

## Return of Sherlock Holmes---Adventure of the Missing Three-Quarter

Being a Story Teaching that Careful and Skillful Investigation Will Sometimes Prove that What Looks Like the Blackest of Crimes May Be an Entirely Innocent Incident

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XI.



WERE fairly accustomed to receive weird telegrams at Baker street, but I have a particular recollection of one which reached us on a gloomy February morning, some seven or eight years ago, and gave Mr. Sherlock Holmes a puzzled quarter of an hour. It was addressed to him, and ran thus:

Please await me. Terrible misfortune. Right wing three-quarter missing, indispensable tomorrow. OVERTON.

"Strand postmark and dispatched ten-thirty-six," said Holmes, reading it over and over. "Mr. Overton was evidently considerably excited when he sent it, and somewhat incoherent in consequence. Well, well, he will be here, I daresay, by the time I have looked through the Times, and then we shall know all about it. Even the most insignificant problem would be welcome in these stagnant days."

Things had indeed been very slow with us, and I had learned to dread such periods of inaction, for I knew by experience that my companion's brain was so abnormally active that it was dangerous to leave it without material upon which to work. For years I had gradually weaned him from that drug mania which had threatened once to check his remarkable career. Now I knew that under ordinary conditions he no longer craved for this artificial stimulus, but I was well aware that the fiend was not dead, but sleeping, and I have known that the sleep was a light one and the waking near when in periods of idleness I have seen the drawn look upon Holmes' ascetic face and the brooding of his deep-set and inscrutable eyes. Therefore I blessed this Mr. Overton, whoever he might be, since he had come with his enigmatic message to break that dangerous calm which brought more peril to my friend than all the storms of his tempestuous life.

As we had expected, the telegram was soon followed by its sender, and the card of Mr. Cyril Overton, Trinity college, Cambridge, announced the arrival of an enormous young man, sixteen stone of solid bone and muscle, who spanned the doorway with his broad shoulders and looked from one of us to the other with a comely face, which was haggard with anxiety.

"Mr. Sherlock Holmes?" My companion bowed. "I've been down to Scotland Yard, Mr. Holmes. I saw Inspector Stanley Hopkins. He advised me to come to you. He said the case, so far as he could see, was more in your line than in that of the regular police."

"Pray sit down and tell me what is the matter."

"It's awful, Mr. Holmes—simply awful! Godfrey Staunton—you've heard of him, of course? He's simply the hinge that the whole team turns on. I'd rather spare two from the pack and have Godfrey for my three-quarter line. Whether its passing or tackling, or dribbling, there's no one to touch him, and then, he's got the head, and can hold us all together. What am I to do? That's what I ask you, Mr. Holmes. There's Moorehouse, first reserve, but he is trained as a half, and he always edges right into the scrum instead of keeping out on the touchline. He's a fine place kick, it's true, but then he has no judgment, and he can't sprint for nuts. Why, Morton or Johnson, the Oxford fliers, could round him. Stevenson is fast enough, but he couldn't drop from the twenty-five line, and a three-quarter who can't either punt or drop isn't worth a place for pace alone. No, Mr. Holmes, we are done unless you can help me find Godfrey Staunton."

My friend had listened with amused surprise to this long speech, which was poured forth with extraordinary vigor and earnestness, every point being driven home by the slapping of a brawny hand upon the speaker's knee. When our visitor was silent Holmes stretched out his hand and took down letter "S" of his commonplace book. For once he dug in vain into that mine of varied information.

"There is Arthur H. Staunton, the rising young forger," said he. "and there was Henry Staunton, whom I helped to hang, but Godfrey Staunton is a new name to me."

"It was our visitor's turn to look surprised. "Why, Mr. Holmes, I thought you knew things," said he. "I suppose, then, if you have never heard of Godfrey Staunton, you don't know Cyril Overton, either?"

Holmes shook his head good humoredly. "Great Scott!" cried the athlete. "Why, I was first reserve for England against Wales, and I've skipped the varsity all this year. But that's nothing! I didn't think there was a soul in England who didn't know Godfrey Staunton, the crack three-quarter, Cambridge, Blackheath and five Internationals. Good Lord, Mr. Holmes, where have you lived?"

