

# His Friends and His Relations

*An original story*

*to Arthur Conan Doyle and E.W. Hornung, this form of flattery*

## Watson

It was the spring when all conversation turned to the cessation of hostilities for His Majesty's forces in South Africa. All conversation, that is, except with my friend Sherlock Holmes, who had no complaint against the Boers while they confined their crimes to the Transvaal. As we caught up on old times over a late breakfast at Baker Street, each attempt to turn the conversation to the twenty-point headlines dwindled to the small print.

"Another upper-floor entry," Holmes said suddenly, glancing out the window.

"Another?" I propted from long custom.

"Mrs. Savident's house, three weeks ago, was the first, and now this," he replied, pointing to the Sunday edition of the *News Herald*. "That will be Inspector Hopkins at the door."

Holmes called entry to the policeman. "Losses of great value?" he greeted his C.I.D. disciple cheerfully.

"Several items of jewelry from a safe," the inspector sighed, unperturbed by Holmes' jump to the point. "Not,

perhaps, of the first water, but sentimental value as well as some at market, I expect."

"Cup of coffee, inspector?" I interjected.

"This safe is on the first floor of the house?" said Holmes at the same moment.

"In the gentleman's study," said Hopkins, politely declining the coffee. "Street-level doors are all bolted nightly, with no sign of forced entry. We found some footprints in the rear yard, but no evidence of breaking in on that side either."

"I presume from your presence that you already suspect the same culprit as at Mrs. Savident's."

Hopkins nodded deferentially. "I expect you'll want to form an unbiased opinion, sir. I've a four-wheeler waiting outside, if it's not an imposition."

Holmes sipped the last of his own coffee. "Doubtless a commonplace answer," said he after a moment's thought. "Still, it may yet yield something of interest. Do you feel like a spring drive to Bryanston Square, Watson?"

"I expected nothing less," I answered.

The house in Bryanston Square was that of Mr. Theodore Farnsworth. The name was unfamiliar to me, but the paper, which Holmes handed me in the cab, named him as a socially prominent solicitor for many of the kingdom's finest families. His house was certainly elegant in

an understated way, befitting a man who'd made a fortune in the professions. "Had I doubled down on medicine," I remarked, "instead of tearing about after thieves and murderers all these years, I too might live in a house like this."

An elderly butler, with every sign of being above suspicion, showed us immediately upstairs to the study, where a square safe from one of the lesser manufacturers stood open, its owner beside it.

We presented ourselves. "I know you by reputation, of course, sir," said Mr. Farnsworth, solemn and well-plumed. "I'm most appreciative of your time."

"The police have taken down a detailed list of the missing items?" Holmes asked as he glanced at all sides of the safe.

"Trifles, really," said a woman's voice from the doorway. "Though I would like them back — some little things of my mother's." Mrs. Farnsworth showed weariness in a lovely pair of eyes. "But the real trouble," she added, "is that someone has got in and out again without leaving a sign. It is more than a little unnerving."

Holmes surveyed the room, from the door we'd entered by to the half-length window opposite. Books on law and other topics lined the walls; on the solicitor's desk, only what one would expect. "Tell me," he said, resting his gaze

on Mr. Farnsworth, “were the jewels that were taken the most valuable items in the house?”

“Not by yards,” Mrs. Farnsworth responded for him. “We have a beautiful set of gold-plated spoons laid out on the dining-room sideboard.”

“These were untouched?”

“Completely.”

“The jewels were merely the most valuable items in the safe,” Mr. Farnsworth clarified.

Holmes put his head into the safe, hands in his coat pockets. “These documents are your deeds and wills, then?”

“They are papers related to some of my particular clients,” the solicitor told us. “Untouched also. Nothing of use to a burglar.”

“Yet you keep them under lock and key,” Holmes observed.

Mr. Farnsworth nodded. “They are confidential – so much so that even my office staff are not to lay their hands on them in the usual course of things. I carry them away with me nightly.”

“Nothing of use to a burglar,” Holmes repeated, “but perhaps to a blackmailer?”

“I couldn’t say, Mr. Holmes,” said Mr. Farnsworth, with a colder note. “I merely tell you the papers were completely untouched. Only the jewels are missing.”

“Hum!” said Holmes. “I would suggest you make very certain of that, Mr. Farnsworth.” He was already drifting towards the window. “This is unlocked.”

“I’m afraid I opened it yesterday morning to let in the spring air, before I noticed the loss,” said Mr. Farnsworth apologetically.

“But it was locked the night before?”

“I believe so. It is usually locked.”

Holmes raised the window-screen and leaned so far out that I made a dash at his coat-tails. “Rear yard cobbled,” he commented. “Still, we will look for prints before we go. As for the window-frame —”

“Do you think the man leaned a ladder below the window, then?” Mrs. Farnsworth asked, stepping to our side.

“A ladder,” Holmes thought aloud, “or something altogether more ingenious.” He twisted with a grunt, half-sitting on the narrow sill, and ran his hand slowly along the even narrower ridge above the window on the outside. A look almost like pleasure came over his face. “Just as I thought,” he murmured.

“We noticed the indentation there, Mr. Holmes,” Inspector Hopkins said, “but it didn’t seem to indicate much.”

“That is because you lack my encyclopedia of criminal history,” said Holmes as he felt the top of the window-frame carefully. “Watson, have you a shoe-lace going spare, by any chance?”

“As long as I’m not required to give chase in the next few minutes,” I responded, sitting down long enough to draw a lace from one of my Oxfords. “Or the next few hours,” I added, as Holmes held the lace above the window, measured minutely, and then snipped it close to the end with a pocket sewing scissor.

“Wouldn’t a bit of paper have done as well?” I grumbled as I followed him out the house’s rear door, my left shoe wobbling.

“Paper might crumple. I need this to last until I can measure it against a ruler and my notes.” Bent almost double, Holmes scanned the cobbled yard for footprints, as I’d watched him do a thousand times. “Here we are, just as I expected. Do you see the smudge made by the heel? The thief squared up here, then jumped. Small feet for your typical second-storey man.” Having the remaining length of lace still in his hand, he measured and snipped again.

“Why would he have jumped, small feet or no?” I asked, my curiosity piqued despite my annoyance.

“I believe our thief gained entry after the fashion of a certain eminent cracksman.”

“A man with a signature!” I exclaimed. “The only task is to find him, then.”

“His movements are limited,” said Holmes. “I believe him to have been dead since last decade. Scotland Yard confiscated his singular rope ladder, but it was itself stolen from their Black Museum two or three years ago.”

“Stole it *from* Scotland Yard?” said I. “A most remarkable thief we’re up against.”

“Possibly,” Holmes replied with reserve. “At very least, the similarity of instrument dictates our next step.” He looked humourously down at my bereft Oxford. “The primary source on that deceased titan of crime should be easily located Monday morning. I believe you abstain from appointments during those hours? I’d be glad of your company.”

He held out to me again the morning’s edition of the *News Herald*, creased to one byline: *H. Manders*.

## **Manders**

It was one of those rare days when for minutes together I did not think of A.J. Raffles.

It helped that my editor-in-chief insisted on overseeing publication of all matters of state in person, while relegating to me items of mere society, sport, and sensation. I had been deeply into the weekend’s drafts for an hour when one of

the typewriters put her head in. "Mr. M, are you free just now?" she said. "Two gentlemen to see you."

"To see me?" I responded in some surprise. "I hope they haven't taken exception to their coverage! Yes, let them in, thank you." I strove to make order of the chaos on my desk. "Come in, sirs," I called. "Forgive me for not—" I looked up at them, and courtesy caught in my throat. "Rising," I finished with a cough.

"It looks as if we are known to you, Mr. Manders," the famous detective gravely stated.

I cleared my throat again. "I'm fighting the urge to exclaim that whatever it is, I didn't do it," I declared with uneasy humour.

"On the contrary, Mr. Manders, I believe you did quite a lot of it," said Holmes. "But not for some time now."

"That's true enough," I admitted readily. "Won't you sit down?"

Dr. Watson pulled up the rickety chair, while Holmes perched on the corner of my desk.

"Mr. Manders is a colleague of yours," Holmes remarked to his companion.

Dr. Watson surveyed my ocean of papers dubiously. "A medical man?"

“I believe he means that, like yourself, I am an author of magazine stories,” I said modestly. “You may have seen my little efforts in *Cassell’s*.”

“Mr. Manders writes the Raffles tales,” Holmes explained.

Dr. Watson kindly expressed his enthusiasm for my work, when he might as justly have accused me of imitation to the point of plagiarism. I replied with thanks, all the time pondering the strangeness of hearing Raffles’ name, at last, in the mouth of Sherlock Holmes.

