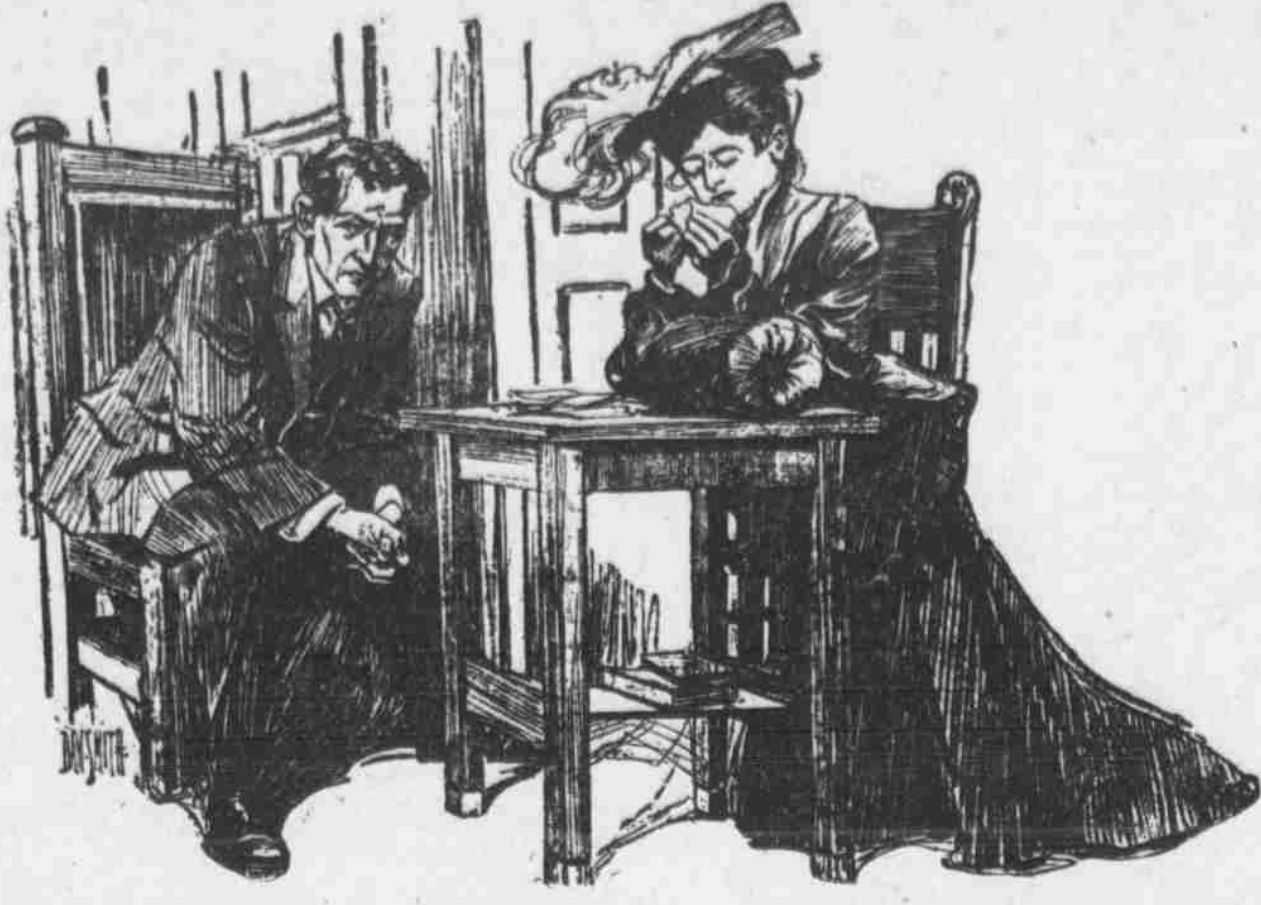


Sherlock Holmes--A Case of Identity

By A. Conan Doyle.
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"My dear fellow," said Sherlock Holmes, as we sat on either side of the fire in his lodgings at Baker street, "life is infinitely stranger than anything which the mind of man could invent. We would not dare to conceive the things which are really mere commonplace of existence. If we could fly out of that window hand in hand, hover over this great city, gently remove the roofs, and peep in at the queer things which are going on, the strange coincidences, the plannings, the cross-purposes, the wonderful chain of events, working through generations, and leading to the most outrageous results, it would make all fiction with its conventionalities and foreseen conclusions most stale and unprofitable."



"And yet I am not convinced of it," I answered. "The cases which come to light in the papers are, as a rule, bald enough and vulgar enough. We have in our police reports realism pushed to its extreme limits, and yet the result is, it must be confessed, neither fascinating nor artistic."

"A certain amount of imagination must be used in producing a realistic effect," remarked Holmes. "This is wanting in the police report, where more stress is laid, perhaps, upon the platitudes of the magistrate than upon the details, which to an observer contain the vital essence of the whole matter. Depend upon it there is nothing so unnatural as the commonplace."