Holmes laughed at the young giant's naive astonishment. "You live in a different world from me, Mr. Overton—a sweeter and healthier one. My ramifications stretch out into many sections of society, but never, I am happy to say, into amateur sport, which is the best and soundest thing in England. However, your unexpected visit this morning shows me that even in that world of fresh air and fair play there may be work for me to do. So now, my good sir, I beg you to sit down and tell me, slowly and quietly, exactly what it is that occurred, and how you desire that I should help you."

Young Overton's face assumed the bothered look of the man who is more accustomed to using his muscles than his wits, but by degrees, with many repetitions and obscurities which I may omit from his narrative, he laid his strange story before us.

"It's this way, Mr. Holmes. As I have said, I am the skipper of the Buzzer team of Cambridge varsity and Godfrey Staunton is my best man. Tomorrow we play Oxford. Yesterday we all came up, and we settled at Bentley's private hotel. At 10 o'clock I went around and saw that all the fellows had gone to roost, for I believe in strict training and plenty of sleep to keep a team fit. I had a word or two with Godfrey before he turned in. He seemed to me to be pale and bothered. I asked him what was the matter. He said he was all right—just a touch of headache. I bade him good night and left him. Half an hour later the porters tell me that a cough looking man with a beard called with a note for Godfrey. He had not gone to bed, and the note was taken to his room. Godfrey read it and fell back in a chair as if he had been pole-axed. The porter was so scared that he was going to fetch me, but Godfrey stopped him, had a drink of water and pulled himself together. Then he went downstairs, said a few words to the man who was waiting in the hall, and the two of them went out together. The last that the porter saw of them they were almost running down the street in the direction of the Strand. This morning Godfrey's room was empty, his bed had never been slept in, and his things were all just as I had seen them the night before. He had gone off at a moment's notice with this stranger, and no word has come from him since. I don't believe he will ever come back. He was a sportsman, was Godfrey, down to his marrow, and he wouldn't have stopped his training and let in his skipper if it were not for

some cause that was too strong for him. No, I feel as if he were gone for good and we should never see him again."

Sherlock Holmes listened with the deepest attention to this singular narrative.

"What did you do?" he asked. "I wired to Cambridge to learn if anything had been heard of him there. I have had an answer. No one has seen him."

"Could he have got back to Cambridge?" "Yes, there is a late train—11.15."

"But, so far as you can ascertain, he did not take it?" "No, he has not been seen."

"What did you do next?" "I wired to Lord Mount-James."

"Why to Lord Mount-James?" "Godfrey is an orphan and Lord Mount-James is his nearest relative—his uncle, I believe."

"Indeed. This throws new light upon the matter. Lord Mount-James is one of the richest men in England."

"So I've heard Godfrey say."

"And your friend was closely related?" "Yes, he was his heir, and the old boy is nearly 80—crum full of gout, too. They say he could chalk his billiard cue with his knuckles. He never allowed Godfrey a shilling in his life, for he is an absolute miser, but it will all come to him right enough."

"Have you heard from Lord Mount-James?" "No."

"What motive could your friend have in going to Lord Mount-James?" "Well, something was worrying him the night before, and if it was to do with money it is possible that he would make for his nearest relative, who had so much of it, though from all I have heard he would not have much chance of getting it. Godfrey was not fond of the old man. He would not go if he could help it."

"Well, we can soon determine that. If your friend was going to his relative, Lord Mount-James, you would have then to explain the visit of this rough looking fellow at so late an hour and the agitation that was caused by his coming."

Cyril Overton pressed his hands to his head. "I can make nothing out of it," said he.

"Well, well, I have a clear day, and I should be happy to look into the matter," said Holmes. "I should strongly recommend you to make your preparations for your match without reference to this young gentleman. It must, as you say, have been an overpowering necessity which tore him away in such a fashion, and the same necessity is likely to hold him away. Let us step round together to the hotel and see if the porter can throw any fresh light upon the matter."

