had a suicide’s courage; you will make of him another Wandering Jew; he shall know no rest any more, no peace of mind, no placid sleep; you shall shadow him, cling to him, persecute him, till you break his heart, as he broke my father’s and mine.”

“I will obey, mother.”

“I believe it, my child. The preparations are all made; everything is ready. Here is a letter of credit; spend freely, there is no lack of money. At times you may need disguises. I have provided them; also some other conveniences.” She took from the drawer of the type-writer-table several squares of paper. They all bore these type-written words:

$10,000 REWARD

It is believed that a certain man who is wanted in an Eastern state is sojourning here. In 1880, in the night, he tied his young wife to a tree by the public road, cut her across the face with a cowhide, and made his dogs tear her clothes from her, leaving her naked. He left her there, and fled the country. A blood-relative of hers has searched for him for seventeen years. Address... ....., ....., Post-office. The above reward will be paid in cash to the person who will furnish the seeker, in a personal interview, the criminal's address.

"When you have found him and acquainted yourself with his scent, you will go in the night and placard one of these upon the building he occupies, and another one upon the post-office or in some other prominent place. It will be the talk of the region. At first you must give him several days in which to force a sale of his belongings at something approaching their value. We will ruin him by-and-by, but gradually; we must not impoverish him at once, for that could bring him to despair and injure his health, possibly kill him."

She took three or four more typewritten forms from the drawer—duplicates—and read one:

....., ....., 18... To Jacob Fuller:

You have..... days in which to settle your affairs. You will not be disturbed during that limit, which will expire at. ..... M., on the..... of..... You must then MOVE ON. If you are still in the place after the named hour, I will placard you on all the dead walls, detailing your crime once more, and adding the date, also the scene of it, with all names concerned, including your own. Have no fear of bodily injury—it will in no circumstances ever be inflicted upon you. You brought misery upon an old man, and ruined his life and broke his heart. What he suffered, you are to suffer.

"You will add no signature. He must receive this before he learns of the reward-placard—before he rises in the morning—lest he lose his head and fly the

place penniless.”

“I shall not forget.”

“You will need to use these forms only in the beginning—once may be enough. Afterward, when you are ready for him to vanish out of a place, see that he gets a copy of this form, which merely says,

MOVE ON. You have..... days.

“He will obey. That is sure.”

## III

**Extracts from letters to the mother:**

DENVER, April 3, 1897 I have now been living several days in the same hotel with Jacob Fuller. I have his scent; I could track him through ten divisions of infantry and find him. I have often been near him and heard him talk. He owns a good mine, and has a fair income from it; but he is not rich. He learned mining in a good way—by working at it for wages. He is a cheerful creature, and his forty-three years sit lightly upon him; he could pass for a younger man—say thirty-six or thirty-seven. He has never married again—passes himself off for a widower. He stands well, is liked, is popular, and has many friends. Even I feel a drawing toward him—the paternal blood in me making its claim. How blind and unreasoning and arbitrary are some of the laws of nature—the most of them, in fact! My task is become hard now—you realize it? you comprehend, and make allowances?—and the fire of it has cooled, more than I like to confess to myself. But I will carry it out. Even with the pleasure paled, the duty remains, and I will not spare him.

And for my help, a sharp resentment rises in me when I reflect that he who committed that odious crime is the only one who has not suffered by it. The lesson of it has manifestly reformed his character, and in the change he is happy. He, the

guilty party, is absolved from all suffering; you, the innocent, are borne down with it. But be comforted—he shall harvest his share.

SILVER GULCH, May 19 I placarded Form No. 1 at midnight of April 3; an hour later I slipped Form No. 2 under his chamber door, notifying him to leave Denver at or before 11.50 the night of the 14th.

Some late bird of a reporter stole one of my placards, then hunted the town over and found the other one, and stole that. In this manner he accomplished what the profession call a "scoop"—that is, he got a valuable item, and saw to it that no other paper got it. And so his paper—the principal one in the town—had it in glaring type on the editorial page in the morning, followed by a Vesuvian opinion of our wretch a column long, which wound up by adding a thousand dollars to our reward on the paper's account! The journals out here know how to do the noble thing—when there's business in it.

At breakfast I occupied my usual seat—selected because it afforded a view of papa Fuller's face, and was near enough for me to hear the talk that went on at his table. Seventy-five or a hundred people were in the room, and all discussing that item, and saying they hoped the seeker would find that rascal and remove the pollution of his presence from the town—with a rail, or a bullet, or something.

When Fuller came in he had the Notice to Leave—folded up—in one hand, and the newspaper in the other; and it gave me more than half a pang to see him. His cheerfulness was all gone, and he looked old and pinched and ashy. And then—only think of the things he had to listen to! Mamma, he heard his own unsuspecting friends describe him with epithets and characterizations drawn from the very dictionaries and phrase-books of Satan's own authorized editions down below. And more than that, he had to agree with the verdicts and applaud them. His applause tasted bitter in his mouth, though; he could not disguise that from me; and it was observable that his appetite was gone; he only nibbled; he couldn't eat. Finally a

man said,

“It is quite likely that that relative is in the room and hearing what this town thinks of that unspeakable scoundrel. I hope so.”

Ah, dear, it was pitiful the way Fuller winced, and glanced around scared! He couldn’t endure any more, and got up and left.

During several days he gave out that he had bought a mine in Mexico, and wanted to sell out and go down there as soon as he could, and give the property his personal attention. He played his cards well; said he would take $40,000—a quarter in cash, the rest in safe notes; but that as he greatly needed money on account of his new purchase, he would diminish his terms for cash in full, He sold out for $30,000. And then, what do you think he did? He asked for greenbacks, and took them, saying the man in Mexico was a New-Englander, with a head full of crotchets, and preferred greenbacks to gold or drafts. People thought it queer, since a draft on New York could produce greenbacks quite conveniently. There was talk of this odd thing, but only for a day; that is as long as any topic lasts in Denver.

I was watching, all the time. As soon as the sale was completed and the money paid—which was on the 11th—I began to stick to Fuller’s track without dropping it for a moment. That night—no, 12th, for it was a little past midnight—I tracked him to his room, which was four doors from mine in the same hall; then I went back and put on my muddy day-laborer disguise, darkened my complexion, and sat down in my room in the gloom, with a gripsack handy, with a change in it, and my door ajar. For I suspected that the bird would take wing now. In half an hour an old woman passed by, carrying a grip; I caught the familiar whiff, and followed with my grip, for it was Fuller. He left the hotel by a side entrance, and at the corner he turned up an unfrequented street and walked three blocks in a light rain and a heavy darkness, and got into a two-horse hack, which, of course, was waiting for him by appointment. I took a seat (uninvited) on the trunk platform behind, and we drove

briskly off. We drove ten miles, and the hack stopped at a way station and was discharged. Fuller got out and took a seat on a barrow under the awning, as far as he could get from the light; I went inside, and watched the ticket-office. Fuller bought no ticket; I bought none. Presently the train came along, and he boarded a car; I entered the same car at the other end, and came down the aisle and took the seat behind him. When he paid the conductor and named his objective point, I dropped back several seats, while the conductor was changing a bill, and when he came to me I paid to the same place—about a hundred miles westward.

From that time for a week on end he led me a dance. He travelled here and there and yonder—always on a general westward trend—but he was not a woman after the first day. He was a laborer, like myself, and wore bushy false whiskers. His outfit was perfect, and he could do the character without thinking about it, for he had served the trade for wages. His nearest friend could not have recognized him. At last he located himself here, the obscurest little mountain camp in Montana; he has a shanty, and goes out prospecting daily; is gone all day, and avoids society. I am living at a miner's boarding-house, and it is an awful place: the bunks, the food, the dirt—everything.

We have been here four weeks, and in that time I have seen him but once; but every night I go over his track and post myself. As soon as he engaged a shanty here I went to a town fifty miles away and telegraphed that Denver hotel to keep my baggage till I should send for it. I need nothing here but a change of army shirts, and I brought that with me.

SILVER GULCH, June 12.

The Denver episode has never found its way here, I think. I know the most of the men in camp, and they have never referred to it, at least in my hearing. Fuller doubtless feels quite safe in these conditions. He has located a claim, two miles away, in an out-of-the-way place in the mountains; it promises very well, and he is

working it diligently. Ah, but the change in him! He never smiles, and he keeps quite to himself, consorting with no one—he who was so fond of company and so cheery only two months ago. I have seen him passing along several times recently—drooping, forlorn, the spring gone from his step, a pathetic figure. He calls himself David Wilson.

I can trust him to remain here until we disturb him. Since you insist, I will banish him again, but I do not see how he can be unhappier than he already is. I will go hack to Denver and treat myself to a little season of comfort, and edible food, and endurable beds, and bodily decency; then I will fetch my things, and notify poor papa Wilson to move on.

DENVER, June 19.

They miss him here. They all hope he is prospering in Mexico, and they do not say it just with their mouths, but out of their hearts. You know you can always tell. I am loitering here overlong, I confess it. But if you were in my place you would have charity for me. Yes, I know what you will say, and you are right: if I were in your place, and carried your scalding memories in my heart—

I will take the night train back to-morrow.

DENVER, June 20.

God forgive us, mother, we are hunting the wrong man! I have not slept any all night. I am now awaiting, at dawn, for the morning train—and how the minutes drag, how they drag!

This Jacob Fuller is a cousin of the guilty one. How stupid we have been not to reflect that the guilty one would never again wear his own name after that fiendish deed! The Denver Fuller is four years younger than the other one; he came here a young widower in ‘79, aged twenty-one—a year before you were married; and the documents to prove it are innumerable. Last night I talked with familiar friends of his who have known him from the day of his arrival. I said nothing, but a few days

from now I will land him in this town again, with the loss upon his mine made good; and there will be a banquet, and a torch-light procession, and there will not be any expense on anybody but me. Do you call this “gush”? I am only a boy, as you well know; it is my privilege. By-and-by I shall not be a boy any more.

