

August, 1914

I have written these words with the intention they be read in a hundred years' time. Holmes assures me that fifty years would be plenty, but I tend towards caution in this matter, even though Holmes is almost always right. All around me the world is changing. As the men go abroad, more women take their places in factories and shops and things we thought yesterday were scandalous are today a fact of life.

So, at long last, let me share with the world the untold story of my great friend, Sherlock Holmes, who was, in truth, a woman.

I met Miss Charlotte Holmes in 1881, as I described in 'A Study in Scarlet'. Our mutual acquaintance, Stamford, allowed her use of the equipment at St. Bartholomew's for her studies of Chemistry and Biology, in which she was well trained. Her true calling was detective work, but she was forced to work via post, and longed to work great cases she had no way of accessing. Occasionally, she consulted in her Montague Street flat, but no police officer would ever let her near the scene of a crime. Miss Holmes required an escort, and she asked if I would be hers.

It was the height of impropriety, pretending to be a distant cousin and escorting a lady to gruesome murders, let alone living in the same flat! However, the deception reminded me of the cunning I required in Afghanistan. I was amazed at her talents and when I discussed my situation with my trusted old schoolmate Doyle, he was so delighted with Miss Holmes's exploits he extolled me to write them down.

Many have written to us over the years pointing out errors, or correctly surmising facts were changed to protect people still living, but who would have suspected the biggest change: Making Holmes a man! It was Doyle who came up with the name, ridiculous, but similar enough to Charlotte for me to remember. Doyle and I carefully removed any hint of her gender from what became 'A Study in Scarlet' and every story that followed after.

In 1887 Miss Holmes met Irene Adler. What I wrote in 'Scandal in Bohemia' is absolutely true: Irene Adler was always *the woman* to Holmes. However where readers perhaps saw grudging admiration or attraction, Charlotte Holmes saw freedom. Charlotte had dabbled with costumes, but Irene's flawless disguise as a young man inspired the possibility of a living, breathing Sherlock, and from that point on, I retired as escort, serving solely as assistant and fictionalized biographer.

Not every noteworthy case could be written about. Doyle and I struggled with adventures that were clever, but inexorably linked to Miss Holmes's gender, and we erred on the side of caution when it came to keeping any hint of Charlotte out of the adventures of Sherlock. Finally, I can relate the first such untold tale. Perhaps others may follow.

In 'A Case of Identity', I mentioned the case of Mrs. Etherege, a story Doyle and I struggled with before giving up entirely. So I present to you now;

The Adventure of the Missing Corpse

It was 1887, a few months after Irene Adler. Charlotte had nearly perfected her disguise as Sherlock, and having taken a handful of cases as 'The Great Detective' now preferred to spend even her time at Baker Street in his garb, claiming corsetry impeded her ability to think, and cut her hair into a man's style. Mrs. Hudson had tutted about impropriety all of once before she realized that without attending Charlotte in the morning she had much more time for other tasks.

Charlotte and I ate breakfast together, splitting the morning papers between us. Charlotte was pleased, as news of a murder was splashed across the front of every paper.

"A murderess, Watson!" she exclaimed as she scanned each article in turn. "It's a shame I haven't been called. There are so few murderesses. I imagine I could learn quite a lot from her." She devoured each article more voraciously than her breakfast. The murderess had been caught, her bloody dress discovered, and a witness had been found who had seen her drag the body away. In short, a simple case, and not one the Met would require our assistance upon.

So it was a surprise when Mrs. Hudson came to the landing to tell us that Inspector Barton of Scotland Yard was here to ask for assistance on the very case! Charlotte adjusted her posture and manners immediately for Barton, as he only knew of Holmes, the man, and by the time Mrs. Hudson showed Barton up the stairs, Doctor John Watson and Mr. Sherlock Holmes were patiently awaiting him.

“Inspector Barton.” Holmes’s alto voice dropped a touch lower for the deception. “Please help yourself to breakfast.”

Inspector Barton remained standing. “I’m afraid I haven’t the time. Perhaps you’ve read of the case in the paper?”

“The Etherege murder?” Holmes asked. “It seemed rather conclusive. What help do you require?”