Sherlock Holmes was a past master in the art of putting a humble witness at his ease, and very soon, in the privacy of Godfrey Staunton's abandoned room, he had extracted all that the porter had to tell. The visitor of the night before was not a gentleman, neither was he a workingman. He was simply what the porter described as a "medium looking chap," a man of 50, beard grizzled, pale face, quietly dressed. He seemed himself to be agitated. The porter had observed his hand trembling when he had held out the note. Godfrey Staunton had crammed the note into his pocket. Staunton had not shaken hands with the man in the hall. They had exchanged a few sentences of which the porter had only distinguished the one word, "time." Then they had hurried off in the manner described. It was just half-past 10 by the hall clock.

"Let me see," said Holmes, seating himself on Staunton's bed. "You are the day porter, are you not?"

"Yes, sir; I go off duty at 11."

"The night porter saw nothing, I suppose?" "No, sir; one theater party came in late. No one else."

"Were you on duty all day yesterday?" "Yes, sir."

"Did you take any messages to Mr. Staunton?" "Yes, sir; one telegram."

"Ah! that's interesting. What o'clock was that?" "About 6."

"Where was Mr. Staunton when he received it?" "Here in his room."

"Were you present when he opened it?" "Yes, sir; I waited to see if there was an answer."

"Well, was there?" "Yes, sir; he wrote an answer."

"Did you take it?" "No, he took it himself."

"But he wrote it in your presence?" "Yes, sir. I was standing by the door and he with his back turned at that table. When he had written it, he said: 'All right, porter, I will take this myself.'"

"What did he write it with?" "A pen, sir."

"Was the telegraphic form one of these on the table?" "Yes, sir; it was the top one."

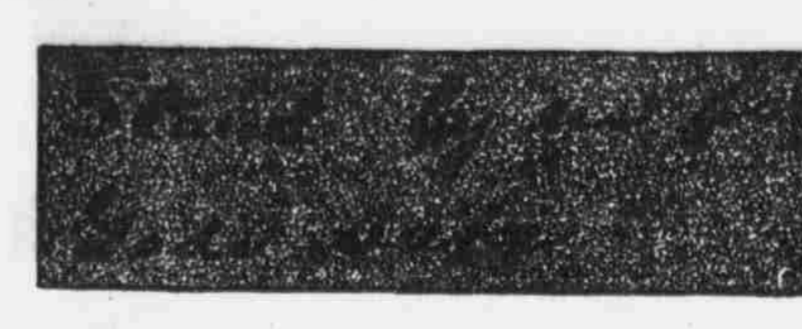
Holmes rose. Taking the forms, he carried them over to the window and carefully examined that which was uppermost.

"It is a pity he did not write in pencil," said he, throwing them down again, with a shrug of disappointment. "As you have no doubt frequently observed, Watson, the impression usually goes through a fact which has dissolved many a happy marriage. However, I can find no trace here. I rejoice, however, to perceive that he wrote with a broad-pointed pen, and I hardly doubt that we will find some impression upon this blotting pad. Ah, yes; surely this is the very thing!"

He tore a strip of the blotting paper and turned toward us a queer looking conglomeration of characters that looked like nothing so much as an imitation of ancient Egyptian hieroglyphics.

Cyril Overton was much excited. "Hold it to the glass," he cried; "that is unnecessary," said Holmes. "The paper is thin, and the

reverse will give the message. Here it is." He turned it over and read:



"So that is the tail-end of the telegram which Godfrey Staunton dispatched within a few hours of his disappearance. There are at least six words of the message which have escaped us, but what remains—'Stand by us for God's sake'—proves that this young man saw a formidable danger which approached him and from which someone else could protect him. 'Us,' mark you! Another person was involved. Who should it be but the pale-faced, bearded man, who seemed himself in so nervous a state? What, then, is the connection between Godfrey Staunton and the bearded man? And what is the third source from which each of them sought for help against pressing danger? Our inquiry has already narrowed down to that."

"We have only to find to whom that telegram is addressed," I suggested.

"Exactly, my dear Watson. Your reflection, though profound, had already crossed my mind. But I dare say it may have come to your notice that if you walk into a postoffice and demand to see the counter-part of another man's message there may be some disinclination on the part of the officials to oblige you. There is so much red tape in these matters. However, I have no doubt that with a little delicacy and fluency the end may be obtained. Meanwhile, I should like in your presence, Mr. Overton, to go through these papers which have been left upon the table."