“So Raffles is your eminent cracksman!” said Dr. Watson in an admiring tone. “Are they true, then, your tales?”

“As true as your adventures with Mr. Holmes,” I said. “You see, I am Bunny.”

“Ah!” the doctor exclaimed. The hand he had been extending hovered in midair, unsure whether to meet that of a convicted criminal.

Holmes dismissed the awkward moment. “I have often thought of paying you a visit on general principle, Mr. Manders,” he said, as Dr. Watson subsided into his seat. “I am almost pleased that the time has come.”

“As these witness, I’m much taken up with my honest trade,” I said neutrally, waving a hand over my papers, “but I’m happy to be of service to you if I can.”

Holmes laid a copy of my own newspaper before me.

“You wrote up the burglary that took place at the Farnsworth residence early Saturday morning.”

“My colleague the roving reporter did,” I corrected. “It is the column that is under my name. I collect and redact the sensational news.”

“So you did not visit the house on Bryanston Square?”

“Not in person.” I quashed my nerves severely. “If you’d like to speak to Mr. Dawkins —”

“So it did not strike you that the method of the thief’s entry was remarkably like that to Lord Thornaby’s house in Piccadilly, February of 1892, when his formal robes were stolen?”

“Was it?” I felt myself losing ground somehow. “The robes were later returned, I believe.”

“But Mr. Farnsworth’s jewels have not been returned. Therefore it falls to us to track the instrument of entry. I believe I am right in saying that on that occasion your Mr. Raffles used an unusual ladder to gain access to Lord Thornaby’s dressing-room.”

*Your Mr. Raffles.* “Raffles never cared for ladder-work,” I told him. “But on that occasion, and a few others, he did use a rope ladder of his own invention. It connected to a telescoping cane, like a fishing-rod, with a large hook at the end.”

Holmes nodded as if he expected this. “A double hook, of steel, I believe.”

I blinked in astonishment. “How did you know that?”

“I have held it in my hands,” said Holmes briefly. “I wonder if you can tell us the current location of that telescoping cane and rope ladder.”

I had drawn breath to reply when he added, “And if you are about to say the Black Museum at Scotland Yard, you may spare us. Mr. Raffles’ relics were pilfered from there several years ago.”

I threw out my chest. “What a pity I can’t help you, then. Presumably the man you’re seeking is the one who lifted the cane from Scotland Yard, or someone who built a close replica of it.”

“A very precise replica,” said Holmes, fixing me with a measured stare. “Would you object to telling us where you were in the early hours of Saturday morning?”

A wave of rage rose in my chest – rage and, if I am quite honest about it, something like elation. “Not at all,” I answered icily. “I was here, putting the newspaper to bed, as I am every late Friday night. You are very welcome to interview my editor or our pressmen on the point. But furthermore –”

With the effort it took every damnable time, I leaned both palms on the desk and stood up. My right leg wavered

beneath me until its iron brace locked into position. I stretched out my arm for my heavy support and, thus customarily encumbered, hobbled round the desk to face the detectives. "I hope it is self-evident, gentlemen, that I am in no situation to shin up the side of a house, however useful the ladder."

The good doctor's face took on an expression of pity, but Sherlock Holmes merely nodded as he added this detail to his mental ledger. "I ask you to indulge just one more question, then," he said. "Are you entirely certain that A.J. Raffles is dead?"

### **Manders cont.**

I was still fuming when I left the newspaper office at the usual hour that evening and turned my slow steps up Fleet Street towards my lodgings. "The cheek, the utter cheek," I muttered into my collar, "to all but accuse me of burgling a petty solicitor, and then to suppose that Raffles himself must have returned from the grave to commit the crime! That rope ladder will hardly hold the weight of hypothesis you're dangling from it!" I was rather pleased with this and wondered how I could use it in a story. Then my jaw clenched again, and not only due to the pain in my leg.

"Entirely certain!" I had blasted the horrid question. "It is a matter of all records, mine least among them, that Raffles

drowned near Genoa in July 1895. He was a master at escaping a sticky situation, the best I ever knew, but even he could not escape death – certainly not to loot some second-rate safe a full seven years later!”

Sherlock Holmes looked at me without expression and, if he knew I was lying, I wished him joy of it. I have never been so thankful to my editor-in-chief as when he interrupted us just then and praised me for securing an exclusive with the famous consulting detective. Courteously, neither visitor disabused him of the notion.

Holmes had merely left his card in case I thought of anything else. I thought of plenty, but nothing I cared to share with him.

Raffles’ unfinished sentence echoed in my mind again. *“I have had a good time, Bunny...I am grateful to the General for giving me to-day. It may be the last...It’s not only been the best time I ever had, old Bunny, but...”*

“But what?” I repeated to the air, my eternal frustration. It was not until I turned up Shoe Lane that I perceived my shadow. For one mad instant I thought that Raffles had indeed come back to life and would any moment drag me into an alley with a hand over my mouth, bear me away to his new hiding-place, pour out all he’d done while the world called him dead. And he used to accuse me of having no imagination.

Up Shoe Lane, step by dragging step, and into Little New Street, the other end from Samuel Johnson's historic residence, to my own small nest on the ground floor of an unremarkable lodging-house. Behind me all the way the darting patter of my follower. With the help of the iron railing, I pulled myself onto our one low step. Then I turned, my eye flashing into the twilight.

"Mr. Holmes," I called out, "please either enter as a guest, or go away. You're disturbing my wife."

Indeed, Gwen was standing in the doorway, and only one other could have held more bliss in my gaze. "Holmes!" she whispered, apprehending the point at once.

"It's all right," I assured her. "He's only asking about ancient history."

Holmes stepped up behind me, turning his coat collar down again. "I will come in for a moment, then, if you don't mind," he said good-humouredly. "It seems that my skills in quiet pursuit have diminished with age."

I frowned at him. "I'm not a novice to the game, Mr. Holmes. Step into the parlour. We share it, as you see, with our landlady Mrs. Burgin. Ladies, we're honoured by the presence of the great Sherlock Holmes."

Gwen and Constance Burgin exchanged meaningful glances as only they could, and Connie set down her sewing.

Little Rebecca, cutting out paper dolls at her mother's knee, looked up with interest.

"Have you brought home a friend, Uncle Buncle?" she addressed me with her favourite playful name.

"Have I bought home a friend?" I challenged Holmes.

"Not an enemy, I trust," said he mildly. His glance flew about the room, no doubt taking in the handsome but well-used furnishings, the old-fashioned *objets*, the childrens' charming clutter.

"I half think Mr. Holmes expected me to lead him straight to some den of thieves," I said, not without a whiff of triumph.

"Instead you've led him straight into a den of suffragists," Gwen said briskly. "What is your opinion on votes for women, Mr. Holmes?"

"She is still determining whether you are friend or foe, you see," I explained.

"On the politics of the matter, madam, I have no opinion," Holmes answered. "I will say that the favoured arguments of those opposed – that women are irrational, untrustworthy, flighty – can, in my long experience, be made equally against men. If calm logic is required for participation in the democratic process, nearly all of humanity is disqualified. And the rare exceptions come in both sexes."

“O, wonderful!” Connie proclaimed, and Gwen’s expression eased marginally. “May we quote you on that in our next circular, Mr. Holmes?”

“You are welcome to the sentiment,” said he with a reasonable dose of grace, “but pray don’t attribute it. I find it wise to remain publicly neutral. I see you’re a teacher, Mrs. Manders.”

Gwen’s eyebrows went up. “Chalk dust,” Holmes explained modestly, pointing to the heel of her hand.

“Mrs. Manders teaches at my daughter’s infant school,” Connie put in, touching Becky’s plaits.

“You have also an older son?” asked Holmes, turning to her.

“Andrew is fourteen.”

“And your husband is no longer with us?”

“True.”

“Yet—forgive me—you are not a widow.”

“I am,” said Connie firmly, “on all the fronts that matter.”

“Now you’ve sorted us all out, Mr. Holmes, will you be dining here?” Gwen asked next.

“I shall not trouble you so long, thank you,” Holmes replied. “I have one lingering question for Mr. Manders. I fear we went astray from the point at hand when we spoke at your office.”

*“Spoke at your office?”* Gwen mouthed at me behind Holmes’ back.

“To wit?” I prompted.

“Only this: when I mentioned that the telescoping cane had been stolen from Scotland Yard’s Black Museum, you did not appear surprised by the news.”

He was good, there was no denying it. “If I concede that point, will you leave me in peace?” I asked with a sigh.