SILVER GULCH, July 3.

Mother, he is gone! Gone, and left no trace. The scent was cold when I came. To-day I am out of bed for the first time since. I wish I were not a boy; then I could stand shocks better. They all think he went west. I start to-night, in a wagon—two or three hours of that, then I get a train. I don’t know where I’m going, but I must go; to try to keep still would be torture.

Of course he has effaced himself with a new name and a disguise. This means that I may have to search the whole globe to find him. Indeed it is what I expect. Do you see, mother? It is I that am the Wandering Jew. The irony of it! We arranged that for another.

Think of the difficulties! And there would be none if I only could advertise for him. But if there is any way to do it that would not frighten him, I have not been able to think it out, and I have tried till my brains are addled. “If the gentleman who lately bought a mine in Mexico and sold one in Denver will send his address to—” (to whom, mother?), “it will be explained to him that it was all a mistake; his forgiveness will be asked, and full reparation made for a loss which he sustained in a certain matter.” Do you see? He would think it a trap. Well, any one would. If I should say, “It is now known that he was not the man wanted, but another man—a man who once bore the same name, but discarded it for good reasons”—would that answer? But the Denver people would wake up then and say “Oho!” and they would remember about the suspicious greenbacks, and say, “Why did he run away if he wasn’t the right man?—it is too thin.” If I failed to find him he would be ruined there—there where there is no taint upon him now. You have a better head than

mine. Help me.

I have one clue, and only one. I know his handwriting. If he puts his new false name upon a hotel register and does not disguise it too much, it will be valuable to me if I ever run across it.

SAN FRANCISCO, June 28, 1898.

You already know how well I have searched the states from Colorado to the Pacific, and how nearly I came to getting him once. Well, I have had another close miss. It was here, yesterday. I struck his trail, hot, on the street, and followed it on a run to a cheap hotel. That was a costly mistake; a dog would have gone the other way. But I am only part dog, and can get very humanly stupid when excited. He had been stopping in that house ten days; I almost know, now, that he stops long nowhere, the past six or eight months, but is restless and has to keep moving. I understand that feeling! and I know what it is to feel it. He still uses the name he had registered when I came so near catching him nine months ago—"James Walker"; doubtless the same he adopted when he fled from Silver Gulch. An unpretending man, and has small taste for fancy names. I recognized the hand easily, through its slight disguise. A square man, and not good at shams and pretenses.

They said he was just gone, on a journey; left no address; didn't say where he was going; looked frightened when asked to leave his address; had no baggage but a cheap valise; carried it off on foot—a "stingy old person, and not much loss to the house." "Old!" I suppose he is, now. I hardly heard; I was there but a moment. I rushed along his trail, and it led me to a wharf. Mother, the smoke of the steamer he had taken was just fading out on the horizon! I should have saved half an hour if I had gone in the right direction at first. I could have taken a fast tug, and should have stood a chance of catching that vessel. She is bound for Melbourne.

HOPE CANYON, CALIFORNIA, October 3, 1900.

You have a right to complain. "A letter a year" is a paucity; I freely acknowledge it;

but how can one write when there is nothing to write about but failures? No one can keep it up; it breaks the heart.

I told you—it seems ages ago, now—how I missed him at Melbourne, and then chased him all over Australasia for months on end.

Well, then, after that I followed him to India; almost saw him in Bombay; traced him all around—to Baroda, Rawal-Pindi, Lucknow, Lahore, Cawnpore, Allahabad, Calcutta, Madras—oh, everywhere; week after week, month after month, through the dust and swelter—always approximately on his track, sometimes close upon him, yet never catching him. And down to Ceylon, and then to—Never mind; by-and-by I will write it all out.

I chased him home to California, and down to Mexico, and back again to California. Since then I have been hunting him about the state from the first of last January down to a month ago. I feel almost sure he is not far from Hope Canyon; I traced him to a point thirty miles from here, but there I lost the trail; some one gave him a lift in a wagon, I suppose.

I am taking a rest, now—modified by searchings for the lost trail. I was tired to death, mother, and low-spirited, and sometimes coming uncomfortably near to losing hope; but the miners in this little camp are good fellows, and I am used to their sort this long time back; and their breezy ways freshen a person up and make him forget his troubles. I have been here a month. I am cabining with a young fellow named “Sammy” Hillyer, about twenty-five, the only son of his mother—like me—and loves her dearly, and writes to her every week—part of which is like me. He is a timid body, and in the matter of intellect—well, he cannot be depended upon to set a river on fire; but no matter, he is well liked; he is good and fine, and it is meat and bread and rest and luxury to sit and talk with him and have a comradeship again. I wish “James Walker” could have it. He had friends; he liked company. That brings up that picture of him, the time that I saw him last. The pathos of it! It comes

before me often and often. At that very time, poor thing, I was girding up my conscience to make him move on again!

Hillyer's heart is better than mine, better than anybody's in the community, I suppose, for he is the one friend of the black sheep of the camp—Flint Buckner—and the only man Flint ever talks with or allows to talk with him. He says he knows Flint's history, and that it is trouble that has made him what he is, and so one ought to be as charitable toward him as one can. Now none but a pretty large heart could find space to accommodate a lodger like Flint Buckner, from all I hear about him outside. I think that this one detail will give you a better idea of Sammy's character than any labored-out description I could furnish you of him. In one of our talks he said something about like this: "Flint is a kinsman of mine, and he pours out all his troubles to me—empties his breast from time to time, or I reckon it would burst. There couldn't be any unhappier man, Archy Stillman; his life had been made up of misery of mind—he isn't near as old as he looks. He has lost the feel of reposefulness and peace—oh, years and years ago! He doesn't know what good luck is—never has had any; often says he wishes he was in the other hell, he is so tired of this one."

## IV.

"No real gentleman will tell the naked truth in the presence of ladies."

It was a crisp and spicy morning in early October. The lilacs and laburnums, lit with the glory-fires of autumn, hung burning and flashing in the upper air, a fairy bridge provided by kind Nature for the wingless wild things that have their homes in the tree-tops and would visit together; the larch and the pomegranate flung their purple and yellow flames in brilliant broad splashes along the slanting sweep of the woodland; the sensuous fragrance of innumerable deciduous flowers rose upon the swooning atmosphere; far in the empty sky a solitary oesophagus slept upon

motionless wing; everywhere brooded stillness, serenity, and the peace of God.

October is the time—1900; Hope Canyon is the place, a silver-mining camp away down in the Esmeralda region. It is a secluded spot, high and remote; recent as to discovery; thought by its occupants to be rich in metal—a year or two's prospecting will decide that matter one way or the other. For inhabitants, the camp has about two hundred miners, one white woman and child, several Chinese washermen, five squaws, and a dozen vagrant buck Indians in rabbit-skin robes, battered plug hats, and tin-can necklaces. There are no mills as yet; there is no church, no newspaper. The camp has existed but two years; it has made no big strike; the world is ignorant of its name and place.

On both sides of the canyon the mountains rise wall-like, three thousand feet, and the long spiral of straggling huts down in its narrow bottom gets a kiss from the sun only once a day, when he sails over at noon. The village is a couple of miles long; the cabins stand well apart from each other. The tavern is the only "frame" house—the only house, one might say. It occupies a central position, and is the evening resort of the population. They drink there, and play seven-up and dominoes; also billiards, for there is a table, crossed all over with torn places repaired with court-plaster; there are some cues, but no leathers; some chipped balls which clatter when they run, and do not slow up gradually, but stop suddenly and sit down; there is part of a cube of chalk, with a projecting jag of flint in it; and the man who can score six on a single break can set up the drinks at the bar's expense.

Flint Buckner's cabin was the last one of the village, going south; his silver-claim was at the other end of the village, northward, and a little beyond the last hut in that direction. He was a sour creature, unsociable, and had no companionships. People who had tried to get acquainted with him had regretted it and dropped him. His history was not known. Some believed that Sammy Hillyer knew it; others said no. If asked, Hillyer said no, he was not acquainted with it. Flint had a meek English

youth of sixteen or seventeen with him, whom he treated roughly, both in public and in private, and of course this lad was applied to for information, but with no success. Fetlock Jones—the name of the youth—said that Flint picked him up on a prospecting tramp, and as he had neither home nor friends in America, he had found it wise to stay and take Buckner's hard usage for the sake of the salary, which was bacon and beans. Further than this he could offer no testimony.

Fetlock had been in this slavery for a month now, and under his meek exterior he was slowly consuming to a cinder with the insults and humiliations which his master had put upon him. For the meek suffer bitterly from these hurts; more bitterly, perhaps, than do the manlier sort, who can burst out and get relief with words or blows when the limit of endurance has been reached. Good-hearted people wanted to help Fetlock out of his trouble, and tried to get him to leave Buckner; but the boy showed fright at the thought, and said he "dasn't." Pat Riley urged him, and said,

"You leave the damned hunks and come with me; don't you be afraid. I'll take care of him."

The boy thanked him with tears in his eyes, but shuddered and said he "dasn't risk it"; he said Flint would catch him alone, some time, in the night, and then—"Oh, it makes me sick, Mr. Riley, to think of it."

Others said, "Run away from him; we'll stake you; skip out for the coast some night." But all these suggestions failed; he said Flint would hunt him down and fetch him back, just for meanness.

The people could not understand this. The boy's miseries went steadily on, week after week. It is quite likely that the people would have understood if they had known how he was employing his spare time. He slept in an out-cabin near Flint's; and there, nights, he nursed his bruises and his humiliations, and studied and studied over a single problem—how he could murder Flint Buckner and not be found out. It was the only joy he had in life; these hours were the only ones in the twenty-four

which he looked forward to with eagerness and spent in happiness.

He thought of poison. No—that would not serve; the inquest would reveal where it was procured and who had procured it. He thought of a shot in the back in a lonely place when Flint would be homeward-bound at midnight—his unvarying hour for the trip. No—somebody might be near, and catch him. He thought of stabbing him in his sleep. No—he might strike an inefficient blow, and Flint would seize him. He examined a hundred different ways—none of them would answer; for in even the very obscurest and secretest of them there was always the fatal defect of a risk, a chance, a possibility that he might be found out. He would have none of that.