There were a number of letters, bills and notebooks, which Holmes turned over and examined with quick, nervous fingers and darting, penetrating eyes. "Nothing here," he said, at last. "By the way, I suppose your friend was a healthy young fellow—nothing amiss with him?"

"Sound as a bell."

"Have you ever known him ill?" "Not a day. He has been laid up with a back, and once he slipped his kneecap, but that was nothing."

"Perhaps he was not so strong as you suppose. I should think he may have had some secret trouble. With your assent, I will put one or two of these papers in my pocket, in case they should bear upon our future inquiry."

"One moment—one moment!" cried a querulous voice, and we looked up to find a queer little old man, jerking and twitching in the doorway. He was dressed in rusty black, with a very broad-brimmed top-hat and a loose white necktie—the whole effect being that of a very rustic parson or of an undertaker's mule. Yet, in spite of his shabby and even absurd appearance, his voice had a sharp crackle, and his manner a quick intensity which commanded attention.

"Who are you, sir, and by what right do you touch this gentleman's papers?" he asked.

"I am a private detective and I am endeavoring to explain his disappearance."

"Oh, you are, are you? And who instructed you, eh?" "This gentleman, Mr. Staunton's friend, was referred to me by Scotland Yard."

"Who are you, sir?" "I am Cyril Overton."

"Then it is you who sent me a telegram. My name is Lord Mount-James. I came round as quickly as the Bayswater bus would bring me. So you have instructed a detective?"

"Yes, sir."

"And you are prepared to meet the cost?" "I have no doubt, sir, that my friend Godfrey, when we find him, will be prepared to do that."

"But if he is never found, eh? Answer me that!" "In that case, no doubt his family—"

"Nothing of the sort, sir!" screamed the little man. "Don't look to me for a penny—not a penny! You understand that, Mr. Detective! I am all the family that this young man has got, and I tell you that I am not responsible. If he has any expectations it is due to the fact that I have never wasted money, and I do not propose to begin to do so now. As to those papers with which you are making so free, I may tell you that in case there should be anything of any value among them, you will be held strictly to account for what you do with them."

"Very good, sir," said Sherlock Holmes. "May I ask, in the meanwhile, whether you have yourself any theory to account for this young man's disappearance?"

"No, sir, I have not. He is big enough and old enough to look after himself, and I entirely refuse to accept the responsibility of hunting for him."

"I quite understand your position," said Holmes, with a mischievous twinkle in his eyes. "Perhaps you don't quite understand mine. Godfrey Staunton appears to have been a poor man. If he has been kidnaped it could not have been for anything which he himself possessed. The fame of your wealth has gone abroad, Lord Mount-James, and it is entirely possible that a gang of thieves have secured your nephew in order to gain from him some information as to your house, your habits and your treasure."

"The face of our unpleasant little visitors turned as white as his neckcloth."

"Heavens, sir, what an idea! I never thought of such villainy! What inhuman rogues there are in the world! But Godfrey is a blue-lad—a staunch lad. Nothing would induce him to give his old uncle away. I'll have the plate moved over to the bank this evening. In the mean-



DR. LESLIE ARMSTRONG.



THE MISSING THREE-QUARTER.

time spare no pains, Mr. Detective! I beg you to leave no stone unturned to bring him safely back. As to money, well, so far as a fiver, or even a tenner goes, you can always look to me."

Even in his chastened frame of mind the noble miser could give us no information which could help us, for he knew little of the private life of his nephew. Our only clue lay in the truncated telegram, and with a copy of this in his hand Holmes set forth to find a second link for his chain. We had shaken off Lord Mount-James, and Overton had gone to consult with the other members of his team over the misfortune which had befallen them.

There was a telegraph office at a short distance from the hotel. We halted outside it.

"It's worth trying, Watson," said Holmes. "Of course, with a warrant we could demand to see the counterfoils, but we have not reached that stage yet. I don't suppose they remember faces in so busy a place. Let us venture it."

"I am sorry to trouble you," said he, in his blindest manner to the young woman behind the grating; "there is some small mistake about a telegram I sent yesterday. I have had no answer and I very much fear that I must have omitted to put my name at the end. Could you tell me if this was so?"

The young woman turned over a sheet of counterfoils.

"What o'clock was it?" she asked. "A little after six."