“If I can.”

“Harry, you’re under no obligation—” Gwen protested.

“Very well,” I carried on, leaning hard on my cane. “Your man does not have A.J. Raffles’ telescoping ladder because I have it.”

Holmes nodded as if this was merely what he expected. “You took the items from the Black Museum, then?”

“I, no!” I sputtered. “It— they — came into my possession, that’s all.” The truth, naturally, was that Raffles had stolen them back himself, but that had happened four years after his theoretical death. A burst of inspiration. “I— purchased them from the party who did take them. Indirectly.”

“They must have been of great personal importance,” said Holmes.

“I was strongly attached to their inventor,” I said, “as you must know from my writings. Please come and examine the items, if you wish.”

I led him haltingly through the door into our apartment, its presiding fairy right behind him. In my bedroom, I turned a decorative key in my wardrobe door and pointed to a plain chest some three feet by two. “My dear, if you could give me a hand to lift this —”

Gwen and I shouldered the chest onto the counterpane. Now I took out a small key that hung on my watch fob and fit it into the chest’s lock. Holmes removed a bit of black string from his pocket. “Feel free to handle these as you choose,” I said, flipping open the lid. “I think you’ll find that —”

I heard Gwen’s gasp before the situation slammed home. The chest was empty.

“What — ?” I heard myself foolishly interrogate it. “What — ! How can — ! Oh — !”

“When did you last open this chest?” Holmes asked with sudden force.

“I don’t know — a fortnight or so ago,” I stammered.

“The chest has not been moved from this room?”

“We’d have no reason to move it,” Gwen declared.

“You have the sole key?”

“The sole key! I had it made especially to hold —” My voice cracked. Gwen’s arms went about my ribs as I rocked back on my heels, stabbed with grief and fury and a fresh blaze of pain from my wound. “Well,” I exclaimed, throwing

up my hands, "it looks as if your burglar may in fact be using A.J. Raffles' rope ladder, and the first person he burgled was me!"

### **Manders cont.**

It was a miserable dinner we ate after Holmes had gone. Afterwards, in a departure from my usual practice, I at once attacked the Scotch whisky. I recalled once thinking, long before it befell me, that if I lost Raffles I would either never drink again, or seldom do anything else.

Gwen updated her scrapbook of suffrage news and listened tolerantly to my increasingly incontinent and self-pitying outbursts.

"They were all I had of him," I whimpered into my third glassful. "All I had! Who could possibly want to take them from me? Who would be so cruel?"

Having seen Becky to bed, Connie came down from her own apartment and gently kneaded my shoulders. "Where is Andrew?" Gwen suddenly thought to inquire.

"I don't know," Andrew's mother replied with an edge. "He'll have a cold supper."

I roused up in fresh despair. "You don't suppose anything's happened to him?"

Connie shook her head, resuming her chair. "I predict something will happen to him, if he's not home within the quarter hour."

As it turned out, Andrew narrowly evaded the oracle, slipping through the door as I poured my fourth finger. "Sorry, Mum!" he said brightly. "Examinations next week, you know. We stayed at school to have Smith tutor us at maths."

"Clever at maths, is he?" said Connie skeptically.

"Smith, Mum," Andrew replied as if this spoke to all. "He's clever at everything."

"And his parents don't wonder where he is?" Gwen put in.

"He lives at the school," said Drew, reaching for his cold plate. "Orphan, I think. What are you doing up, Mouse?"

Rebecca had skipped sleeplessly downstairs again. To my surprise, it was my lap she burrowed into. "Uncle Bun is sad," she informed her brother. To me she said, "You miss your friend."

"Yes," I agreed soppily. "I miss him very much."

She laid her soft head on my collarbone. "I know," she whispered. "Sometimes I miss my papa."

"I'll put her down, Mum," Drew volunteered good-naturedly as Connie reached again for her daughter.

He picked her up topsy-turvy, squashing the sentimental moment. "Put me down! Put me down!" she screamed with laughter.

I sank into silence, staring into the small spring fire. Becky went off to sleep at last. Andrew cleaned his plate and followed her. Connie counted a last few stitches, then folded up her work for the night. "To bed, my love?" she asked, taking Gwen's hand.

Gwen looked at me with concern. "Will you be all right, Harry dear?"

"Of course," I said sleepily. "I'll just have one more small one and turn in."

When they were safely gone to their bedroom, I stumbled into mine. The empty chest mocked me. To my final finger of whisky I added careful drops from the phial of laudanum in my bedside table. I closed my eyes and thought of my Raffles, but what dreams came were all the doleful exercise-yard at Reading Gaol, and nary a hair of my lost friend.

## **Watson**

I thought that might be all I would hear of the eminent cracksman and his rope ladder, but Wednesday morning I received a message from Holmes at my surgery. If I might be interested in the sequel, it said, I should arrive at Baker

Street by teatime. My midweek patients presenting no particular challenges, I took care of immediate needs and entered my old rooms again by half-past three.

Holmes caught me up economically on his findings to date. Harry Manders, it transpired, had dispatched a note from the *News Herald* office asking if he might visit Holmes this same afternoon.

“I have also written Mrs. Savident for permission to call upon her this evening,” Holmes said, “and it may be of use to carry Mr. Manders with us. It appears that I shall take him on as a sort of sub-client to this case. If we find the Farnsworth burglar, we may as well restore Mr. Raffles’ friend his property, however ill-gotten.”

“If Scotland Yard couldn’t hold it, they have no more right to it than he, say I.”

“Just so. In your professional opinion, is his lameness genuine?”

“I believe it is,” I said.

“As was his distress at the loss of the Raffles relics, or I’m no reader of faces,” Holmes mused.

“He seems positively worshipful of this Raffles character, if the stories are anything to go by,” I observed. “I’d another look at some of them after we met him. If I didn’t know better, I would almost suspect them of, well, of the Wildean vice.”

Holmes looked amused. "If you didn't know better?"

"Manders is married," I reminded him.

"Permit me to remind you of Oscar Wilde's wife and two sons," said Holmes. "There's the bell."

I faintly heard the servant opening the downstairs door, but the pause was then so long that I glanced down from the landing. Mr. Manders, leaning on his cane, appeared exhausted only four steps up from the bottom. Since I knew that the stairs totaled seventeen, I trotted down and offered the poor man a shoulder.

"How did you come to be so grievously crippled?" I asked him as we stopped for breath near the top.

"South African Field Force," Manders gasped. "Sniper outside Johannesburg."

My heart swelled with patriotic admiration for Manders, invert burglar or no. "A bullet through the femur?" I queried. "I just escaped so severe an injury in Afghanistan back in '80. You're fortunate it missed the artery."

"Yes indeed," said Manders as I let him down into an armchair. "But multiple fracture, as well as the flesh wound. Causes me to put too much pressure on the knee, that's the real trouble. I'm sure my recent increase by a stone or so is no help."

"Would you do better on the settee?" I asked.

He shook his head stolidly. "I'm afraid it never gives me a moment's peace until I lie full-length."

"Then do lie full-length," I told him, with a glance at the oddly silent Holmes. "We don't stand on ceremony here, or even sit upon it." I propped a pillow comfortingly beneath his head. "Tea?"

"You're very kind, doctor," said he, accepting a steaming cup and a currant bun.

"Cigarette?" Holmes proffered a cigarette case other than his usual one.

Mr. Manders looked up at him in astonishment. "How did you –" he began, then caught himself. "I know that one. You read my stories."

Each of them took a slim cigarette. Holmes held out a lit match, and Manders drew a long puff of smoke and sighed. "That does take me back to our old days. Do you care for Sullivans yourself?"

"I laid in a supply as an aide-de-memoire," Holmes explained. "Especially apt, as I seem to have you, after the manner of Dr. Freud, on my couch."

"Must you refer to that beastly Austrian?" I groaned.

Holmes smiled thinly. "Dr. Freud theorises that criminals are motivated by deep-set guilt and a need for punishment. Which might account for Mr. Raffles' tempting fate in the South African Field Force."

“You mean Mr. Manders,” I corrected.

“I mean Mr. Raffles,” Holmes stated, watching Manders closely. “A.J. Raffles stole back his own burglary tools from Scotland Yard’s Black Museum and willed them to you. At the outbreak of war, you enlisted together. He did not drown near Genoa in 1895 as you write. But he was shot by a sniper outside Johannesburg in 1900.”

“I see there’s no use hiding anything from you, Mr. Holmes,” said Manders. He paused, covering his emotions with a large bite of bun.