But he was patient, endlessly patient. There was no hurry, he said to himself. He would never leave Flint till he left him a corpse; there was no hurry—he would find the way. It was somewhere, and he would endure shame and pain and misery until he found it. Yes, somewhere there was a way which would leave not a trace, not even the faintest clue to the murderer—there was no hurry—he would find that way, and then—oh, then, it would just be good to be alive! Meantime he would diligently keep up his reputation for meekness; and also, as always theretofore, he would allow no one to hear him say a resentful or offensive thing about his oppressor.

Two days before the before-mentioned October morning Flint had bought some things, and he and Fetlock had brought them home to Flint's cabin: a fresh box of candles, which they put in the corner; a tin can of blasting-powder, which they placed upon the candle-box; a keg of blasting-powder, which they placed under Flint's bunk; a huge coil of fuse, which they hung on a peg. Fetlock reasoned that Flint's mining operations had outgrown the pick, and that blasting was about to begin now. He had seen blasting done, and he had a notion of the process, but he had never helped in it. His conjecture was right—blasting-time had come. In the morning the pair carried fuse, drills, and the powder-can to the shaft; it was now eight feet deep, and to get into it and out of it a short ladder was used. They

descended, and by command Fetlock held the drill—without any instructions as to the right way to hold it—and Flint proceeded to strike. The sledge came down; the drill sprang out of Fetlock's hand, almost as a matter of course.

"You mangy son of a nigger, is that any way to hold a drill? Pick it up! Stand it up! There—hold fast. D—you! I'll teach you!"

At the end of an hour the drilling was finished.

"Now, then, charge it."

The boy started to pour in the powder.

"Idiot!"

A heavy bat on the jaw laid the lad out.

"Get up! You can't lie snivelling there. Now, then, stick in the fuse first. Now put in the powder. Hold on, hold on! Are you going to fill the hole all up? Of all the sap-headed milksops I—Put in some dirt! Put in some gravel! Tamp it down! Hold on, hold on! Oh, great Scott! get out of the way!" He snatched the iron and tamped the charge himself, meantime cursing and blaspheming like a fiend. Then he fired the fuse, climbed out of the shaft, and ran fifty yards away, Fetlock following. They stood waiting a few minutes, then a great volume of smoke and rocks burst high into the air with a thunderous explosion; after a little there was a shower of descending stones; then all was serene again.

"I wish to God you'd been in it!" remarked the master.

They went down the shaft, cleaned it out, drilled another hole, and put in another charge.

"Look here! How much fuse are you proposing to waste? Don't you know how to time a fuse?"

"No, sir."

"You don't! Well, if you don't beat anything I ever saw!"

He climbed out of the shaft and spoke down,

“Well, idiot, are you going to be all day? Cut the fuse and light it!”

The trembling creature began,

“If you please, sir, I—”

“You talk back to me? Cut it and light it!”

The boy cut and lit.

“Ger-reat Scott! a one-minute fuse! I wish you were in—”

In his rage he snatched the ladder out of the shaft and ran. The boy was aghast.

“Oh, my God! Help. Help! Oh, save me!” he implored. “Oh, what can I do! What can I do!”

He backed against the wall as tightly as he could; the sputtering fuse frightened the voice out of him; his breath stood still; he stood gazing and impotent; in two seconds, three seconds, four he would be flying toward the sky torn to fragments. Then he had an inspiration. He sprang at the fuse, severed the inch of it that was left above ground, and was saved.

He sank down limp and half lifeless with fright, his strength all gone; but he muttered with a deep joy,

“He has learnt me! I knew there was a way, if I would wait.”

After a matter of five minutes Buckner stole to the shaft, looking worried and uneasy, and peered down into it. He took in the situation; he saw what had happened. He lowered the ladder, and the boy dragged himself weakly up it. He was very white. His appearance added something to Buckner’s uncomfortable state, and he said, with a show of regret and sympathy which sat upon him awkwardly from lack of practice:

“It was an accident, you know. Don’t say anything about it to anybody; I was excited, and didn’t notice what I was doing. You’re not looking well; you’ve worked

enough for to-day; go down to my cabin and eat what you want, and rest. It's just an accident, you know, on account of my being excited."

"It scared me," said the lad, as he started away; "but I learnt something, so I don't mind it."

"Damned easy to please!" muttered Buckner, following him with his eye. "I wonder if he'll tell? Mightn't he?... I wish it had killed him."

The boy took no advantage of his holiday in the matter of resting; he employed it in work, eager and feverish and happy work. A thick growth of chaparral extended down the mountainside clear to Flint's cabin; the most of Fetlock's labor was done in the dark intricacies of that stubborn growth; the rest of it was done in his own shanty. At last all was complete, and he said,

"If he's got any suspicions that I'm going to tell on him, he won't keep them long, to-morrow. He will see that I am the same milksop as I always was—all day and the next. And the day after to-morrow night there 'll be an end of him; nobody will ever guess who finished him up nor how it was done. He dropped me the idea his own self, and that's odd."

## V

**The next day came and went.**

It is now almost midnight, and in five minutes the new morning will begin. The scene is in the tavern billiard-room. Rough men in rough clothing, slouch-hats, breeches stuffed into boot-tops, some with vests, none with coats, are grouped about the boiler-iron stove, which has ruddy cheeks and is distributing a grateful warmth; the billiard-balls are clacking; there is no other sound—that is, within; the wind is fitfully moaning without. The men look bored; also expectant. A hulking broad-shouldered miner, of middle age, with grizzled whiskers, and an unfriendly

eye set in an unsociable face, rises, slips a coil of fuse upon his arm, gathers up some other personal properties, and departs without word or greeting to anybody. It is Flint Buckner. As the door closes behind him a buzz of talk breaks out.

“The regularest man that ever was,” said Jake Parker, the blacksmith; “you can tell when it’s twelve just by him leaving, without looking at your Waterbury.”

“And it’s the only virtue he’s got, as fur as I know,” said Peter Hawes, miner.

“He’s just a blight on this society,” said Wells-Fargo’s man, Ferguson. “If I was running this shop I’d make him say something, some time or other, or vamos the ranch.” This with a suggestive glance at the barkeeper, who did not choose to see it, since the man under discussion was a good customer, and went home pretty well set up, every night, with refreshments furnished from the bar.

“Say,” said Ham Sandwich, miner, “does any of you boys ever recollect of him asking you to take a drink?”

“Him? Flint Buckner? Oh, Laura!”

This sarcastic rejoinder came in a spontaneous general outburst in one form of words or another from the crowd. After a brief silence, Pat Riley, miner, said,

“He’s the 15-puzzle, that cuss. And his boy’s another one. I can’t make them out.”

“Nor anybody else,” said Ham Sandwich; “and if they are 15-puzzles how are you going to rank up that other one? When it comes to A 1 right-down solid mysteriousness, he lays over both of them. Easy—don’t he?”

“You bet!”

Everybody said it. Every man but one. He was the new-comer—Peterson. He ordered the drinks all round, and asked who No. 3 might be. All answered at once, “Archy Stillman!”

“Is he a mystery?” asked Peterson.

“Is he a mystery? Is Archy Stillman a mystery?” said Wells-Fargo’s man, Ferguson.

“Why, the fourth dimension’s foolishness to him.”

For Ferguson was learned.

Peterson wanted to hear all about him; everybody wanted to tell him; everybody began. But Billy Stevens, the barkeeper, called the house to order, and said one at a time was best. He distributed the drinks, and appointed Ferguson to lead. Ferguson said,

“Well, he’s a boy. And that is just about all we know about him. You can pump him till you are tired; it ain’t any use; you won’t get anything. At least about his intentions, or line of business, or where he’s from, and such things as that. And as for getting at the nature and get-up of his main big chief mystery, why, he’ll just change the subject, that’s all. You can guess till you’re black in the face—it’s your privilege—but suppose you do, where do you arrive at? Nowhere, as near as I can make out.”

“What is his big chief one?”

“Sight, maybe. Hearing, maybe. Instinct, maybe. Magic, maybe. Take your choice—grownups, twenty-five; children and servants, half price. Now I’ll tell you what he can do. You can start here, and just disappear; you can go and hide wherever you want to, I don’t care where it is, nor how far—and he’ll go straight and put his finger on you.”

“You don’t mean it!”

“I just do, though. Weather’s nothing to him—elemental conditions is nothing to him—he don’t even take notice of them.”

“Oh, come! Dark? Rain? Snow? Hey?”

“It’s all the same to him. He don’t give a damn.”

“Oh, say—including fog, per’aps?”

“Fog! he’s got an eye ’t can plunk through it like a bullet.”

“Now, boys, honor bright, what’s he giving me?”

“It’s a fact!” they all shouted. “Go on, Wells-Fargo.”

“Well, sir, you can leave him here, chatting with the boys, and you can slip out and go to any cabin in this camp and open a book—yes, sir, a dozen of them—and take the page in your memory, and he’ll start out and go straight to that cabin and open every one of them books at the right page, and call it off, and never make a mistake.”

“He must be the devil!”

“More than one has thought it. Now I’ll tell you a perfectly wonderful thing that he done. The other night he—”

There was a sudden great murmur of sounds outside, the door flew open, and an excited crowd burst in, with the camp’s one white woman in the lead and crying,

“My child! my child! she’s lost and gone! For the love of God help me to find Archy Stillman; we’ve hunted everywhere!”

Said the barkeeper:

“Sit down, sit down, Mrs. Hogan, and don’t worry. He asked for a bed three hours ago, tuckered out tramping the trails the way he’s always doing, and went upstairs. Ham Sandwich, run up and roust him out; he’s in No. 14.”

The youth was soon downstairs and ready. He asked Mrs. Hogan for particulars.