"Whom was it to?" Holmes put his finger to his lips and glanced at me. "The best words in it were 'for God's sake,'" he whispered, confidentially; "I am very anxious at getting no answer."

The young woman separated one of the forms. "This is it. There is no name," said she, smoothing it out upon the counter.

"Then that, of course, accounts for my not getting an answer," said Holmes. "Dear me, how very stupid of me, to be sure! Good morning, miss, and many thanks for having relieved my mind." He chuckled and rubbed his hands when we found ourselves in the street once more.

"Well?" I asked. "We progress, my dear Watson, we progress. I had seven different schemes for getting a glimpse of that telegram, but I could hardly hope to succeed the first time."

"And what have you gained?" "A starting point for our investigation." He hailed a cab. "King's Cross station," said he.

"We have a journey, then?" "Yes, I think we must run down to Cambridge together. All the indications seem to me to point in that direction."

"Tell me, I asked, as we rattled up Gray's Inn Road, "have you any suspicion yet as to the cause of the disappearance? I don't think that among all our cases I have known one where the motives are more obscure. Surely you don't really imagine that he may be kidnaped in order to give information against his wealthy uncle?"

"I confess, my dear Watson, that that does not appeal to me as a very probable explanation. It struck me, however, as being the one which was most likely to interest that very unpleasant old person."

"It certainly did that; but what are your alternatives?" "I could mention several. You must admit that it is curious and suggestive that this incident should occur on the eve of this important match, and should involve the only man whose presence seems essential to the success of the side. It may, of course, be a coincidence, but it is interesting. Amateur sport is free from betting, but a good deal of outside betting goes on among the public; and it is possible that it might be worth someone's while to get at a player as the ruffians of the turf get at a race horse."

"There is one explanation. A second very obvious one is that this young man really is the heir of a great property, however modest his means may at present be, and it is not impossible that a plot to hold him for ransom might be concocted."

"These theories take no account of the telegram."

"Quite true, Watson. The telegram still remains the only solid thing with which we have to deal, and we must not permit our attention to wander away from it. It is to gain light upon the purpose of this telegram that we are now upon our way to Cambridge. The path of our investigation is at present obscure, but I shall be very much surprised if before evening we have not cleared it up or made a considerable advance along it."

It was already dark when we reached the old university city. Holmes took a cab at the station and ordered the man to drive to the house of Dr. Leslie Armstrong. A few minutes later we had stopped at a large mansion in the busiest thoroughfare. We were shown in, and after a long wait were at last admitted into the consulting room, where we found the doctor seated behind his table.

It argues the degree in which I had lost touch with my profession that the name of Leslie Armstrong was unknown to me. Now I am aware that he is not only one of the heads of the medical school of the university, but a thinker of European reputation in more than one branch of science. Yet even

without knowing his brilliant record one could not fail to be impressed by a mere glance at the man, the square, massive face, the brooding eyes under the thatched brows, and the granite molding of the inflexible jaw. A man of deep character, a man with an alert mind, grim ascetic, self-contained, formidable—so I read Dr. Leslie Armstrong. He held my friend's card in his hand and he looked up with no very pleased expression upon his shaggy features.

"I have heard your name, Mr. Sherlock Holmes, and I am aware of your profession—one of which I by no means approve."

"In that, doctor, you will find yourself in agreement with every criminal in the country," said my friend, quietly.

"So far as your efforts are directed toward the suppression of crime, sir, they must have the support of every reasonable member of the community, though I cannot doubt that the official machinery is amply sufficient for the purpose. Where your calling is more open to criticism is when you pry into the secrets of private individuals, when you rake up family matters which are better hidden, and when you incidentally waste the time of men who are more busy than yourself. At the present moment, for example, I should be writing a treatise instead of conversing with you."

"No doubt, doctor; and yet the conversation may prove more important than the treatise. Incidentally, I may tell you that we are endeavoring to prevent anything like public exposure of private matters which must necessarily follow when once the case is fairly in the hands of the official police. You may look upon me simply as an irregular pioneer, who goes in front of the regular forces of the country. I have come to ask you about Mr. Godfrey Staunton."

"What about him?" "You know him, do you not?" "He is an intimate friend of mine."

"You are aware that he has disappeared?" "Ah, indeed! There was no change of expression in the rugged

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