“The body was not recovered,” Holmes went on, “and the records were muddled, I think on the orders of a certain well-known general, covering up the false name under which Raffles had been operating. Therefore no official record exists for the actual demise of A.J. Raffles.”

“He is dead, even so,” Manders said in a low voice. “He took one through the eye. Hadn’t a chance. He fell across me – lay there till dark, when the stretcher-bearers could approach. They called for the living, and gentlemen, I seriously considered holding my tongue.” Manders sipped his tea noisily. “Put any construction you like on that,” he added more calmly. “I only beg you not to ask me to incriminate myself.”

“I am retained at present only to look into this matter of Mr. Farnsworth’s,” Holmes replied, sipping his own tea.

“Any other action I leave to the police. Therefore I’ve no doubt but that you will lead a quiet life hereafter if you so choose.” Holmes leaned back in his armchair with his customary lowered lids and steepled fingers. “Now, then! On the topic of your missing items: I have the list of what went astray from the Black Museum. Will you confirm it matches your memory?”

He held out a much-folded page. Manders squinted at it through his spectacles and read aloud. “Lockpicks in an embroidered case. Gimlets, wedges, life-preserver.” He paused as if struck with a thought, then went on. “Unloaded revolver, centre-bit, large empty cartridge. Oil bottle. Velvet bag. Telescope walking-stick.” He handed the page back, turning his head on the cushion. “That is the inventory. I cannot imagine what someone would want with all of it. That velvet bag—how would the thief even know its use?”

“The point has puzzled me as well,” Holmes admitted. “Intended to muffle some task, but what?”

“Filing keys,” Manders responded at once.

“Ingenious,” said Holmes. “The rope ladder, of course, came into use in the theft of Lord Thornaby’s ceremonial robes.”

“You seem to know all about that already, though I’ve not yet written it up,” said Manders with a note of petulance.

“Indeed,” said Holmes, “I had the tale from his lordship himself, at a luncheon I attended for an unrelated matter. The theft is widely attributed to Raffles on the basis of his attendance at Lord Thornaby’s dinner that night. You were another guest, I believe.”

“I was,” said Manders, blowing a wistful smoke-ring towards the ceiling. “It was not just any dinner. It was a meeting of the so-called Criminologist’s Club. I thought surely the invitation was a trap. As it turned out, it was – and Raffles walked straight in and sprang it.”

“He had, of course, committed the actual burglary prior to the dinner?”

“He stole the robes the night before. On that evening he only tossed things about to give the impression of robbery.”

“And altered a clock so it appeared that the thief had done his work while the guests were at table.”

Manders cast a glance back over his shoulder. “Did Lord Thornaby work that out?”

“I worked that out,” said Holmes, “when he described the upturned room. The lockpicks were used in the burglary of the jeweller Danby, as you describe, and also at the home of a Mr. Guillemard in Horsham?”

Manders goggled at him again. “It was quite a simple matter to discover that you had lived there as a child,”

Holmes told him gravely. "The coincidence seemed unlikely."

They carried on in this fashion until the buns and Sullivans ran short. "I wonder, Mr. Holmes," Manders remarked at last, "that you never tracked Raffles down yourself while he lived."

Holmes nodded slowly in acknowledgment of the point. "No client came to me for the purpose, and the Yard's Mr. Mackenzie was no admirer of my methods. Raffles himself never harmed me. In fact it seemed that many of his victims could afford their losses."

"That was always his goal," said Manders. "Well, nearly always."

"Not that a victim's financial capacity makes him less a victim," Holmes reminded us. "I believe I am right in saying that Mr. Raffles never spent an hour behind bars for his crimes."

"True," said Manders, with what might have been a hint of pride.

"You did, however, serve a short prison term," Holmes reminded him. "A year?"

"Eighteen months," Manders said.

"Presumably many of the charges would not 'stick'?" Holmes said. "And you were determined to have been under Mr. Raffles' malign influence throughout."

“Malign influence,” Manders repeated dreamily.  
“Would you believe, I’ve just recalled when the last time was I pulled out that chest. It was the start of cricket season, second week-end of April.”

“Ah,” Holmes said as if he expected this. “And did you have visitors in the house around that time?”

“Did we!” said Manders. “Half the suffrage campaigners in London marched through then. Probably three dozen people visited that fortnight. My bedroom wasn’t on view, of course, but the door wouldn’t have been locked.”

“Anyone who read *Cassell’s* might guess that you owned some articles of Raffles’.”

“But then we have someone who visited with the suffragists, read *Cassell’s*, and could pick a lock so it looked like it hadn’t been done, and that’s where I run out of bounds.”

I couldn’t help thinking that this was eerily like the remark of Mrs. Farnsworth’s, how the thief had got in and out with no sign.

“Patience, Mr. Manders,” counseled Holmes. “Steps remain to be taken. I am myself off now to Mrs. Savident’s town house, which was burgled earlier this spring. Perhaps you’d care to accompany me?”

“Oh dear,” said Manders.

“You’d face the fierce Boers, but not a gracious dowager?” I asked with jocular eyebrow.

“It is only that I used to know her socially. Well,” Manders sighed, “perhaps she will have forgotten me by now.”

### **Watson cont.**

Mrs. Savident had not forgotten. “Bunny Manders, you dreadful little man, what did you and that dastardly cricketer do with my sister’s necklace?” the lady demanded as soon as we came into view.

“Remember the Melrose diamonds? Raffles, in ‘91,” Holmes murmured to me.

Mr. Manders drew up on the rug and bowed. “To tell you the simple truth, madam, we sold it and lived very well on the proceeds for many months. Then I went to prison, and to the war —”

“Serves you right!” the dame declared. “And then you had the crust to go and marry Lord Lochmaben’s niece, though heaven knows why she’d have you, and make him disinherit her!”

“Forgive me for contradicting you, madam,” said Manders humbly, “but it was the other way about. Lord Lochmaben disinherited his niece, and then —”

“For being a socialist!”

“A suffragist, madam.”

“Some sort of troublemaker, it matters not what,” sniffed Mrs. Savident. “Why are you in my house? After my family plate, are you?”

“Mr. Manders is here to assist me,” said Holmes. “I am a consulting detective, and it pleases me, at the moment, to consult him.”

“And you are this Sherlock Holmes one hears so much about,” Mrs. Savident continued to sniff. “What brings you here now? I was robbed weeks ago. Have the police only just admitted their failure?”

“I am looking into a similar theft at the home of Mr. Theodore Farnsworth,” Holmes stated.

“My solicitor?” said Mrs. Savident contemptuously. “What has that to do with me?”

“I hope to determine that shortly, madam.”

“Well, on with it, then. Trask! Show them where my diamond ear-bobs used to be.”

“I believe the loss was the ear-bobs and a bracelet?” Holmes asked the maid who led us up a winding marble staircase.

“And two rings, sir.”

“No necklaces? No tiara?”

“No, sir. The ear-rings and bracelet were a matched set. Other things in the jewel-box were left just as they had been.”

We topped the stairs, in my case slightly winded, to find Mr. Manders with a twinkle in his eye. “She has a lift,” he explained.

“This is the room that contained the jewels, sir,” said Trask, gesturing us into a plush-filled chamber. “And their case.” Atop the dressing-table, she opened a large velvet-lined jewel-box.

Now Holmes took out his large magnifying lens and began to go over the room in his usual detailed way. I looked about at the table and large ornamentally framed mirror and, also as usual, saw nothing extraordinary. Mr. Manders glared about, then plopped himself on the silk-covered divan. “Mrs. Savident just insulted me, and worse, insulted my wife,” said he. “She owes me a seat at least.”

After several minutes, Holmes shook his head. “Nothing to be seen here,” he said. “The thief deftly plucked out the smallest items without a trace. Miss Trask, are you entirely certain the pieces were stolen? They have not simply have gone astray in a drawer or something of that nature?”

“We’re certain about the theft, sir,” said Trask formally, “because of the open window. Madame never keeps a window open. Draughts, you know.”

“The window here was open in the morning?”

“Not that window, sir. At the other end of the corridor.”

“Ah!” Holmes seemed to see a new avenue for investigation. “Can you bring a lamp or candle and shed as much light as possible on this rug?”

He got down on his hands and knees and swept his gaze across every inch of the corridor, past two more closed rooms and to the next open doorway. “I surmise the thief was in stocking feet,” he commented. “Even plimsolls would have left some speck from the out-of-doors. Of course the inspectors and their men have tramped through here in the meantime.” A few steps into the second bedroom he rose stiffly. “Let us look at another window, then.”

“But Mrs. Savident’s dressing-room has French windows,” I said, following him.