“Bless you, dear, there ain’t any; I wish there was. I put her to sleep at seven in the evening, and when I went in there an hour ago to go to bed myself, she was gone. I rushed for your cabin, dear, and you wasn’t there, and I’ve hunted for you ever since, at every cabin down the gulch, and now I’ve come up again, and I’m that distracted and scared and heart-broke; but, thanks to God, I’ve found you at last, dear heart, and you’ll find my child. Come on! come quick!”

“Move right along; I’m with you, madam. Go to your cabin first.”

The whole company streamed out to join the hunt. All the southern half of the village was up, a hundred men strong, and waiting outside, a vague dark mass sprinkled with twinkling lanterns. The mass fell into columns by threes and fours to accommodate itself to the narrow road, and strode briskly along southward in the wake of the leaders. In a few minutes the Hogan cabin was reached.

“There’s the bunk,” said Mrs. Hogan; “there’s where she was; it’s where I laid her at seven o’clock; but where she is now, God only knows.”

“Hand me a lantern,” said Archy. He set it on the hard earth floor and knelt by it, pretending to examine the ground closely. “Here’s her track,” he said, touching the ground here and there and yonder with his finger. “Do you see?”

Several of the company dropped upon their knees and did their best to see. One or two thought they discerned something like a track; the others shook their heads and confessed that the smooth hard surface had no marks upon it which their eyes were sharp enough to discover. One said, “Maybe a child’s foot could make a mark on it, but I don’t see how.”

Young Stillman stepped outside, held the light to the ground, turned leftward, and moved three steps, closely examining; then said, “I’ve got the direction—come along; take the lantern, somebody.”

He strode off swiftly southward, the files following, swaying and bending in and out with the deep curves of the gorge. Thus a mile, and the mouth of the gorge was reached; before them stretched the sagebrush plain, dim, vast, and vague. Stillman called a halt, saying, “We mustn’t start wrong, now; we must take the direction again.”

He took a lantern and examined the ground for a matter of twenty yards; then said, “Come on; it’s all right,” and gave up the lantern. In and out among the sage-bushes he marched, a quarter of a mile, bearing gradually to the right; then took a new direction and made another great semicircle; then changed again and moved due

west nearly half a mile—and stopped.

“She gave it up, here, poor little chap. Hold the lantern. You can see where she sat.”

But this was in a slick alkali flat which was surfaced like steel, and no person in the party was quite hardy enough to claim an eyesight that could detect the track of a cushion on a veneer like that. The bereaved mother fell upon her knees and kissed the spot, lamenting.

“But where is she, then?” some one said. “She didn’t stay here. We can see that much, anyway.”

Stillman moved about in a circle around the place, with the lantern, pretending to hunt for tracks.

“Well!” he said presently, in an annoyed tone, “I don’t understand it.” He examined again. “No use. She was here—that’s certain; she never walked away from here—and that’s certain. It’s a puzzle; I can’t make it out.”

The mother lost heart then.

“Oh, my God! oh, blessed Virgin! some flying beast has got her. I’ll never see her again!”

“Ah, don’t give up,” said Archy. “We’ll find her—don’t give up.”

“God bless you for the words, Archy Stillman!” and she seized his hand and kissed it fervently.

Peterson, the new-comer, whispered satirically in Ferguson’s ear:

“Wonderful performance to find this place, wasn’t it? Hardly worth while to come so far, though; any other supposititious place would have answered just as well—hey?”

Ferguson was not pleased with the innuendo. He said, with some warmth,

“Do you mean to insinuate that the child hasn’t been here? I tell you the child has been here! Now if you want to get yourself into as tidy a little fuss as—”

“All right!” sang out Stillman. “Come, everybody, and look at this! It was right under our noses all the time, and we didn’t see it.”

There was a general plunge for the ground at the place where the child was alleged to have rested, and many eyes tried hard and hopefully to see the thing that Archy’s finger was resting upon. There was a pause, then a several-barrelled sigh of disappointment. Pat Riley and Ham Sandwich said, in the one breath,

“What is it, Archy? There’s nothing here.”

“Nothing? Do you call that nothing?” and he swiftly traced upon the ground a form with his finger. “There—don’t you recognize it now? It’s Injun Billy’s track. He’s got the child.”

“God be praised!” from the mother.

“Take away the lantern. I’ve got the direction. Follow!”

He started on a run, racing in and out among the sage-bushes a matter of three hundred yards, and disappeared over a sand-wave; the others struggled after him, caught him up, and found him waiting. Ten steps away was a little wickieup, a dim and formless shelter of rags and old horse-blankets, a dull light showing through its chinks.

“You lead, Mrs. Hogan,” said the lad. “It’s your privilege to be first.”

All followed the sprint she made for the wickieup, and saw, with her, the picture its interior afforded. Injun Billy was sitting on the ground; the child was asleep beside him. The mother hugged it with a wild embrace, which included Archy Stillman, the grateful tears running down her face, and in a choked and broken voice she poured out a golden stream of that wealth of worshiping endearments which has its home in full richness nowhere but in the Irish heart.

“I find her bymeby it is ten o’clock,” Billy explained. “She ’sleep out yonder, ve’y tired—face wet, been cryin’, ’spose; fetch her home, feed her, she heap much

hungry—go ’sleep ’gin.”

In her limitless gratitude the happy mother waived rank and hugged him too, calling him “the angel of God in disguise.” And he probably was in disguise if he was that kind of an official. He was dressed for the character.

At half past one in the morning the procession burst into the village singing, “When Johnny Comes Marching Home,” waving its lanterns, and swallowing the drinks that were brought out all along its course. It concentrated at the tavern, and made a night of what was left of the morning.

# PART II

## I

The next afternoon the village was electrified with an immense sensation. A grave and dignified foreigner of distinguished bearing and appearance had arrived at the tavern, and entered this formidable name upon the register:

SHERLOCK HOLMES.

The news buzzed from cabin to cabin, from claim to claim; tools were dropped, and the town swarmed toward the center of interest. A man passing out at the northern end of the village shouted it to Pat Riley, whose claim was the next one to Flint Buckner’s. At that time Fetlock Jones seemed to turn sick. He muttered to himself,

“Uncle Sherlock! The mean luck of it!—that he should come just when....” He dropped into a reverie, and presently said to himself: “But what’s the use of being afraid of him? Anybody that knows him the way I do knows he can’t detect a crime except where he plans it all out beforehand and arranges the clues and hires some fellow to commit it according to instructions.... Now there ain’t going to be any clues this time—so, what show has he got? None at all. No, sir; everything’s ready.

If I was to risk putting it off.... No, I won't run any risk like that. Flint Buckner goes out of this world to-night, for sure." Then another trouble presented itself. "Uncle Sherlock 'll be wanting to talk home matters with me this evening, and how am I going to get rid of him? for I've got to be at my cabin a minute or two about eight o'clock." This was an awkward matter, and cost him much thought. But he found a way to beat the difficulty. "We'll go for a walk, and I'll leave him in the road a minute, so that he won't see what it is I do: the best way to throw a detective off the track, anyway, is to have him along when you are preparing the thing. Yes, that's the safest—I'll take him with me."

Meantime the road in front of the tavern was blocked with villagers waiting and hoping for a glimpse of the great man. But he kept his room, and did not appear. None but Ferguson, Jake Parker the blacksmith, and Ham Sandwich had any luck. These enthusiastic admirers of the great scientific detective hired the tavern's detained-baggage lockup, which looked into the detective's room across a little alleyway ten or twelve feet wide, ambushed themselves in it, and cut some peep-holes in the window-blind. Mr. Holmes's blinds were down; but by-and-by he raised them. It gave the spies a hair-lifting but pleasurable thrill to find themselves face to face with the Extraordinary Man who had filled the world with the fame of his more than human ingenuities. There he sat—not a myth, not a shadow, but real, alive, compact of substance, and almost within touching distance with the hand.

"Look at that head!" said Ferguson, in an awed voice. "By gracious! that's a head!"

"You bet!" said the blacksmith, with deep reverence. "Look at his nose! look at his eyes! Intellect? Just a battery of it!"

"And that paleness," said Ham Sandwich. "Comes from thought—that's what it comes from. Hell! duffers like us don't know what real thought is."

"No more we don't," said Ferguson. "What we take for thinking is just blubber-and-slush."

“Right you are, Wells-Fargo. And look at that frown—that’s deep thinking—away down, down, forty fathom into the bowels of things. He’s on the track of something.”

“Well, he is, and don’t you forget it. Say—look at that awful gravity—look at that pallid solemness—there ain’t any corpse can lay over it.”

“No, sir, not for dollars! And it’s his’n by hereditary rights, too; he’s been dead four times a’ready, and there’s history for it. Three times natural, once by accident. I’ve heard say he smells damp and cold, like a grave. And he—”

“’Sh! Watch him! There—he’s got his thumb on the bump on the near corner of his forehead, and his forefinger on the off one. His think-works is just a-grinding now, you bet your other shirt.”

“That’s so. And now he’s gazing up toward heaven and stroking his mustache slow, and—”

“Now he has rose up standing, and is putting his clues together on his left fingers with his right finger. See? he touches the forefinger—now middle finger—now ring-finger—”

“Stuck!”

“Look at him scowl! He can’t seem to make out that clue. So he—”

“See him smile!—like a tiger—and tally off the other fingers like nothing! He’s got it, boys; he’s got it sure!”

“Well, I should say! I’d hate to be in that man’s place that he’s after.”

Mr. Holmes drew a table to the window, sat down with his back to the spies, and proceeded to write. The spies withdrew their eyes from the peep-holes, lit their pipes, and settled themselves for a comfortable smoke and talk. Ferguson said, with conviction,

“Boys, it’s no use talking, he’s a wonder! He’s got the signs of it all over him.”

"You hain't ever said a truer word than that, Wells-Fargo," said Jake Parker. "Say, wouldn't it 'a' been nuts if he'd a-been here last night?"