"I came to you, sir, because I heard of you from Mrs. Etherage, whose husband you found"

your short list it is a little trying to do so much typewriting." "I did at first," she answered, "but now I know where the letters are without looking. Then, suddenly realizing the full purport of her words, she gave a violent start and looked up, with fear and astonishment upon her broad, good-humored face. 'You've heard about Mrs. Windbank?' she cried, 'else how could you know all that?'"

"Never mind," said Holmes laughing; "it is my business to know things. Perhaps I have trained myself to see what others overlook. If not, why should you come to consult me?" "I come to you, sir, because I heard of you from Mrs. Etherage, whose husband you found so easy when the police and everyone had given him up for dead. Oh, Mr. Holmes, I wish you would do as much for me. I'm not rich, but still I have a hundred a year in my own right, besides the little that I make by the machine, and I would give it all to know what has become of Mr. Hosmer Angel."

"Why did you come away to consult me in such a hurry?" asked Sherlock Holmes, with his finger-tips together, and his eyes to the ceiling. "Again a startled look came over the somewhat vacuous face of Miss Mary Sutherland. 'Yes, I did bang out of the house,' she said, 'for it made me angry to see the easy way in which Mr. Windbank—that is, my father—took it all. He would not go to the police, and he would do nothing, and kept on saying that there was no harm done, it made me mad, and I just put on my things and came right away to you.'"

"Your father," said Holmes, "your stepfather, surely, since the name is different." "Oh, yes, my stepfather, I call him father, though it sounds funny, too, for he is only five years and two months older than myself."

"And your mother is alive?" "Oh, yes, mother is alive and well. I wasn't best pleased, Mr. Holmes, when she married again so soon after father's death, and a man who was nearly fifteen years younger than herself. Father was a plumber in the Tottenham Court road, and he left a tidy business behind him, which mother carried on with Mr. Hardy, the foreman, but when Mr. Windbank came he made her stop the business, and he got very superior, being a traveler in wines. They got £4,700 for the good-will and interest, which wasn't near as much as father could have got if he had been alive."

"I had expected to see Sherlock Holmes impatient under this rambling and 'common-sensical' narrative, but, on the contrary, he had listened with the greatest concentration of attention.

"Your own little income," he asked, "does it come out of the business?" "Oh, no, sir. It is quite separate, and was left me by my Uncle Ned in Auckland. It is in New Zealand stock, paying 4s per cent. Two thousand five hundred pounds was the amount, but I can only touch the interest."

"You interest me extremely," said Holmes. "And since you draw so large a sum as I live at home I don't wish to be a burden upon them, and so they have the use of the money just while I am staying with them. Of course, that is only just for the time. Mr. Windbank draws my interest every quarter and pays it over to mother, and I find that I can do pretty well with what I earn at typewriting. It brings me twopenny a sheet, and I can often do from fifteen to twenty sheets in a day."

"You have made your position very clear to me," said Holmes. "This is my friend, Dr. Watson, before whom you can speak as freely as before myself. Kindly tell us now all about your connection with Mr. Hosmer Angel."

A flush stole over Miss Sutherland's face, and she picked nervously at the fringe of her jacket. "I met him first at the gas-fitters' ball," she said. "They used to send father tickets when he was alive, and then afterwards they remembered us, and sent them to mother. Mr. Windbank did not wish us to go. He never did wish us to go anywhere. He would get quite mad if I wanted so much as to join the Sunday school treat. But this time I was set on going, and I would go; for what right had he to prevent? He said the folk were not"

fit for us to know, when all father's friends were to be there. And he said I had nothing fit to wear, when I had my purple plush that I had never so much as taken out of the drawer. At last, when nothing else would do, he went off to France upon the business of the firm, but we went, mother and I, with Mr. Hardy, who used to be our foreman, and it was there I met Mr. Hosmer Angel."

"I suppose," said Holmes, "that when Mr. Windbank came back from France he was very annoyed at your having gone to the ball?" "Oh, well, he was very good about it. He laughed, I remember, and shrugged his shoulders, and said that he was no use saying anything to a woman, for she would have her way."

"I see. Then at the gas-fitters' ball you met, as I understand, a gentleman called Mr. Hosmer Angel?" "Yes, sir. I met him that night and he called next day to ask if we had got home all safe, and after that we met him—that is to say, Mr. Holmes, I met him twice for walks, but after that father came back again, and Mr. Hosmer Angel could not come to the house any more."

"But how about Mr. Hosmer Angel? Did he make no attempt to see you?" "Well, father was going off to France again in a week, and Hosmer wrote and said that it would be safer and better not to see each other until he had gone. We could write in the meantime, and he used to write every day. I took the letters in the morning, so there was no need for mother to know."

"Were you engaged to the gentleman at this time?" "Oh, yes, Mr. Holmes. We were engaged after the first walk that we took. Hosmer—Mr. Angel—was a cashier in an office in Leadenhall street—and—"

"That's the worst of it, Mr. Holmes, I don't know." "Where did he live?" "He slept on the premises." "And you don't know his address?" "No—except that it was Leadenhall street."