“It has. And?”

“What sort of burglar would come in and out through this poky little window when there were full-length windows and a balcony on the very room he wished to burgle?”

“The sort who wished his burglary to remain undiscovered as long as possible,” Holmes answered. “That balcony lets down into a garden. This side of the house faces a rear yard, like Mr. Farnsworth’s.”

“An intelligent sort of burglar, in other words,” Manders added.

As at the Farnsworths’, Holmes leaned on the windowsill and reached up to run his fingers along the narrow upper frame. “Come here, Mr. Manders,” he said. “Give me your hand. Now! Does that not resemble the teeth of Mr. Raffles’ cane-and-rope ladder?”

Manders felt the indentations and broke into a smile. “But I don’t understand,” he said. “This little frame would never hold a man. Raffles used to throw the upper hook over a pipe, something solid and metal.”

“Well observed,” said Holmes mildly. “In both uses we’ve seen of the rope ladder, the support would never hold a man.”

“Good lord, Holmes,” I exclaimed. “You don’t suppose someone’s forcing a child to carry off jewels?”

“It would scarcely be the first time,” said Holmes, stroking his chin. “But it would require a child with extreme caution and great coordination of movement.” I wondered if he, like me, remembered then the strange little Andaman Islander who had been the villain’s slave in the case I called *The Sign of the Four*.

“I say,” said Manders, directing us towards the lift, “do you know what he’s driving at?”

“Hardly ever,” I confided. “Until he explains himself, and sometimes not then.” Manders laughed sadly.

“Well?” Mrs. Savident queried when we reassembled in her morning room. “Surely you have something! The monster could have murdered me in my bed!”

“Highly unlikely,” Holmes told her. “The burglar was scarcely even interested in your jewels.”

“Scarcely interested –!”

“The thief took four tiny items while leaving several more valuable pieces in the same box,” said Holmes. “This was an experiment. Or a statement.”

“About me?” said Mrs. Savident skeptically.

“I think not,” said Holmes mysteriously. “Thank you very much for your time, Mrs. Savident. We’ll impose on it no more.”

“You there, Manders! You’ll turn out your pockets before you go!” The lady’s commanding tone followed us to the door.

### **Watson cont.**

Thursday morning found me following Holmes to the Gray’s Inn chambers of Theo. Farnsworth, Esq. “A pleasure to see you again, Mr. Holmes and Dr. Watson,” said Mr. Farnsworth, in a tone suggesting the opposite. “You have news for me?”

“Of a sort,” said Holmes. “It is that this office was burgled some weeks ago.”

“Nonsense!” Mr. Farnsworth blustered. “We’ve not seen a leaf out of place.”

“Pray recall how little was disturbed at your home,” Holmes pointed out. “The same was true at Mrs. Savident’s house, although several gems were gone.”

This gave the solicitor pause. “Indeed, she consulted me about an insurance settlement,” he admitted. “You think these things connected?”

“Is Mrs. Savident one of the clients whose confidential papers travel home with you?” Holmes countered.

“No,” said Mr. Farnsworth. “Does that help or hurt your case?”

“That remains to be seen. May we examine the room where Mrs. Savident’s files are kept?”

“Certainly,” Mr. Farnsworth responded more humbly. “Cartwright!”

A law clerk stepped in with inquisitive look. “Show these gentlemen anything they request, within our usual guidelines of confidentiality,” he instructed. “Start with the cabinets.”

“If you’ll follow me,” the clerk murmured. He led us across the corridor to a chamber containing a desk, currently unoccupied, and several tall dark filing cabinets.

Holmes darted at once to the latter part of the alphabet. "These drawers are not kept locked?"

"I have been consulting papers from that one. They are locked at close of business."

Holmes flicked rapidly through names beginning with S. "As I suspected," said he under his breath. "Here are Mrs. Savident's files. Adjacent to them, a Mr. David Scanlon and – hum! The Earl of Salmine."

"Mr. Farnsworth has served two generations of the earl's family," the clerk said proudly. "I must beg you, sir, not to remove or copy anything from that file."

"Nor have I any wish to," said Holmes. "This is all I need."

He flung the file open on the empty desk. Among the routine deeds and agreements, a pale pink paper flag read *Also see Bryanston*.

"*Bryanston*, I take it, refers to Mr. Farnsworth's home safe?" Holmes asked briskly.

"Just so, sir."

"How many *also see Bryanston* clients does Mr. Farnsworth's practice encompass?"

"I'm not certain, sir – between ten and twenty."

"Any more in this drawer?" Holmes scanned the remainder. "One, a Mr. Rust. Very good." This name he

noted on his shirtcuff. "Just lift up that banker's lamp, Watson, if you will, and let me look at this cabinet's locks." I did as he asked. He peered closely at the drawers' locks with an enigmatic expression. "The door to this room? Also locked at close of business?"

"If all is as it should be, sir."

The lamp's electrical cord would not stretch to the door, but Holmes looked at it as closely. "And the front door of the chambers," he finished. "You'll see, Watson, that they open to the out-of-doors, not onto a corridor. The thief must have given thanks for that." I trailed him to the outer door, which he examined minutely outside and in. "And there you are," he said finally, with a flash of a smile. "Can you see them?" he addressed the clerk and me. "Amidst the usual scratches made by fitted keys, here is a repeated shiny depression. It is a lockpick, repeatedly feeling for the proper angle. And I have no doubt but that this lockpick was formerly owned by A.J. Raffles."

"Raffles, the amateur cracksman?" Cartwright the clerk exclaimed with sudden passionate interest. "Has he been here?"

"Not he," said Holmes, "but his legacy. And, I think, someone else's as well."

We returned to Mr. Farnsworth's office, where Holmes laid out his findings to the solicitor's considerable

discomfort. "Are all my clients at risk, then?" he asked dismally.

"Not all," Holmes reassured him. "One, at least, perhaps two. However, I've a strong suspicion which two, and can alert the authorities accordingly."

"You think the thief will strike again soon, then?"

"Very possibly as soon as tomorrow night," said Holmes.

"Both Mr. Farnsworth's home and Mrs. Savident's were robbed on Friday nights," I suddenly noticed.

"Yes, though in the opposite order," Holmes confirmed. "It is reasonable to assume that this office was also entered on a Friday, unless you have had some particular security practice for Friday nights, Mr. Farnsworth."

"None," the solicitor said. "I can arrange for you to speak to the charwoman. She is the only one who would be here late on a Friday."

"That may be instructive," said Holmes, "but for the moment, there is no time to lose in sending a prophylactic uniformed policeman each to two town homes: that of Mr. David Scanlon, and that of Robert Naylor, Earl of Salmine. We should also, perhaps, dispatch a message to the home of Mr. Eleazar Rust, suggesting that he check his bolts."

"I fear you will lose me the trust of my most valued clients," said the gloomy solicitor.

“On the contrary, sir,” said Holmes. “Should the thief be apprehended at any of the three properties, you will be the hero of the hour for providing such protection.”

So pleased was Holmes at this turn in the case, he treated me to a spring luncheon of pea soup and salmon at a Lyons tea shop. In response to my persistent questions, he began to sketch in the features of Raffles’ heir.

“We seek a person of small stature or at least light weight,” he began. “Someone who knew or suspected that Harry Manders held a case of burglary tools and who either had access to the Burgin/Manders home in Little New Street, or spotted a chance to gain access while their many visitors came and went. This person has the opportunity to commit break-ins solely, or primarily, late on Friday evenings.”

“A night when Manders works late at his newspaper,” I put in.

“Precisely. This person resides within a two- to three-mile radius of Gray’s Inn.”

“All the burglaries have taken place quite near,” I concurred.

“I infer from this that the thief will be missed after too long an absence, even in the small hours of a Saturday morning. The locations are all easily linked by ‘buses, but the longest distance could be walked at a pinch.”

“And you said the burglary at Lady Savident’s was an experiment?”

“Or a decoy,” said Holmes, leaning forward eagerly, fork suspended. “If I am correct, our thief is bagging jewels as a side game. The real object is some sort of information.”

“Information? For blackmail, you mean.”

“Here is the thread: Following the acquisition of Raffles’ tools from Mr. Manders, the solicitor’s office was the first victim. There the thief found only partial satisfaction: the needed documents were not in the office, but in Mr. Farnsworth’s safe on Bryanston Square. In frustration —”

“ — the thief took Mrs. Savident’s address instead!”

“Thus making the whole project appear more a simple grasp for wealth than a deliberate search. The thief carried away only a pocketful of items from Mrs. Savident, however — proof that the thing could be done. The taking of Mrs. Farnsworth’s jewels obviously distracted from the necessary rifling of those confidential documents — although the thief is almost inhumanly deft to leave them looking so undisturbed.”