"Oh, by George, but wouldn't it!" said Ferguson. "Then we'd have seen scientific work. Intellect—just pure intellect—away up on the upper levels, dontchuknow. Archy is all right, and it don't become anybody to belittle him, I can tell you. But his gift is only just eyesight, sharp as an owl's, as near as I can make it out just a grand natural animal talent, no more, no less, and prime as far as it goes, but no intellect in it, and for awfulness and marvelousness no more to be compared to what this man does than—than—Why, let me tell you what he'd have done. He'd have stepped over to Hogan's and glanced—just glanced, that's all—at the premises, and that's enough. See everything? Yes, sir, to the last little detail; and he'll know more about that place than the Hogans would know in seven years. Next, he would sit down on the bunk, just as ca'm, and say to Mrs. Hogan—Say, Ham, consider that you are Mrs. Hogan. I'll ask the questions; you answer them."

"All right; go on."

"'Madam, if you please—attention—do not let your mind wander. Now, then—sex of the child?'

"'Female, your Honor.'

"'Um—female. Very good, very good. Age?'

"'Turned six, your Honor.'

"'Um—young, weak—two miles. Weariness will overtake it then. It will sink down and sleep. We shall find it two miles away, or less. Teeth?'

"'Five, your Honor, and one a-coming.'

"'Very good, very good, very good, indeed.' You see, boys, he knows a clue when he sees it, when it wouldn't mean a dern thing to anybody else. 'Stockings, madam? Shoes?'

"'Yes, your Honor—both.'

"'Yarn, perhaps? Morocco?'

"'Yarn, your Honor. And kip.'

"'Um—kip. This complicates the matter. However, let it go—we shall manage. Religion?'

"'Catholic, your Honor.'

"'Very good. Snip me a bit from the bed blanket, please. Ah, thanks. Part wool—foreign make. Very well. A snip from some garment of the child's, please. Thanks. Cotton. Shows wear. An excellent clue, excellent. Pass me a pallet of the floor dirt, if you'll be so kind. Thanks, many thanks. Ah, admirable, admirable! Now we know where we are, I think.' You see, boys, he's got all the clues he wants now; he don't need anything more. Now, then, what does this Extraordinary Man do? He lays those snips and that dirt out on the table and leans over them on his elbows, and puts them together side by side and studies them—mumbles to himself, 'Female'; changes them around—mumbles, 'Six years old'; changes them this way and that—again mumbles: 'Five teeth—one a-coming—Catholic—yarn—cotton—kip—damn that kip.' Then he straightens up and gazes toward heaven, and plows his hands through his hair—plows and plows, muttering, 'Damn that kip!' Then he stands up and frowns, and begins to tally off his clues on his fingers—and gets stuck at the ring-finger. But only just a minute—then his face glares all up in a smile like a house afire, and he straightens up stately and majestic, and says to the crowd, 'Take a lantern, a couple of you, and go down to Injun Billy's and fetch the child—the rest of you go 'long home to bed; good-night, madam; good-night, gents.' And he bows like the Matterhorn, and pulls out for the tavern. That's his style, and the Only—scientific, intellectual—all over in fifteen minutes—no poking around all over the sage-brush range an hour and a half in a mass-meeting crowd for him, boys—you hear me!"

“By Jackson, it’s grand!” said Ham Sandwich. “Wells-Fargo, you’ve got him down to a dot. He ain’t painted up any exacter to the life in the books. By George, I can just see him—can’t you, boys?”

“You bet you! It’s just a photograft, that’s what it is.”

Ferguson was profoundly pleased with his success, and grateful. He sat silently enjoying his happiness a little while, then he murmured, with a deep awe in his voice,

“I wonder if God made him?”

There was no response for a moment; then Ham Sandwich said, reverently,

“Not all at one time, I reckon.”

## II

At eight o’clock that evening two persons were groping their way past Flint Buckner’s cabin in the frosty gloom. They were Sherlock Holmes and his nephew.

“Stop here in the road a moment, uncle,” said Fetlock, “while I run to my cabin; I won’t be gone a minute.”

He asked for something—the uncle furnished it—then he disappeared in the darkness, but soon returned, and the talking-walk was resumed. By nine o’clock they had wandered back to the tavern. They worked their way through the billiard-room, where a crowd had gathered in the hope of getting a glimpse of the Extraordinary Man. A royal cheer was raised. Mr. Holmes acknowledged the compliment with a series of courtly bows, and as he was passing out his nephew said to the assemblage,

“Uncle Sherlock’s got some work to do, gentlemen, that ’ll keep him till twelve or one; but he’ll be down again then, or earlier if he can, and hopes some of you’ll be left to take a drink with him.”

“By George, he’s just a duke, boys! Three cheers for Sherlock Holmes, the greatest man that ever lived!” shouted Ferguson. “Hip, hip, hip—”

“Hurrah! hurrah! hurrah! Tiger!”

The uproar shook the building, so hearty was the feeling the boys put into their welcome. Upstairs the uncle reproached the nephew gently, saying,

“What did you get me into that engagement for?”

“I reckon you don’t want to be unpopular, do you, uncle? Well, then, don’t you put on any exclusiveness in a mining-camp, that’s all. The boys admire you; but if you was to leave without taking a drink with them, they’d set you down for a snob. And, besides, you said you had home talk enough in stock to keep us up and at it half the night.”

The boy was right, and wise—the uncle acknowledged it. The boy was wise in another detail which he did not mention—except to himself: “Uncle and the others will come handy—in the way of nailing an alibi where it can’t be budged.”

He and his uncle talked diligently about three hours. Then, about midnight, Fetlock stepped down-stairs and took a position in the dark a dozen steps from the tavern, and waited. Five minutes later Flint Buckner came rocking out of the billiard-room and almost brushed him as he passed.

“I’ve got him!” muttered the boy. He continued to himself, looking after the shadowy form: “Good-by—good-by for good, Flint Buckner; you called my mother a—well, never mind what; it’s all right, now; you’re taking your last walk, friend.”

He went musing back into the tavern. “From now till one is an hour. We’ll spend it with the boys; it’s good for the alibi.”

He brought Sherlock Holmes to the billiard-room, which was jammed with eager and admiring miners; the guest called the drinks, and the fun began. Everybody was happy; everybody was complimentary; the ice was soon broken; songs, anecdotes,

and more drinks followed, and the pregnant minutes flew. At six minutes to one, when the jollity was at its highest—

BOOM!

There was silence instantly. The deep sound came rolling and rumbling from peak to peak up the gorge, then died down, and ceased. The spell broke, then, and the men made a rush for the door, saying,

"Something's blown up!"

Outside, a voice in the darkness said, "It's away down the gorge; I saw the flash."

The crowd poured down the canyon—Holmes, Fetlock, Archy Stillman, everybody. They made the mile in a few minutes. By the light of a lantern they found the smooth and solid dirt floor of Flint Buckner's cabin; of the cabin itself not a vestige remained, not a rag nor a splinter. Nor any sign of Flint. Search-parties sought here and there and yonder, and presently a cry went up.

"Here he is!"

It was true. Fifty yards down the gulch they had found him—that is, they had found a crushed and lifeless mass which represented him. Fetlock Jones hurried thither with the others and looked.

The inquest was a fifteen-minute affair. Ham Sandwich, foreman of the jury, handed up the verdict, which was phrased with a certain unstudied literary grace, and closed with this finding, to wit: that "deceased came to his death by his own act or some other person or persons unknown to this jury not leaving any family or similar effects behind but his cabin which was blown away and God have mercy on his soul amen."

Then the impatient jury rejoined the main crowd, for the storm-centre of interest was there—Sherlock Holmes. The miners stood silent and reverent in a half-circle, inclosing a large vacant space which included the front exposure of the site of the

late premises. In this considerable space the Extraordinary Man was moving about, attended by his nephew with a lantern. With a tape he took measurements of the cabin site; of the distance from the wall of chaparral to the road; of the height of the chaparral bushes; also various other measurements. He gathered a rag here, a splinter there, and a pinch of earth yonder, inspected them profoundly, and preserved them. He took the "lay" of the place with a pocket-compass, allowing two seconds for magnetic variation. He took the time (Pacific) by his watch, correcting it for local time. He paced off the distance from the cabin site to the corpse, and corrected that for tidal differentiation. He took the altitude with a pocket-aneroid, and the temperature with a pocket-thermometer. Finally he said, with a stately bow:

"It is finished. Shall we return, gentlemen?"

He took up the line of march for the tavern, and the crowd fell into his wake, earnestly discussing and admiring the Extraordinary Man, and interlarding guesses as to the origin of the tragedy and who the author of it might he.

"My, but it's grand luck having him here—hey, boys?" said Ferguson.

"It's the biggest thing of the century," said Ham Sandwich. "It 'll go all over the world; you mark my words."

"You bet!" said Jake Parker, the blacksmith. "It 'll boom this camp. Ain't it so, Wells-Fargo?"

"Well, as you want my opinion—if it's any sign of how I think about it, I can tell you this: yesterday I was holding the Straight Flush claim at two dollars a foot; I'd like to see the man that can get it at sixteen today."

"Right you are, Wells-Fargo! It's the grandest luck a new camp ever struck. Say, did you see him collar them little rags and dirt and things? What an eye! He just can't overlook a clue—'tain't in him."

"That's so. And they wouldn't mean a thing to anybody else; but to him, why, they're just a book—large print at that."

“Sure’s you’re born! Them odds and ends have got their little old secret, and they think there ain’t anybody can pull it; but, land! when he sets his grip there they’ve got to squeal, and don’t you forget it.”

“Boys, I ain’t sorry, now, that he wasn’t here to roust out the child; this is a bigger thing, by a long sight. Yes, sir, and more tangled up and scientific and intellectual.”

“I reckon we’re all of us glad it’s turned out this way. Glad? ‘George! it ain’t any name for it. Dontchuknow, Archy could ’ve learnt something if he’d had the nous to stand by and take notice of how that man works the system. But no; he went poking up into the chaparral and just missed the whole thing.”