“We cannot find the body,” Barton explained, “and Mrs. Etherege refuses to admit her guilt.”

Sherlock sat up straighter and indicated the paper in his hand. “The papers all say there was a witness to the disposal.”

“There was a witness,” Barton confirmed, “who saw Mrs. Etherege dragging a rolled carpet large enough to contain a body towards the river a short distance away. We found the carpet and Mrs. Etherege’s bloody clothes along the river, but no body.”

Sherlock frowned. “Mrs. Etherege transported her husband’s body by herself?”

“Her husband was a very slight man, by all accounts,” Barton rushed to add.

Sherlock pushed to his feet. “It is entirely possible that Mr. Etherege has just been lost to the river and there is nothing to be done. Still, I would like to see for myself the scene of the crime.”

“The scene of the crime?” Barton asked. “Surely just the riverbank where we found...”

“It is impossible to properly understand and appreciate a concerto from the last few stanzas,” Sherlock said. “Please trust my methods and trust I will do my best for you.” Sherlock gathered his things and headed to the door. “Please give Watson the address and we shall begin immediately.”

The Etherege house was once a property of good size and repair, but even I could see the Ethereges had suffered in the current generation. The other homes along the street were quite neat, in contrast, far enough away to provide privacy and decent sized gardens, but close enough that we could hear the sound of children playing in the neighbourhood and a boy calling for his dog.

From the front door to the street was a stone-paved walk. Along either side were muddy patches still not dried from the recent rains, to which Barton drew our attention.

“Here you can see two very clear imprints of a woman’s boot,” he pointed out. “They match the boots we collected at the riverbank precisely, and the boots have this exact mud on them.” Barton seemed very proud of his work.

Sherlock knelt to observe more closely. They were extremely clear impressions; no details were obscured, and seemed a bit heavy on the toes. “I wonder, Watson,” Sherlock mused quietly, as he stood to move inside, “why a woman struggling with a body in a rug would step off a stone path to leave such perfect impressions, one of each boot, mind you, in slippery mud?”

The murder scene was easy enough to determine—great splashes of blood decorated the walls and some of the floor where the carpet had not covered. The murder weapon, a fireplace poker, laid where it had been dropped.

“Mr. Etherege had an unfortunate gambling habit,” Barton pointed out sadly. “He’d inherited a good living, but squandered it all. The staff was sent away, the jewellery was sold. I suspect Mrs. Etherege could no longer take the indignity and killed him to preserve the rest of the money.” Sherlock ignored Barton to examine the fireplace poker very closely. After a few moments he stood quickly and looked towards the stairs. “I will need to see the bedroom, and after that the bloody clothing, but I believe I can find your body.” He nodded, confident, though to me it seemed an impossible task. “The bedroom is this way?”

Sherlock made his way up the stairs and immediately threw open the dresser and wardrobe.

“What on earth can this have to do with the case?” Barton asked, alarmed, as Sherlock rifled through clothing.

“A great deal. Please go and arrange transportation so I can see the evidence found on the riverbank as soon as I am done here. I won’t be long.” Sherlock looked pointedly at the door and Barton went away with a shrug as Sherlock returned to his perusal of the Ethereges’s clothes.

“As I suspected, all of Mrs. Etherege’s dresses button at the front so she could get into them without help. Mended and taken in multiple times. She’s lost weight due to stress.” Sherlock stacked all of the garments in a neat pile. “All of

their clothing is a number of seasons old, except for this.” He proffered one of Mr. Etherege’s shirts and looked at me expectantly.

I did my best, examining the garment, but I certainly didn’t have the expertise to say much. It looked the same as any other white shirt. “The fabric seems nicer than the others. Less worn,” I said, comparing it to the other shirts in Mr. Etherege’s pile and then offering it back.

“It’s brand new. Machines making this type of stitch were patented only four months ago and only two London tailors have them in service. Neither are nearby. It’s very expensive.” Sherlock looked at me meaningfully, raising an eyebrow. “I believe it was a gift.” He set the shirt back down and perused the bottles in the room. I recognised a number of women’s tonics and sleeping aids immediately along with the mostly empty perfumes.

“A mistress?” I asked. “Surely that only gives more of a motive to Mrs. Etherege?”