“I see!” I said with equal eagerness, though less neglect of my salmon. “So if the thief strikes again, it is most likely to be the town home of either a neighbour in Mr. Farnsworth’s office files — hence the Earl or Mr. Scanlon — or in his home safe papers — hence Mr. Rust.”

“Well said, Watson,” Holmes concluded, leaning back with satisfaction. “And I think it safe to say that the thief will strike again. If blackmail is the goal, the wanted item has not yet been located. One does not commit a minimum of three break-ins solely to put facts in one’s head.”

“Even you would not go that far,” I jested.

### **Watson cont.**

As it happened, the thief made no traceable appearance on the night of Friday 23d May.

“Hopkins stationed plainclothesmen outside of all three homes,” Holmes said, showing me the Saturday-morning telegram from Inspector Hopkins. “An admirable application of my advice, but in this case for naught.”

“Do you suppose the thief spotted the guards and scarpered?”

“Quite possibly. You may also have noticed the stunning full moon. Not the most commodious evening for burglary.”

“Prolongs the investigation, unfortunately.”

“It does, but we may be able to bring a more active resolution. I see you’ve no urgent cases waiting, dear fellow. Will you join me in a visit to Little New Street? The morning is bright; let us walk.”

As we strolled south, I queried, “So we are calling on Mr. Manders again?”

“On Mr. and Mrs. Manders.”

“I can’t help noticing, Holmes, that you continually say *our thief* or *the burglar*. Why not *he*?”

“Think, Watson,” said my friend. “We seek a small, light person. Who visits Harry Manders’ house? Suffrage campaigners. The household itself contains two women to the one man, none of them of large size.”

“Surely no woman could pull herself up Raffles’ rope ladder!” I exclaimed.

“You have not yet seen the Manders’ landlady, Mrs. Burgin,” said Holmes. “I would not be surprised if she were among the small company of women who can pull their own weight hand-over-hand.”

“You suspect Mrs. Manders, or their friend?” I breathed disbelieving. “I admit they sound unconventional, New Women and all that, but thievery?”

“Pray don’t forget that the former Gwendoline Wood, niece of Lord Lochmaben, deliberately married a convicted criminal. While I suspect that the match may be one primarily of convenience —”

“Good lord, Holmes —”

“ — Mrs. Manders struck me as defensive of her husband to the point of rudeness. Consider the possibility that Mr. Farnsworth’s safe contained some damning evidence against A.J. Raffles’ erstwhile accomplice, something that might

return him to prison for far longer than his prior light sentence.”

“A determined woman might go to extreme measures to preserve what little honour remained to her family.”

“It is a slender thread, I admit,” said Holmes, “but best to rule it out while we can.”

## **Manders**

I never admired Gwen more than when she was in command. At the moment, she was wrangling seven old biddies at the dining-room table, four shopgirls at a hastily erected card-table next the hearth, and five or six nursemaids, factory workers, and young mothers scattered about the parlour. Under her guidance, they were assembling, folding, enclosing, sealing, addressing, and stamping fifteen hundred printed appeals from the Women’s Franchise League. Around the edges, Rebecca Burgin led her own troupe of tots in cheery mayhem. In the kitchen, her mother Connie prepared constant trays of hors d’oeuvres for the labourers. Noisy conversation was optimistic that this or that politician would begin to change his mind based on our arguments.

Of course it was Gwen’s logic that had changed my own mind on the subject of women’s rights, among many others. Even then I was not so much sold on women’s

enfranchisement as I was convinced that any cause Gwen espoused must be worthy. After all, she'd taken me on, that terrible summer of 1900, a lost cause if ever there was one. It was she who had arrested my tumble into dissipation. She had seen the possibilities in our partnership when her sour uncle disowned her: I bereaved, she newly devoted to Mrs. Burgin. She had encouraged me to publish my adventurous tales, not hoard them up as a mourned golden age. How Raffles would have laughed to see me so like a family man, chatting away to a shopgirl as if I had never known either the pavilion at Lord's or Reading's whitewashed cell.

Gwen looked up from correcting a stamp's alignment to flash me a smile. "Don't lose track!" she ordered.

It was my task to check the prepared envelopes against a long list of MPs and various government officers. The women moved so quickly that the envelopes piled up as soon as my head turned.

I did turn my head, however, for the occasional sneeze, and it was then that I saw the figures of Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson darkening my door.

"Come in, gentlemen," I said damply. "I warn you, there are no drones here today."

"Are you feeling better, Mr. Manders?" Holmes asked with insincere solicitude.

“Largely,” I replied, handkerchief to my face. “It’s only a slight head cold.”

“But you were kept from work yesterday?”

“I exchanged shifts with a colleague. Observe me not asking you how you know that.”

Gwen was at my elbow. “Welcome back, Mr. Holmes,” she said coolly. “I’d offer you a seat, but I’m afraid they’re all in use.”

“I don’t suppose you’re here to return my keepsakes?” I inquired without much hope.

“Not quite yet,” said Holmes, pacing languidly about us as though he owned the place. “Have you had any occasion of late to visit Gray’s Inn?”

“Happily my needs for legal counsel are behind me,” said I. “Why do you ask?”

“We have found evidence of another unlawful entry, this time to the chambers of Mr. Theodore Farnsworth.”

“The same man whose house was robbed last Saturday week?” I recalled my column inches. “What terribly bad luck this Mr. Farnsworth is having.”

“And Raffles’ things were used in this case as well?” asked Gwen.

“Lockpicks are less distinctive than rope-ladders, but I suspect they were his,” Holmes replied.

Before I could ask what on earth he wanted next, lusty voices interrupted with a slightly ribald version of Andrew Burgin's school song. A handful of third-formers crowded in, several shaky tenors and a soprano or so. "Votes for women!" Andrew bellowed, raising his fists in a victory gesture that won cheers from the assembly.

"Thank you for coming," Gwen welcomed the new arrivals. "We know you're busy revising for end-of-term examinations."

"Yes, but Burgin promised us food," said one eager lad.

"Put us to work first, Mrs. M.," said Drew, laughing.

"One of you can take over checking the outgoing post against this list," I suggested, handing it on with relief.

"I say, Burgin!" another exclaimed. "Is this your uncle who writes the Raffles stories in *Cassell's*?"

"I write the Raffles stories, at any rate," I said, flattered at his enthusiasm.

"We're all fanatical about them," another lad told me.

"We pass the magazine hand to hand – outside of the classroom, of course," he added to Gwen's glance.

"Shan't you write any more, sir?" a small voice piped up shyly.

"Why, the story ends, you know," I answered, feeling the beginning of a blush. "Raffles drowned, and I went to prison." I cleared my throat uncomfortably. Even without

my cold, Holmes' gaze seemed to provoke repeated catarrh. "And let that be a lesson to you," I added hastily.

Gwen herded the new volunteers to their stations as Connie delivered the latest elevenses. "What is all of this, then?" said Dr. Watson, aligning his step with hers and leaning over the flyer-folders' heads. "*Women, who govern our families, have as much natural right to govern our land...?*"

"Do you dispute that, sir?" asked Connie in a formidable tone.

"I've seldom seen such passionate advocacy of the idea, that's all," Watson assured her.

"Why should we not be passionate about it?" Gwen challenged. "Women give everything to society and receive almost nothing in return. We have no voice and no legal standing."

"Well," said Watson innocently, "through your husbands —"

"Husbands!" Connie rejoined fiercely. "My husband deserted me. He holds the title to this house. He has legal custody of our children. He could cast me out on the street alone if the whim took him. Where is my power in that?"

"Hear, hear!" a dozen voices chorused. "Same with me!" cried one.

"My husband died at Ladysmith," another said. "I had to drag through the courts just to get his pension."

“My husband’s in gaol, though he’s done no wrong!” a third woman swore. “If it was left to society, I’d starve!”

“You have unleashed the tigers, you see, Watson,” said Holmes with a chuckle. Quietly he slipped his card to the last speaker. “Visit me, if you like,” he told her. “Perhaps I can help you find some justice in the world, masculine though it be.” She looked up at him, impressed in spite of herself. “Come, Watson—I believe we’ve troubled these good advocates enough for the day.”

“Did you find what you came for, though?” I asked in some puzzlement.

“No and yes,” Holmes answered enigmatically. His glance swept the room again and alit on Andrew. “As a matter of fact, I would very much like to have a word with young Master Burgin, if it would not impose.”