“It’s true as gospel; I seen it myself. Well, Archy’s young. He’ll know better one of these days.”

“Say, boys, who do you reckon done it?”

That was a difficult question, and brought out a world of unsatisfying conjecture. Various men were mentioned as possibilities, but one by one they were discarded as not being eligible. No one but young Hillyer had been intimate with Flint Buckner; no one had really had a quarrel with him; he had affronted every man who had tried to make up to him, although not quite offensively enough to require bloodshed. There was one name that was upon every tongue from the start, but it was the last to get utterance—Fetlock Jones’s. It was Pat Riley that mentioned it.

“Oh, well,” the boys said, “of course we’ve all thought of him, because he had a million rights to kill Flint Buckner, and it was just his plain duty to do it. But all the same there’s two things we can’t get around, for one thing, he hasn’t got the sand; and for another, he wasn’t anywhere near the place when it happened.”

“I know it,” said Pat. “He was there in the billiard-room with us when it happened.”

“Yes, and was there all the time for an hour before it happened.”

“It’s so. And lucky for him, too. He’d have been suspected in a minute if it hadn’t

been for that.”

## III

The tavern dining-room had been cleared of all its furniture save one six-foot pine table and a chair. This table was against one end of the room; the chair was on it; Sherlock Holmes, stately, imposing, impressive, sat in the chair. The public stood. The room was full. The tobacco-smoke was dense, the stillness profound.

The Extraordinary Man raised his hand to command additional silence; held it in the air a few moments; then, in brief, crisp terms he put forward question after question, and noted the answers with “Um-ums,” nods of the head, and so on. By this process he learned all about Flint Buckner, his character, conduct, and habits, that the people were able to tell him. It thus transpired that the Extraordinary Man’s nephew was the only person in the camp who had a killing-grudge against Flint Buckner. Mr. Holmes smiled compassionately upon the witness, and asked, languidly—

“Do any of you gentlemen chance to know where the lad Fetlock Jones was at the time of the explosion?”

A thunderous response followed—

“In the billiard-room of this house!”

“Ah. And had he just come in?”

“Been there all of an hour!”

“Ah. It is about—about—well, about how far might it be to the scene of the explosions.”

“All of a mile!”

“Ah. It isn’t much of an alibi, ’tis true, but—”

A storm-burst of laughter, mingled with shouts of “By jiminy, but he’s chain-lightning!” and “Ain’t you sorry you spoke, Sandy?” shut off the rest of the

sentence, and the crushed witness drooped his blushing face in pathetic shame. The inquisitor resumed:

“The lad Jones’s somewhat distant connection with the case” (laughter) “having been disposed of, let us now call the eye-witnesses of the tragedy, and listen to what they have to say.”

He got out his fragmentary clues and arranged them on a sheet of cardboard on his knee. The house held its breath and watched.

“We have the longitude and the latitude, corrected for magnetic variation, and this gives us the exact location of the tragedy. We have the altitude, the temperature, and the degree of humidity prevailing—inestimably valuable, since they enable us to estimate with precision the degree of influence which they would exercise upon the mood and disposition of the assassin at that time of the night.”

(Buzz of admiration; muttered remark, “By George, but he’s deep!”) He fingered his clues. “And now let us ask these mute witnesses to speak to us.

“Here we have an empty linen shot-bag. What is its message? This: that robbery was the motive, not revenge. What is its further message? This: that the assassin was of inferior intelligence—shall we say light-witted, or perhaps approaching that? How do we know this? Because a person of sound intelligence would not have proposed to rob the man Buckner, who never had much money with him. But the assassin might have been a stranger? Let the bag speak again. I take from it this article. It is a bit of silver-bearing quartz. It is peculiar. Examine it, please—you—and you—and you. Now pass it back, please. There is but one lode on this coast which produces just that character and color of quartz; and that is a lode which crops out for nearly two miles on a stretch, and in my opinion is destined, at no distant day, to confer upon its locality a globe-girdling celebrity, and upon its two hundred owners riches beyond the dreams of avarice. Name that lode, please.”

“The Consolidated Christian Science and Mary Ann!” was the prompt response.

A wild crash of hurrahs followed, and every man reached for his neighbor's hand and wrung it, with tears in his eyes; and Wells-Fargo Ferguson shouted, "The Straight Flush is on the lode, and up she goes to a hunched and fifty a foot—you hear me!"

When quiet fell, Mr. Holmes resumed:

"We perceive, then, that three facts are established, to wit: the assassin was approximately light-witted; he was not a stranger; his motive was robbery, not revenge. Let us proceed. I hold in my hand a small fragment of fuse, with the recent smell of fire upon it. What is its testimony? Taken with the corroborative evidence of the quartz, it reveals to us that the assassin was a miner. What does it tell us further? This, gentlemen: that the assassination was consummated by means of an explosive. What else does it say? This: that the explosive was located against the side of the cabin nearest the road—the front side—for within six feet of that spot I found it.

"I hold in my fingers a burnt Swedish match—the kind one rubs on a safety-box. I found it in the road, six hundred and twenty-two feet from the abolished cabin. What does it say? This: that the train was fired from that point. What further does it tell us? This: that the assassin was left-handed. How do I know this? I should not be able to explain to you, gentlemen, how I know it, the signs being so subtle that only long experience and deep study can enable one to detect them. But the signs are here, and they are reinforced by a fact which you must have often noticed in the great detective narratives—that all assassins are left-handed."

"By Jackson, that's so!" said Ham Sandwich, bringing his great hand down with a resounding slap upon his thigh; "blamed if I ever thought of it before."

"Nor I!" "Nor I!" cried several. "Oh, there can't anything escape him—look at his eye!"

"Gentlemen, distant as the murderer was from his doomed victim, he did not wholly

escape injury. This fragment of wood which I now exhibit to you struck him. It drew blood. Wherever he is, he bears the telltale mark. I picked it up where he stood when he fired the fatal train." He looked out over the house from his high perch, and his countenance began to darken; he slowly raised his hand, and pointed—

"There stands the assassin!"

For a moment the house was paralyzed with amazement; then twenty voices burst out with:

"Sammy Hillyer? Oh, hell, no! Him? It's pure foolishness!"

"Take care, gentlemen—be not hasty. Observe—he has the blood-mark on his brow."

Hillyer turned white with fright. He was near to crying. He turned this way and that, appealing to every face for help and sympathy; and held out his supplicating hands toward Holmes and began to plead,

"Don't, oh, don't! I never did it; I give my word I never did it. The way I got this hurt on my forehead was—"

"Arrest him, constable!" cried Holmes. "I will swear out the warrant."

The constable moved reluctantly forward—hesitated—stopped.

Hillyer broke out with another appeal. "Oh, Archy, don't let them do it; it would kill mother! You know how I got the hurt. Tell them, and save me, Archy; save me!"

Stillman worked his way to the front, and said,

"Yes, I'll save you. Don't be afraid." Then he said to the house, "Never mind how he got the hurt; it hasn't anything to do with this case, and isn't of any consequence."

"God bless you, Archy, for a true friend!"

"Hurrah for Archy! Go in, boy, and play 'em a knock-down flush to their two pair 'n' a jack!" shouted the house, pride in their home talent and a patriotic sentiment of

loyalty to it rising suddenly in the public heart and changing the whole attitude of the situation.

Young Stillman waited for the noise to cease; then he said,

“I will ask Tom Jeffries to stand by that door yonder, and Constable Harris to stand by the other one here, and not let anybody leave the room.

“Said and done. Go on, old man!”

“The criminal is present, I believe. I will show him to you before long, in case I am right in my guess. Now I will tell you all about the tragedy, from start to finish. The motive wasn’t robbery; it was revenge. The murderer wasn’t light-witted. He didn’t stand six hundred and twenty-two feet away. He didn’t get hit with a piece of wood. He didn’t place the explosive against the cabin. He didn’t bring a shot-bag with him, and he wasn’t left-handed. With the exception of these errors, the distinguished guest’s statement of the case is substantially correct.”

A comfortable laugh rippled over the house; friend nodded to friend, as much as to say, “That’s the word, with the bark on it. Good lad, good boy. He ain’t lowering his flag any!”

The guest’s serenity was not disturbed. Stillman resumed:

“I also have some witnesses; and I will presently tell you where you can find some more.” He held up a piece of coarse wire; the crowd craned their necks to see. “It has a smooth coating of melted tallow on it. And here is a candle which is burned half-way down. The remaining half of it has marks cut upon it an inch apart. Soon I will tell you where I found these things. I will now put aside reasonings, guesses, the impressive hitchings of odds and ends of clues together, and the other showy theatricals of the detective trade, and tell you in a plain, straightforward way just how this dismal thing happened.”

He paused a moment, for effect—to allow silence and suspense to intensify and concentrate the house’s interest; then he went on:

“The assassin studied out his plan with a good deal of pains. It was a good plan, very ingenious, and showed an intelligent mind, not a feeble one. It was a plan which was well calculated to ward off all suspicion from its inventor. In the first place, he marked a candle into spaces an inch apart, and lit it and timed it. He found it took three hours to burn four inches of it. I tried it myself for half an hour, awhile ago, up-stairs here, while the inquiry into Flint Buckner’s character and ways was being conducted in this room, and I arrived in that way at the rate of a candle’s consumption when sheltered from the wind. Having proved his trial candle’s rate, he blew it out—I have already shown it to you—and put his inch-marks on a fresh one.

“He put the fresh one into a tin candlestick. Then at the five-hour mark he bored a hole through the candle with a red-hot wire. I have already shown you the wire, with a smooth coat of tallow on it—tallow that had been melted and had cooled.

