

# THE ADVENTURE OF THE MURDERED GYPSY

*The Early Case Files of Sherlock Holmes*  
*Case Two*



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WHAT THEY ARE SAYING ABOUT CASE ONE OF  
"THE EARLY CASE FILES OF SHERLOCK  
HOLMES"

*The Adventure of the Murdered Midwife* is a great nod to classic Sherlock Holmes. Liese Sherwood-Fabre paints a vivid picture and transports you back in time, in what I'm sure will become a bestseller. Fans of Sherlock Holmes will love this new take and appreciate [Liese's] attention to detail.

A classic in the making!

—Gemma Halliday, *New York Times* and *USA Today*  
Bestselling Author

[Dr.] Sherwood-Fabre's attention to detail and vivid prose are on full display in this delightful look at the evolution of a young Sherlock Holmes.

—Book Life Prize

*To my husband, for the support and humor he has shared for more than  
forty years.*



## CHAPTER ONE

**M**other pivoted, swung her foot, and hit her opponent squarely on the jaw. The man landed on his back against the wooden floorboards with enough force to send tremors through the soles of my feet.

Mr. Moto raised himself onto one elbow and rubbed the side of his face with his other hand. “Very good.”

Mother extended her hand to our *baritsu* instructor, but he waved it away. “I’m quite amazed,” she said, “at the freedom of movement these Turkish trousers allow.”

I couldn’t argue with her statement. The blousy coverings permitted full use of her legs—something her skirts had never done. At the same time, I found them rather unsettling. Until she had introduced the garment for our lessons, I had not seen her lower extremities, and

certainly not in motion. I also couldn't help but wonder what our instructor thought of her visible, albeit covered, limbs.

On the other hand, both he and I bared most of our legs. The traditional *baritsu* costume, or *gi*, consisted of a loose, long-sleeved white tunic that all but covered a pair of very short pants.

When he rose to his feet, I was struck again by our instructor's diminutive size. He matched my mother closely in height and weight, but I had learned at our first lesson his stature did not indicate his strength when it came to defending himself.

Of course, my mother was rather tall compared to many women in our village. Slim and dark-haired, I was told repeatedly how much I resembled her.

"Your turn, Master Sherlock."

By this time, I'd gotten used to his accent and enjoyed how he pronounced my name, roughening the *l* almost into an *r*.

I took the traditional opening stance, but before I could bow, Trevor entered, leaving my uncle's workshop open to the winter air. My seven-year-old cousin stood just inside, almost as if he were afraid to enter. The cold air rushed in, causing goose bumps to break out on my legs.

"I was told to come and get you. Cousin Mycroft is here."

"How wonderful," my mother said. "I know he'll want to freshen up from his trip, so we'll be there shortly. Sherlock

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was about to have a go at this new move. If you wish to stay and watch, you may. But please shut the door.”

Once we were no longer exposed to the elements, I bowed to our trainer and prepared to imitate the kick my mother had just executed.

Trevor spoke up behind my back. “But Mother said you were to come directly and bring Uncle Ernest with you because a friend of his has come too.”

I turned my back to Mr. Moto to ask my cousin to repeat the statement. In all my years, I couldn’t recall a single time my quite, private uncle had received a visitor. Before I could voice this observation, my instructor swept his leg behind mine, flipping my feet out from under me and the rest of me toward the floor. The air rushed out of my lungs with a *whoosh*. I wasn’t sure which hurt more, my back or my pride, when I heard Trevor giggle.

My instructor’s face hovered over mine. “Are you all right, Master Sherlock?”

I nodded and accepted his hand to pull myself up.

Once righted, he pointed a finger at me. “Never turn your back on an opponent.”

My cheeks burned from his reproach. While he might have overplayed his point, he was correct in demonstrating I had given him the advantage. I had no time to note this because Mother spoke again.

“A friend of Ernest’s? That does put a different wrinkle on things.” She tilted her head to one side, as if weighing this new information, and turned to Moto. “I’m afraid,



then, we'll have to cut our lesson short today. Let's continue tomorrow, shall we?" She glanced at me. "Sherry, dear, please collect your uncle from the barn and join us in the parlor. We'll see you at dinner, Mr. Moto."

The man bowed low. "Until then."

Retrieving my pants from a nearby workbench, I pulled them on over my *gi*.

When I turned to go, Trevor asked, "Might I go with you?"

I hesitated in my response, seeking a socially acceptable excuse to avoid including him. To be honest, I found the boy annoying. I was, after all, six—about to be seven—years his senior, yet he insisted on following me everywhere. Since he'd arrived two days ago, whenever I turned around, I found him staring at me with wide eyes and a slight smile on his face.

Mother solved my quandary, although not in the fashion I'd hoped. "An excellent idea. Trevor's been asking to see the horses. This will give him an opportunity to do so."

With a sigh, I bowed once again to Moto and moved to the door, where I jammed my feet into my boots and wrapped a scarf about my neck. "Come on, then I need to change before dinner."