I sneezed, and frowned. “May I be present for it?”

“Of course,” said Holmes graciously, as if it were his house we stood in, and not mine.

## **Watson**

Manders leaned in to the ear of the strapping, smiling lad who lived upstairs. He cast us a curious glance, then nodded. The two led us slowly among the knots of quick-fingered workers, through a locked door, and into the Manders’ tiny sitting-room.

“I’ve locked that door this time, you see,” Manders remarked. “Horse fled, naturally.”

We found seats on various armchairs and ottomans. Andrew Burgin stood, looking from one face to another. “I know who you are, Mr. Holmes,” he said. “I’ve very much enjoyed your *Strand* stories as well, Dr. Watson.”

I bowed and asked lightly, “As much as you enjoy the ones about Raffles?”

“It’s hard to speak objectively,” Andrew replied, still smiling, “since the latter pay my school fees. I’m happy to be of service to you if I can, sirs, though, frankly, I’m not sure why you’re questioning us.”

“You’re not under any obligation to speak to them,” Manders put in hurriedly. “They’re not the police.”

“I understand, Unc,” said Andrew.

“Is Mr. Manders your uncle?” Holmes broached.

“Only metaphorically, sir,” Andrew answered. “My mother is Mrs. Manders’ close friend. My sister took up calling them Aunt and Uncle in play, and it’s got to be a habit.”

“How long have your families been allied?”

Andrew’s brow creased. “About a year? Fourteen months, I guess.”

“You’re aware of Mr. Manders’ past, clearly.”

“My mother doesn’t believe in keeping secrets from us,” said Andrew stoutly. “I know the Raffles things were stolen from here a few weeks ago, as well.”

“Had you seen the items before then?”

“I showed them to him once, when he read the stories,” Manders put in.

Holmes gazed steadily at young Burgin. “Have you any idea who might have taken them – any at all?”

“Believe me, I wish I had,” said Andrew earnestly.

“Has anyone ever spoken to you about the items, or asked you questions about Mr. Manders?”

“Only my schoolmates, as you heard, talking about the published bits. Just chat, sir.”

“You’ve achieved a certain notoriety in the school, then, as the author’s friend?”

Andrew looked disturbed by this. “Perhaps a little, sir. I’m also near the top of my class. It’s not a large school.”

“I understand,” said Holmes. I thought he had run through everything to hand, but he suddenly added, “May I ask when you last saw your father?”

A pause while Andrew shook his head. “Becky was very little. It must’ve been at least three years ago, sir. And he’d often been away for long periods before that.”

“You’ve heard nothing from him since then?”

“He writes now and again. Some years he remembers my birthday.” The boy looked doubtful. “You don’t think he’s somehow involved with this – ?”

Holmes smiled courteously. “I find it useful to gain as full a picture as possible. Thank you very much for your time, Master Burgin, Mr. Manders. Don’t let me keep you any longer from the project of the day.”

“You didn’t ask a thing about the women and Friday nights,” I noted as soon as Holmes and I were well out of earshot of the house and its crowd of suffragists.

“I noticed you putting your shoe alongside Mrs. Burgin’s.”

“While putting my foot in it about votes for women!”

“Presumably you observed, as I did, that her feet are much too large, and Mrs. Manders’ too small, to match the print I measured with your shoelace. Although Mr. Manders’ illness last night would very neatly confine his wife at home, she cannot be the culprit.”

“I am just as glad,” I said. “The women are doubtless extreme in that house, but it is hard to imagine them larcenous. What’s next, then?”

“I shall smoke a pipe or two on this case, certainly,” said Holmes meditatively. “If the thief holds to his pattern, no new data will arrive until next Friday at the earliest. In the

meantime, I have several other questions calling for my urgent attention.”

**Watson cont.**

I thus heard no more of Manders or Farnsworth until the following Friday, when Holmes made a rare appearance at my home just as we rose from table. “What do you say to staking out an aristocratic house tonight?” he proposed.

“The Raffles relics again?”

“Just so. Little of note has come to light this week, but the more I re-examine the facts, the more convinced I am that the thief will try for one of the cribs in the Farnsworth files some Friday. Of those, the Earl of Salmine is the biggest fish, so we will leave Mssrs. Rust and Scanlon to Inspector Hopkins’ men and play at sentry-go ourselves on Belgrave Square.”

“Us alone, or shall we have the inspector’s men as well?”

“None in uniform,” said Holmes mysteriously, “but if you will look outside your door, you’ll find our other conspirator.”

It was Harry Manders, leaning on his eternal cane. “I realise I’m ill-suited to the game, even with the adage about setting a thief,” he commented modestly. “But I’ve an interest in this, after all, and I was a soldier not so long ago.”

“Count me quite content with it, sir,” I said genuinely. “If you’ll take a seat in the parlour for just a moment, I shall be prepared to depart.”

“This Manders has turned out to be really a solid chap,” I commented to Holmes as I dressed in dark evening clothes. “Out from under the thumb of that Raffles rascal, you know. Supporting the fatherless Burgins and his wife’s ambitions.”

“As you say,” Holmes answered noncommittally, fingering his loaded hunting crop.

## **Manders**

Lord Salmine had an expensive house in Belgrave Square, a lion-like head of reddish-brown hair, and a face so familiar I could hardly believe it when he showed me no recognition at all.

“Surely we’ve met before, your lordship?” I nudged. “I was the great friend of A.J. Raffles, the famous cricketer.”

“Don’t follow cricket,” said Lord Salmine dismissively. “Don’t know you, either. Servants will bolt the doors front and rear. Most likely to come in through an upper-storey window, you said? This way, then.”

He led us up a beautiful marble stair that I had plenty of time to admire. This was one of my better days, but I was still slower than Mr. Holmes and Dr. Watson despite their grey hairs. I peeped into rooms, spotting at every turn

gewgaws that might have gone straight into the pockets of A.J. Raffles, the famous cricketer.

“Handsome, aren’t they?” the earl was saying as I caught up with him outside an ornamented door. “Ceramic inlay, Chinese-style. Cost a fortune. Scoundrel won’t be thieving those, at any rate! Dressing-room’s through here.” The earl and his lady dwelt in chambers on either side of a corridor whose end window faced the rear of the property. In either direction, a large and commodious dressing room led beyond into a snug, beautifully appointed bedroom. The lady’s was on the left facing the window, the earl’s on the right.

Holmes sniffed through every space. “You’ve secreted away her ladyship’s jewels, I hope?”

“As you suggested. Well-hid, and not in the safe,” Lord Salmine replied.

“A pair of gold cufflinks on your dressing-table?”

“Leave ‘em,” said the nobleman indifferently. “Bit of bait can’t hurt, what? I see you’re looking at Bobbie.”

With the first smile I’d seen on him, he scooped up a framed photograph of a stocky, white-blond boy in rugby pads. “Just thirteen, and already coveted for the school team,” he cooed.

He seemed to await a response. “A good-looking lad,” Dr. Watson agreed.

“Ah, well, takes after his mother, thank God,” said the earl, setting down the photograph reverently.

Holmes gave us our orders. “Watson, you take her ladyship’s bedroom and you, my lord, your own. Mr. Manders, if you will hover near the window in his lordship’s dressing room, I will plant myself in the doorway of her ladyship’s and keep one eye each on its window and the corridor. Find a seat in reach of a light switch. If you hear any suspicious noise from outside, whisper first, then turn on your light and raise the alarm. Lights out now, and every man awake and alert!”

I thus settled in for a long, dark wait on a satin-covered chair beside the dressing-table lamp. I almost wished we could have the windows open; it was a fine evening with a breeze anticipating summer. The soft chime of Big Ben echoed from the distance, marking eleven o’clock.

Odd it may seem that I had changed shifts again to join this little party. Only a few years before I would have been helping to make off with those gold cufflinks, not guarding them. But I’d quickly wearied of Sherlock Holmes’ condescending attitude towards me and his suspicious one towards my family. I could think of nothing of benefit except to prove the culprit a stranger or passing acquaintance. And then I would have Raffles’ things back.

I sighed and turned to memories as the faraway clock told of the quarter-hour, the half-hour, the three-quarter-hour.

In the days when Raffles and I were the toast and scourge of bejewelled society, I would have laughed in the face of a man who told me how attached I'd be to a cane, a bottle, an embroidered case. Now I thought not only of the palmy times round Albany, when Raffles had filched the lord's robes, but the cozy ones in our little Ham Common house. That day he'd made me secure a tour of Scotland Yard's Black Museum, and my nerves as we stood chatting with the guide about his collection! — not to mention my much greater terror when Raffles disappeared and kept me waiting till all hours to boast of his relics' recapture.