“With labor—very hard labor, I should say—he struggled up through the stiff chaparral that clothes the steep hillside back of Flint Buckner’s place, tugging an empty flour-barrel with him. He placed it in that absolutely secure hiding-place, and in the bottom of it he set the candlestick. Then he measured off about thirty-five feet of fuse—the barrel’s distance from the back of the cabin. He bored a hole in the side of the barrel—here is the large gimlet he did it with. He went on and finished his work; and when it was done, one end of the fuse was in Buckner’s cabin, and the other end, with a notch chipped in it to expose the powder, was in the hole in the candle—timed to blow the place up at one o’clock this morning, provided the candle was lit about eight o’clock yesterday evening—which I am betting it was—and provided there was an explosive in the cabin and connected with that end of the fuse—which I am also betting there was, though I can’t prove it. Boys, the barrel is there in the chaparral, the candle’s remains are in it in the tin stick; the burnt-out fuse is in the gimlet-hole, the other end is down the hill where the late cabin stood. I saw them all an hour or two ago, when the Professor here was measuring off unimplicated vacancies and collecting relics that hadn’t anything to do with the

case."

He paused. The house drew a long, deep breath, shook its strained cords and muscles free and burst into cheers. "Dang him!" said Ham Sandwich, "that's why he was snooping around in the chaparral, instead of picking up points out of the P'fessor's game. Looky here—he ain't no fool, boys."

"No, sir! Why, great Scott—"

But Stillman was resuming:

"While we were out yonder an hour or two ago, the owner of the gimlet and the trial-candle took them from a place where he had concealed them—it was not a good place—and carried them to what he probably thought was a better one, two hundred yards up in the pine woods, and hid them there, covering them over with pine needles. It was there that I found them. The gimlet exactly fits the hole in the barrel. And now—"

The Extraordinary Man interrupted him. He said, sarcastically,

"We have had a very pretty fairy tale, gentlemen—very pretty indeed. Now I would like to ask this young man a question or two."

Some of the boys winced, and Ferguson said,

"I'm afraid Archy's going to catch it now."

The others lost their smiles and sobered down. Mr. Holmes said,

"Let us proceed to examine into this fairy-tale in a consecutive and orderly way—by geometrical progression, so to speak—linking detail to detail in a steadily advancing and remorselessly consistent and unassailable march upon this tinsel toy-fortress of error, the dream fabric of a callow-imagination. To begin with, young sir, I desire to ask you but three questions at present—at present. Did I understand you to say it was your opinion that the supposititious candle was lighted at about eight o'clock yesterday evening?"

“Yes, sir—about eight.”

“Could you say exactly eight?”

“Well, no, I couldn’t be that exact.”

“Um. If a person had been passing along there just about that time, he would have been almost sure to encounter that assassin, do you think?”

“Yes, I should think so.”

“Thank you, that is all. For the present. I say, all for the present.”

“Dern him, he’s laying for Archy,” said Ferguson.

“It’s so,” said Ham Sandwich. “I don’t like the look of it.”

Stillman said, glancing at the guest, “I was along there myself at half past eight—no, about nine.”

“Indeed? This is interesting—this is very interesting. Perhaps you encountered the assassin?”

“No, I encountered no one.”

“Ah. Then—if you will excuse the remark—I do not quite see the relevancy of the information.”

“It has none. At present. I say it has none—at present.”

He paused. Presently he resumed: “I did not encounter the assassin, but I am on his track, I am sure, for I believe he is in this room. I will ask you all to pass one by one in front of me—here, where there is a good light—so that I can see your feet.”

A buzz of excitement swept the place, and the march began, the guest looking on with an iron attempt at gravity which was not an unqualified success. Stillman stooped, shaded his eyes with his hand, and gazed down intently at each pair of feet as it passed. Fifty men tramped monotonously by—with no result. Sixty. Seventy. The thing was beginning to look absurd. The guest remarked, with suave irony,

“Assassins appear to be scarce this evening.”

The house saw the humor if it, and refreshed itself with a cordial laugh. Ten or twelve more candidates tramped by—no, danced by, with airy and ridiculous capers which convulsed the spectators—then suddenly Stillman put out his hand and said,

“This is the assassin!”

“Fetlock Jones, by the great Sanhedrim!” roared the crowd; and at once let fly a pyrotechnic explosion and dazzle and confusion of stirring remarks inspired by the situation.

At the height of the turmoil the guest stretched out his hand, commanding peace. The authority of a great name and a great personality laid its mysterious compulsion upon the house, and it obeyed. Out of the panting calm which succeeded, the guest spoke, saying, with dignity and feeling,

“This is serious. It strikes at an innocent life. Innocent beyond suspicion! Innocent beyond peradventure! Hear me prove it; observe how simple a fact can brush out of existence this witless lie. Listen. My friends, that lad was never out of my sight yesterday evening at any time!”

It made a deep impression. Men turned their eyes upon Stillman with grave inquiry in them. His face brightened, and he said,

“I knew there was another one!” He stepped briskly to the table and glanced at the guest’s feet, then up at his face, and said: “You were with him! You were not fifty steps from him when he lit the candle that by-and-by fired the powder!” (Sensation.) “And what is more, you furnished the matches yourself!”

Plainly the guest seemed hit; it looked so to the public. He opened his mouth to speak; the words did not come freely.

“This—er—this is insanity—this—”

Stillman pressed his evident advantage home. He held up a charred match.

“Here is one of them. I found it in the barrel—and there’s another one there.”

The guest found his voice at once.

“Yes—and put them there yourself!”

It was recognized a good shot. Stillman retorted.

“It is wax—a breed unknown to this camp. I am ready to be searched for the box. Are you?”

The guest was staggered this time—the dullest eye could see it. He fumbled with his hands; once or twice his lips moved, but the words did not come. The house waited and watched, in tense suspense, the stillness adding effect to the situation. Presently Stillman said, gently,

“We are waiting for your decision.”

There was silence again during several moments; then the guest answered, in a low voice,

“I refuse to be searched.”

There was no noisy demonstration, but all about the house one voice after another muttered,

“That settles it! He’s Archy’s meat.”

What to do now? Nobody seemed to know. It was an embarrassing situation for the moment—merely, of course, because matters had taken such a sudden and unexpected turn that these unpractised minds were not prepared for it, and had come to a standstill, like a stopped clock, under the shock. But after a little the machinery began to work again, tentatively, and by twos and threes the men put their heads together and privately buzzed over this and that and the other proposition. One of these propositions met with much favor; it was, to confer upon the assassin a vote of thanks for removing Flint Buckner, and let him go. But the cooler heads opposed it, pointing out that addled brains in the Eastern states would pronounce it a scandal,

and make no end of foolish noise about it. Finally the cool heads got the upper hand, and obtained general consent to a proposition of their own; their leader then called the house to order and stated it—to this effect: that Fetlock Jones be jailed and put upon trial.

The motion was carried. Apparently there was nothing further to do now, and the people were glad, for, privately, they were impatient to get out and rush to the scene of the tragedy, and see whether that barrel and the other things were really there or not.

But no—the break-up got a check. The surprises were not over yet. For a while Fetlock Jones had been silently sobbing, unnoticed in the absorbing excitements which had been following one another so persistently for some time; but when his arrest and trial were decreed, he broke out despairingly, and said,

"No! it's no use. I don't want any jail, I don't want any trial; I've had all the hard luck I want, and all the miseries. Hang me now, and let me out! It would all come out, anyway—there couldn't anything save me. He has told it all, just as if he'd been with me and seen it—I don't know how he found out; and you'll find the barrel and things, and then I wouldn't have any chance any more. I killed him; and you'd have done it too, if he'd treated you like a dog, and you only a boy, and weak and poor, and not a friend to help you."

"And served him damned well right!" broke in Ham Sandwich. "Looky here, boys—"

From the constable: "Order! Order, gentlemen!"

A voice: "Did your uncle know what you was up to?"

"No, he didn't."

"Did he give you the matches, sure enough?"

"Yes, he did; but he didn't know what I wanted them for."

“When you was out on such a business as that, how did you venture to risk having him along—and him a detective? How’s that?”

The boy hesitated, fumbled with his buttons in an embarrassed way, then said, shyly,

“I know about detectives, on account of having them in the family; and if you don’t want them to find out about a thing, it’s best to have them around when you do it.”

The cyclone of laughter which greeted this naïve discharge of wisdom did not modify the poor little waif’s embarrassment in any large degree.

## IV

**From a letter to Mrs. Stillman, dated merely “Tuesday.”**

Fetlock Jones was put under lock and key in an unoccupied log cabin, and left there to await his trial. Constable Harris provided him with a couple of days’ rations, instructed him to keep a good guard over himself, and promised to look in on him as soon as further supplies should be due.

Next morning a score of us went with Hillyer, out of friendship, and helped him bury his late relative, the unlamented Buckner, and I acted as first assistant pall-bearer, Hillyer acting as chief. Just as we had finished our labors a ragged and melancholy stranger, carrying an old hand-bag, limped by with his head down, and I caught the scent I had chased around the globe! It was the odor of Paradise to my perishing hope!

In a moment I was at his side and had laid a gentle hand upon his shoulder. He slumped to the ground as if a stroke of lightning had withered him in his tracks; and as the boys came running he struggled to his knees and put up his pleading hands to me, and out of his chattering jaws he begged me to persecute him no more, and said,

“You have hunted me around the world, Sherlock Holmes, yet God is my witness I have never done any man harm!”

A glance at his wild eyes showed us that he was insane. That was my work, mother! The tidings of your death can some day repeat the misery I felt in that moment, but nothing else can ever do it. The boys lifted him up, and gathered about him, and were full of pity of him, and said the gentlest and touchingest things to him, and said cheer up and don't be troubled, he was among friends now, and they would take care of him, and protect him, and hang any man that laid a hand on him. They are just like so many mothers, the rough mining-camp boys are, when you wake up the south side of their hearts; yes, and just like so many reckless and unreasoning children when you wake up the opposite of that muscle. They did everything they could think of to comfort him, but nothing succeeded until Wells-Fargo Ferguson, who is a clever strategist, said,

"If it's only Sherlock Holmes that's troubling you, you needn't worry any more."

"Why?" asked the forlorn lunatic, eagerly.

"Because he's dead again."