"Where did you address your letters, then?" "To the Leadenhall street postoffice, to be left till called for. He said that if he were sent to the office he would be chafed by all the other clerks about having letters from a lady, so I offered to typewrite them, like he did his, but he wouldn't have that, for he said that when I wrote them they seemed to come from me, but when they were typewritten he always felt that the machine had come between us. That will show you just how fond he was of me, Mr. Holmes, and the little things that he would think of."

"It was most suggestive," said Holmes. "It has long been an axiom of mine that the little things are infinitely the most important. Can you remember any other little things about Mr. Hosmer Angel?" "He was a very shy man, Mr. Holmes. He would rather walk with me in the evening than in the daylight, for he said that he hated to be conspicuous. Very retiring and gentlemanly he was. Even his voice was gentle. He'd had the quinsy and swollen glands when he was young, he told me, and it had left him with a weak throat, and a hesitating, whispering fashion of speech. He was always well dressed, very neat and plain, but his eyes were weak, just as mine are, and he wore tinted glasses against the glare."

"Well, and what happened when Mr. Windbank, your step-father, returned to France?" "Mr. Hosmer Angel came to the house again, and proposed that we should marry before father came back. He was in dreadful earnest, and made me swear, with my hands on the Testament, that whatever happened I would marry him. Mother said that it was quite right to make me swear, and that it was a sign of his passion. Mother was all in his favor from the first, and was even fonder of him than I was. Then, when they talked of marrying within the week, I began to ask about father; but they both said never to mind about father, but just to tell him afterwards, and mother said she would make it all right with him. I didn't quite like that, Mr. Holmes. It seemed funny that I should ask his leave, as he was only a few years older than me; but I didn't want to do anything on the sly, so I wrote to father at Bordeaux, where the company has its French offices, but the letter came back to me on the very day of the wedding."

"It missed him then?" "Yes, sir; for he had started to England just before it arrived." "But that was unfortunate. Your wedding was arranged, then, for Friday. Was it to be in church?" "Yes, sir, but very quietly. It was to be at St. Saviour's, near King's Cross, and we were to have breakfast afterward at the St. Pancras hotel. Hosmer came for us in a hansom, but as there was two of us, he put us both into it, and stepped himself into a four-wheeler, which happened to be the only other cab in the street. We got to the church first, and when the four-wheeler drove up we waited for him to step out, but he never did, and when the cabman got down from the box and looked, there was no one there! The cabman said that he could not imagine what had become of him, for he had seen him get in with his own eyes. That was last Friday, Mr. Holmes, and I never have"

seen or heard anything since then to throw any light upon what became of him." "It seems to me that you have been very shamefully treated," said Holmes. "Oh no, sir! He was too good and kind to leave me so. Why, all the morning he was saying to me that, whatever happened I was to be true; and that if even something quite unforeseen occurred to separate us, I was always to remember that I was pledged to him, and that he would claim his pledge sooner or later. It seemed strange talk for a wedding morning, but what has happened since gives a meaning to it."

"Most certainly it does. Your own opinion is, then, that some unforeseen catastrophe has occurred to him?" "Yes, sir. I believe that he foresaw some danger, or else he would not have talked so. And then I think that what he foresaw happened."

"But you have no notion as to what it could have been?" "None."

"One more question. How did your mother take the matter?" "She was angry, and said that I was never to speak of the matter again."

"And your father? Did you tell him?" "Yes; and he seemed to think, with me, that something had happened, and that I should hear of Hosmer again. As he said, what interest could any one have in bringing me to the doors of the church and then leaving me? Now, if he had borrowed my money, or if he had married me and got my money settled on him, there might be some reason for his having been very independent about money and never would look at a shilling of mine. And yet, what could have happened? And why could he not write? Oh, it drives me half mad to think of, and I can't sleep a wink at night." She pulled a little handkerchief out of her muff and began to sob heavily into it.

"I shall glance into the case for you," said Holmes, rising. "And I have no doubt that we shall reach some definite result. Let the weight of the matter rest upon me now, and do not let your mind dwell upon it further. Above all, try to let Mr. Hosmer Angel stand for your memory, as he has done from your life."

"Then you don't think I'll see him again?" "I fear not."

"Then what has happened to him?" "You will leave that question in my hands. I shall like an accurate description of him, and any letters of his which you can spare."

"I advertised for him in last Saturday's Chronicle," said she. "Here is the slip and here are four letters from him."

"Thank you. And your address?" "No. St. Lyon place, Camberwell."

"Mr. Angel's address, if you had, I understand. Where is your father's place of business?" "He travels for Westhouse & Marbank, the great claret importers of Fenchurch street."

"Thank you. You have made your statement very clearly. You will leave the papers here, and remember the advice which I have given you. Let the whole incident be a sealed book, and do not allow it to affect your life."

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