“Perhaps,” Sherlock said vaguely, and headed downstairs again to meet Barton.

Mrs. Etherege’s bloody clothes were on a table in a room when we arrived at the station. Sherlock went immediately to the pile and began sorting through it. “This dress has not been taken in,” he remarked. “Watson, I’ll need a dressmaker’s form.”

I checked my watch. It was late. “The shops will all be closed. We’ll have to wait for the morning,” I said with a frown.

Sherlock sighed. "There's nothing else for it then." He turned to Barton. "Give me a few hours with the evidence and my thoughts and I will have an answer for you. I shall come find you when we have finished," he said, ushering Barton out of the room. Once we were alone, Sherlock lifted up the bodice of the bloodstained dress. "Turn your head please, Watson," he said "and watch the door."

I did as Sherlock asked, suspecting what might be happening, and resolutely faced away. Fabric rustled behind me.

"As I suspected. Watson, what do you think?"

I turned. Charlotte had fitted herself into Mrs. Etherege's blood-covered dress. I must have looked horrified, because she quickly explained her rationale.

"Observe, Watson," she said, pointing at a splash of blood running from her right hip to the left side of her ribs. "An arterial spray should be in a continuous line, however, you will find nearly every blood spatter has a break across where the top and bottom of the dress join, and a few are broken across the buttons."

I stepped closer to look. In one case a bloody button was completely surrounded by pristine white fabric, which should have been impossible, if the dress had been worn correctly at the time of the murder. "Mrs. Etherege should know how to put on her own dress. She doesn't have a maid."

Charlotte smiled and nodded at my conclusion. "What's more, the skirt was attached completely wrong. Lining up the hooks and eyes oneself can be very difficult without practice, and especially when the wearer is of the wrong



proportions. This dress was Mrs. Etherege's largest, but at the time of the murder it was being worn by someone with an untrained waist. The bottom few buttons of the blouse were left undone."

"So Mrs. Etherege was not wearing the dress that night!" I clarified. "Who was?"

In reply, Charlotte offered out one of Mrs. Etherege's boots. "Try that on."

I hesitated, but at Charlotte's pointed look, I did as she asked, removing my own boot to force my foot into Mrs. Etherege's, which was very narrow at the toes compared to mine. "It doesn't fit," I explained. "My toes curl under."

"If you had to walk in them, what impressions would you leave?"

"I'd walk gingerly," I admitted. "It feels as if my toes might split the sole. The toe would probably leave a deeper impression than the heel."

Charlotte nodded. "As we saw at the crime scene. But why would someone walk in the mud when there was a perfectly good path to walk on instead?" She smiled. "I believe someone has been planting clues in an attempt to confuse us, Watson. Someone with a waist which has never been corseted and a wide foot."

"So Mr. Etherege's body—" I started.

"Is likely alive and well in the home of his wealthy mistress."

"And all the blood?" I asked with some alarm, indicating Charlotte's bloody dress.

"There were dog hairs on the fire iron," Charlotte explained. "I believe a boy in the neighbourhood is missing a mastiff." Charlotte picked up Sherlock's

clothing. "Watch the door, Watson. We should tell Barton before they attempt to escape to the continent."

Mr. Etherege was indeed found alive and well in the home of his mistress, which Sherlock located from its proximity to the upscale tailor who had made Mr. Etherege's very nice shirt. Barton arrested him immediately, and extracted the whole story:

Mrs. Etherege had been helped to sleep by her usual laudanum. Mr. Etherege then used the same laudanum in some meat scraps to drug the dog. He dressed, as best as he could, in his wife's clothes, beat the dog to death with the fire poker and then went out in his wife's clothes and boots to dump the dog's body in the river, being careful to tread in the mud on the way. Once at the river he changed into his own clothes, leaving the damning evidence to be found, and went to meet his mistress, confident he'd gotten away with it when the papers announced his wife's arrest.

Barton thanked Sherlock heartily, and Mrs. Etheredge promised any reward we might want. Sherlock turned aside their thanks and we returned to Baker Street, though unfortunately both Sherlock and Charlotte were out of sorts the rest of the week as they had never met their murderess.