"Dead! Dead! Oh, don't trifle with a poor wreck like me. Is he dead? On honor, now—is he telling me true, boys?"

"True as you're standing there!" said Ham Sandwich, and they all backed up the statement in a body.

"They hung him in San Bernardino last week," added Ferguson, clinching the matter, "whilst he was searching around after you. Mistook him for another man. They're sorry, but they can't help it now."

"They're a-building him a monument," said Ham Sandwich, with the air of a person who had contributed to it, and knew.

"James Walker" drew a deep sigh—evidently a sigh of relief—and said nothing; but his eyes lost something of their wildness, his countenance cleared visibly, and its drawn look relaxed a little. We all went to our cabin, and the boys cooked him the best dinner the camp could furnish the materials for, and while they were about it

Hillyer and I outfitted him from hat to shoe-leather with new clothes of ours, and made a comely and presentable old gentleman of him. “Old” is the right word, and a pity, too; old by the droop of him, and the frost upon his hair, and the marks which sorrow and distress have left upon his face; though he is only in his prime in the matter of years. While he ate, we smoked and chatted; and when he was finishing he found his voice at last, and of his own accord broke out with his personal history. I cannot furnish his exact words, but I will come as near it as I can.

THE “WRONG MAN’S” STORY

It happened like this: I was in Denver. I had been there many years; sometimes I remember how many, sometimes I don’t—but it isn’t any matter. All of a sudden I got a notice to leave, or I would be exposed for a horrible crime committed long before—years and years before—in the East.

I knew about that crime, but I was not the criminal; it was a cousin of mine of the same name. What should I better do? My head was all disordered by fear, and I didn’t know. I was allowed very little time—only one day, I think it was. I would be ruined if I was published, and the people would lynch me, and not believe what I said. It is always the way with lynchings: when they find out it is a mistake they are sorry, but it is too late—the same as it was with Mr. Holmes, you see. So I said I would sell out and get money to live on, and run away until it blew over and I could come back with my proofs. Then I escaped in the night and went a long way off in the mountains somewhere, and lived disguised and had a false name.

I got more and more troubled and worried, and my troubles made me see spirits and hear voices, and I could not think straight and clear on any subject, but got confused and involved and had to give it up, because my head hurt so. It got to be worse and worse; more spirits and more voices. They were about me all the time; at first only in the night, then in the day too. They were always whispering around my bed and plotting against me, and it broke my sleep and kept me fagged out, because I got no

good rest.

And then came the worst. One night the whispers said, “We’ll never manage, because we can’t see him, and so can’t point him out to the people.”

They sighed; then one said: “We must bring Sherlock Holmes. He can be here in twelve days.”

They all agreed, and whispered and jibbered with joy. But my heart broke; for I had read about that man, and knew what it would be to have him upon my track, with his superhuman penetration and tireless energies.

The spirits went away to fetch him, and I got up at once in the middle of the night and fled away, carrying nothing but the hand-bag that had my money in it—thirty thousand dollars; two-thirds of it are in the bag there yet. It was forty days before that man caught up on my track. I just escaped. From habit he had written his real name on a tavern register, but had scratched it out and written “Dagget Barclay” in the place of it. But fear gives you a watchful eye and keen, and I read the true name through the scratches, and fled like a deer.

He has hunted me all over this world for three years and a half—the Pacific states, Australasia, India—everywhere you can think of; then back to Mexico and up to California again, giving me hardly any rest; but that name on the registers always saved me, and what is left of me is alive yet. And I am so tired! A cruel time he has given me, yet I give you my honor I have never harmed him nor any man.

That was the end of the story, and it stirred those boys to blood-heat, be sure of it. As for me—each word burnt a hole in me where it struck.

We voted that the old man should bunk with us, and be my guest and Hillyer’s. I shall keep my own counsel, naturally; but as soon as he is well rested and nourished, I shall take him to Denver and rehabilitate his fortunes.

The boys gave the old fellow the bone-mashing good-fellowship handshake of the mines, and then scattered away to spread the news.

At dawn next morning Wells-Fargo Ferguson and Ham Sandwich called us softly out, and said, privately,

“That news about the way that old stranger has been treated has spread all around, and the camps are up. They are piling in from everywhere, and are going to lynch the P’fessor. Constable Harris is in a dead funk, and has telephoned the sheriff. Come along!”

We started on a run. The others were privileged to feel as they chose, but in my heart’s privacy I hoped the sheriff would arrive in time; for I had small desire that Sherlock Holmes should hang for my deeds, as you can easily believe. I had heard a good deal about the sheriff, but for reassurance’s sake I asked,

“Can he stop a mob?”

“Can he stop a mob! Can Jack Fairfax stop a mob! Well, I should smile! Ex-desperado—nineteen scalps on his string. Can he! Oh, I say!”

As we tore up the gulch, distant cries and shouts and yells rose faintly on the still air, and grew steadily in strength as we raced along. Roar after roar burst out, stronger and stronger, nearer and nearer; and at last, when we closed up upon the multitude massed in the open area in front of the tavern, the crash of sound was deafening. Some brutal roughs from Daly’s gorge had Holmes in their grip, and he was the calmest man there; a contemptuous smile played about his lips, and if any fear of death was in his British heart, his iron personality was master of it and no sign of it was allowed to appear.

“Come to a vote, men!” This from one of the Daly gang, Shadbelly Higgins. “Quick! is it hang, or shoot?”

“Neither!” shouted one of his comrades. “He’ll be alive again in a week; burning’s the only permanency for him.”

The gangs from all the outlying camps burst out in a thunder-crash of approval, and went struggling and surging toward the prisoner, and closed around him, shouting,

“Fire! fire’s the ticket!” They dragged him to the horse-post, backed him against it, chained him to it, and piled wood and pine cones around him waist-deep. Still the strong face did not blench, and still the scornful smile played about the thin lips.

“A match! fetch a match!”

Shadbelly struck it, shaded it with his hand, stooped, and held it under a pine cone. A deep silence fell upon the mob. The cone caught, a tiny flame flickered about it a moment or two. I seemed to catch the sound of distant hoofs—it grew more distinct—still more and more distinct, more and more definite, but the absorbed crowd did not appear to notice it. The match went out. The man struck another, stooped, and again the flame rose; this time it took hold and began to spread—here and there men turned away their faces. The executioner stood with the charred match in his fingers, watching his work. The hoof-beats turned a projecting crag, and now they came thundering down upon us. Almost the next moment there was a shout—

“The sheriff!”

And straightway he came tearing into the midst, stood his horse almost on his hind feet, and said,

“Fall back, you gutter-snipes!”

He was obeyed. By all but their leader. He stood his ground, and his hand went to his revolver. The sheriff covered him promptly, and said,

“Drop your hand, you parlor-desperado. Kick the fire away. Now unchain the stranger.”

The parlor-desperado obeyed. Then the sheriff made a speech; sitting his horse at martial ease, and not warming his words with any touch of fire, but delivering them in a measured and deliberate way, and in a tone which harmonized with their character and made them impressively disrespectful.

"You're a nice lot—now ain't you? Just about eligible to travel with this bilk here—Shadbelly Higgins—this loud-mouthed sneak that shoots people in the back and calls himself a desperado. If there's anything I do particularly despise, it's a lynching mob; I've never seen one that had a man in it. It has to tally up a hundred against one before it can pump up pluck enough to tackle a sick tailor. It's made up of cowards, and so is the community that breeds it; and ninety-nine times out of a hundred the sheriff's another one." He paused—apparently to turn that last idea over in his mind and taste the juice of it—then he went on: "The sheriff that lets a mob take a prisoner away from him is the lowest-down coward there is. By the statistics there was a hundred and eighty-two of them drawing sneak pay in America last year. By the way it's going, pretty soon there 'll be a new disease in the doctor-books—sheriff complaint." That idea pleased him—any one could see it. "People will say, 'Sheriff sick again?' 'Yes; got the same old thing.' And next there 'll be a new title. People won't say, 'He's running for sheriff of Rapaho County,' for instance; they'll say, 'He's running for Coward of Rapaho.' Lord, the idea of a grown-up person being afraid of a lynch mob!"

He turned an eye on the captive, and said, "Stranger, who are you, and what have you been doing?"

"My name is Sherlock Holmes, and I have not been doing anything."

It was wonderful, the impression which the sound of that name made on the sheriff, notwithstanding he must have come posted. He spoke up with feeling, and said it was a blot on the country that a man whose marvelous exploits had filled the world with their fame and their ingenuity, and whose histories of them had won every reader's heart by the brilliancy and charm of their literary setting, should be visited under the Stars and Stripes by an outrage like this. He apologized in the name of the whole nation, and made Holmes a most handsome bow, and told Constable Harris to see him to his quarters, and hold himself personally responsible if he was molested

again. Then he turned to the mob and said,

“Hunt your holes, you scum!” which they did; then he said: “Follow me, Shadbelly; I’ll take care of your case myself. No—keep your pop-gun; whenever I see the day that I’ll be afraid to have you behind me with that thing, it ’ll be time for me to join last year’s hundred and eighty-two”; and he rode off in a walk, Shadbelly following.

When we were on our way back to our cabin, toward breakfast-time, we ran upon the news that Fetlock Jones had escaped from his lock-up in the night and is gone! Nobody is sorry. Let his uncle track him out if he likes; it is in his line; the camp is not interested.

## V

**Ten days later—**

“James Walker” is all right in body now, and his mind shows improvement too. I start with him for Denver to-morrow morning.

Next night. Brief note, mailed at a waystation—

As we were starting, this morning, Hillyer whispered to me: “Keep this news from Walker until you think it safe and not likely to disturb his mind and check his improvement: the ancient crime he spoke of was really committed—and by his cousin, as he said. We buried the real criminal the other day—the unhappiest man that has lived in a century—Flint Buckner. His real name was Jacob Fuller!” There, mother, by help of me, an unwitting mourner, your husband and my father is in his grave. Let him rest.

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK A DOUBLE BARRELLED DETECTIVE STORY ***

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