I never knew one for sheer pluck like Raffles. Perhaps Gwen. But less dangerously. I thought of little Becky clambering into my lap and diagnosing me with missing my friend. Woman's intuition though the woman be pint-sized. Sitting in that elegant chamber, the faintest ray of moonlight catching on those gold cufflinks, I ached for Raffles with every bone in my body, whole or broken. If only it were his signal I awaited. If only it were he hooking the steel grip over the windowsill. If only it were he oh-so-carefully sliding a blade through the top of the windowsash, and ever-so-softly turning the latch.

Then I remembered myself and forgot Holmes' injunction about whispering first. When I slammed on the electric lamp, a small, slim boy froze before me, his fingers around Lord Salmine's bait. "Why, I know you!" I burst out.

"Yes, sir!" the lad gasped. "Burgin's schoolmate!"

He was that pal of Andrew's who'd piped up about more Raffles stories Saturday last. I'd scarcely glanced at him then. His wide, frightened eyes were an extraordinary colour, almost golden, beneath a mop of coppery hair. "You must be the generally clever Smith," I realised.

## **Watson**

The doze into which I'd fallen made me leap all the more into panic when the light suddenly flicked on across the corridor. "Dressing room! His lordship's!" I bellowed unnecessarily.

Holmes and I crowded in. "Well done Manders!" I exclaimed as we gazed upon the face of the burglar at bay. It was, as Holmes had predicted, an astonishingly young face. I tumbled past him and got a firm hand on the lad's shoulder.

His face creased in anger. "Finlay Smith is the name they gave me when they stole away my right one!" he shrilled, seizing the framed photograph on the dressing-table. "I should be this – but my mother is not Lady Salmine. So he

cast me off – never even seen me –” He dashed the photograph to the floor like a petulant infant.

Lord Salmine stumbled through the opposite door, rubbing his eyes. “You’ve caught the blackguard?” he asked through a mighty yawn.

“We have,” said Holmes calmly, “and he claims to be your son.”

“Nonsense, Bobbie’s at school,” Lord Salmine answered at once. Then he cleared his eyes enough to clap them on the boy. “Good Lord,” he faltered. “Finlay?”

The lad’s chest heaved. “Hello, Father,” he said softly.

“How,” the earl stammered, “how have you come to this? How have you – ?”

“Just to know you, Father,” Finlay Smith answered, bursting into sobs. “I’ve all the jewels with me – you can return them – I had only to find out who you were –”

The child reached for its father, would fall upon his breast. Wonderingly the earl stretched out his hands, stepping towards us.

Then the boy dodged past him and bounded fleet-footed into the bedroom.

## **Manders**

A giant hand of fate, the gravitational pull of the sun, explosions of joy in my breast propelled me in one giant

spring over the threshold after Finlay Smith. I spun round and locked the door neatly in the face of Sherlock Holmes.

I threw myself at the window and slammed it open. "Can you get away? Not this side, they'll expect it. Over the roof?"

Outside the door, bangs and bellowing and imprecations involving my name and the earl ordering no one to harm his ceramic. Pulling a small knapsack more securely onto his shoulders, the boy glanced out the window at the tiles above. "I can."

"Brilliant lad," I whispered fervently. I slipped into his palm some few pounds, all the pocket money to hand. "Run," I told him, "as far and as fast as you can. Hold off fencing the booty as long as possible. When immediate danger's past, write me care of my publisher, and mind your postmarks." Impulsively I drew him close and pressed my lips to his forehead. "It's Raffles' son you should have been," I said. "Now off you go."

Out the window climbed Finlay Smith, with my hands to boost him onto the tiles. Now it was down to speed. The shouts next door had ceased, meaning Holmes had almost certainly dashed down the stairs and round the house to the very window I stood at. Would he, at his age, outrace at ground level the strong young man scrabbling over the roof, sliding down a drainpipe, running for his life, never looking

back? “Oh, A.J.,” I found myself chanting, “A.J., A.J. and all your gods, protect him!”

I slumped breathless on Lord Salmine’s bed. For the first time, I spared a thought for myself. I have committed a crime, I considered, with a hot mix of emotions, satisfaction uppermost. Then a pang for Gwen, the children, the newspaper, and this translated into a shooting agony in my wounded leg.

While I moaned and prayed, no sound from next door. Eventually, they knocked.

## **Watson**

As Holmes and I leaned panting against its ornamental frame, Bunny Manders unlocked the bedroom door. Behind him, the room was empty, the night breeze stirring the curtains.

“Gone,” said Holmes hoarsely. “Constables at the corners, but I doubt they’ll spot him. As you planned, Mr. Manders.”

“I planned nothing!” Manders protested like driven snow. “I thought you were behind me! He knocked me down, locked the door and went pop out the window. I’ve only just picked myself up!”

Indeed his wound seemed to be troubling him afresh as he limped to the dressing-room window and unhooked the

rope ladder. "Suppose this is all I'll see of Raffles' things," he murmured.

At that moment, Big Ben rang out midnight. As if in chorus, bells across the city took up the refrain, chime after chime after chime. "The treaty is official," said I. "The war is over."

## **Manders**

"Clean away, the little bastard!" Lord Salmine exclaimed, ignoring the bells, "and with my cufflinks!" He pointed angrily to his now-empty dressing table. Then he turned his rage-twisted face in my direction. "Here's the con who let him go!"

Raffles' voice echoed in my mind. "*Have you got the pluck?*" Wide-eyed, I placidly offered my wrists. "Care to arrest me?"

"Unfortunately English law cannot try a man for corrupting the youth," spat Sherlock Holmes.

"Shan't drain my draught of hemlock just yet," I replied. "I believe our business is completed, then, and I'll be home to my bed."

Stonily Holmes stood aside to let me limp past. "If you will take a word of advice, Mr. Manders —"

I turned to him, smiling. "Yes?"

"— in future, keep out of my gaze."

*I have been threatened by Sherlock Holmes,* I thought as I stepped out of the house and raised my hand for a cab before remembering I'd no pocket money. Raffles himself had never been paid such a compliment. I tucked the telescoping cane securely under my arm and began my long stroll home.

## **Watson**

The earl gazed tiredly about the room. "Think he'll return to the school? That headmaster's supposed to keep him on a chain."

"We must send there at once, your lordship, if you have a man to spare," Holmes said grimly. "Doubtless we'll hear that Smith was caught sneaking out after hours a week ago."

"To think of him breaking into all those places like a common thief!" Lord Salmine groaned.

"Like a most uncommon thief, I would say," said Holmes coldly. "You seemed willing to make up with him despite it all."

"That's when I thought he was contrite and the whole thing could be excused as a schoolboy prank!" the earl protested. "Good lord," he then added. "I hope these other johnnies don't expect me to cover their losses!"

"I think it's quite clear you never set eyes on the boy until tonight," said Holmes.

“No more did I,” the earl declared, “and I should’ve thrown his slattern of a mother out in the streets the second she revealed her family state.”

“His mother is dead, then?” Holmes queried.

“Years ago.”

“He has other friends? The mother’s family?”

“All gone in that famine unpleasantness, last I heard. He spent his holidays at the school.”

“I assume you directed his school fees through Theodore Farnsworth’s office.”

“You’d think he’d be grateful I’ve paid his room and board all this time. They never are, are they?” Lord Salmine stared moodily out the window. “Bobbie looks so much like his mother,” he muttered under his breath.

“Do you suppose Smith’s done with burglary, now he’s had his little revenge?” I asked Holmes as we reluctantly left Belgrave Square.

“One can but hope,” said Holmes. “If not, I fear it will fall to some successor of mine to apprehend him, if anyone does.”

“Oh, come now,” said I. “Who could succeed you?”

## **Manders**

This was one of the good dreams.

I stood with Finlay Smith in Raffles' Albany rooms, before the great chest where his relics had once rested in Scotland Yard. The end opened, and from it slid Raffles himself, exquisite as in the best old days, every black curl in place. He clasped my hands. "Bunny, dear Bunny, best of friends," he greeted me, "you've triumphed once again. Well played, my rabbit!"

For one long, sweet moment, he held me in his arms.

Then he offered a snowy-gloved hand to Finlay Smith. "Victory," he cried, "or Wormwood Scrubs!"

"Victory or Wormwood Scrubs!" echoed Finlay Smith in his piping voice. He gave me a wink with one of his beautiful golden eyes.

And the two of them ran, hand-in-hand and jubilant, towards the horizon.

THE  
Adventures  
OF

GENERALLY CLEVER

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