The boy's delight was obvious. He bounced next to me and kept up a running commentary as we made our way to the stables. He noted how cold it was, how we could see our breath, and didn't he resemble a dragon when he blew out through his nostrils, and how quiet it was here in the coun-

try. I considered pointing out the last was difficult to note with his persistent jabbering, but instead, let my mind wander, providing various grunts and other noncommittal noises while he nattered on. My ill humor was only partly related to his constant tagging along. Another portion reflected the humiliation I'd just experienced at the hands, or rather the feet, of Mr. Moto.

The majority, however, involved Mycroft's arrival. While he'd been away at university, I'd been able to relax in a way I found difficult when he was at home. His criticisms of my violin practicing; constant corrections to my French, German, and Latin pronunciations; and complaints about any noise I made that disturbed his thinking always kept me on guard. With his return, I would have to, once again, increase my caution. Not that I didn't like my brother. We had certainly developed a greater appreciation for each other when our family had solved a murder and freed my mother from gaol a bare three months ago. He simply wasn't the easiest person to get along with.

As we neared the barn, I stopped and turned to Trevor. "Can you repeat what you just said?"

"I said the woman visitor was very pretty."

Thankfully, I was no longer in the middle of a *baritsu* lesson because Moto would have kicked me onto my back for a second time as I stared dumbfounded at my cousin. Uncle Ernest's friend a woman? And pretty? I didn't recall Ernest ever mentioning a woman, other than once, and she had been the daughter of an Indian royal.

“Is she an Englishwoman?”

When he nodded, I quickened my pace. I had to get my uncle back to the house to see his female friend for myself.

Our footfalls echoed in the cavernous barn. Built for a much larger number of horses than we presently kept, many of its stalls were empty, but the current occupants responded to our calls with a chorus of whinnies and stamping in the darkness. Their pungent animal odor, mixed with that of hay and leather, grew stronger, and Trevor edged closer to me as we continued toward a lantern glowing near the structure’s black center. When my uncle popped up from behind one stall door to the side of the light, Trevor gave a little yelp.

I chuckled at his fright. What would his reaction be when he found out what my uncle was doing in there?

Ernest’s resemblance to my mother was striking. She once had told me it was the nose, which I had inherited as well. My experience had taught me the French were thinner and their faces more angular than the British. Our connection to the Vernet family was quite evident in all three of us. And of course, the graying moustache gave my uncle a distinguished look in spite of his often-distracted manner.

“Boys, so glad you’re here,” he said. “Come. I could use some help.”

Trevor ran to the stall but stopped at its entrance. “Where’s the horse?”

“No horse,” Ernest said and held up a rectangular metal box. “Mice.”

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My cousin's eyes rounded as scratching and scurrying from inside the box indicated it held several live ones. "What are you doing with those?"

"Uncle Ernest uses them in his work," I said.

From Trevor's stare, I wasn't sure if he was curious or fearful of the contents, but I didn't have the patience to explain it to him at the time. More pressing matters had brought us here.

"We came to get you," I said. "You're to come to the house—"

"You have a visitor," Trevor said, breaking in. "Two, actually."

I turned to him. Two?

"A lady and a gentleman. Mother said you were to come at once."

"I have some things to finish up here," he said, glancing about the stall. "But I guess the mice will keep until I can come back to collect them. Let's set up the traps and then go back to the house."

He handed me another metal box and pointed to an empty stall midway between the center and the far door. "Put it in that one."

"I've never seen a mouse trap like that," my cousin said.

"It's my own invention." A broad smile split his face. "To capture them alive, you have to attract them but not harm them. The key is the entrance."

I turned the box for Trevor to see the hole.

“Put your hand in.” When he hesitated, I added, “Don’t worry. It’s empty.”

After another studied pause, he pushed his hand inside. A wire cone connected to the hole’s entrance led inside the box. As a mouse (or in this case, my cousin’s hand) slipped into the box, the cone closed in on itself, trapping the mouse inside. In Trevor’s case, the wire constricted about his wrist. Upon realizing he was snared, Trevor tried to pull out his hand, but it held him fast.

“I’m stuck.” Panic tinged his voice. “Get me out.”

My uncle stepped up and patted the boy on his back. “Don’t worry. It’s actually based on a toy. A tube made out of straw. It’s woven in such a fashion that when you put your fingers in each end of the tube and pull, it tightens just like the wire cone. But one has merely to push the contraption in the opposite direction...” He placed a finger inside the cone next to the boy’s wrist and pushed it upward and toward the box’s center. It widened enough for Trevor to extract his hand with a sigh of relief. “To be free of the contraption.”

I checked his wrist. The wire had left slight imprints on the skin, but he was otherwise unmarked. “No harm done.”

“It wasn’t a very nice trick,” he said, his lower lip pouting out.

Before I could respond, Ernest snickered. “How do you think he knew what would happen? I caught him the same way.”

“Truly?”

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Trevor glanced at me, and I dropped my gaze, too embarrassed for the second time within an hour to answer.

Ernest must have recognized my discomfort because he tugged on his overcoat's lapels and brushed off the larger bits of hay and changed the subject. "Let's leave the traps and return to the house. I shouldn't keep my visitors waiting. A man and a woman? I have no idea who."

My uncle's strides were too long for Trevor's much shorter legs. When we had gone no more than a quarter of the way to the house, the boy was a number of paces behind us. He called out, and my uncle instructed me to wait for him. By the time Trevor caught up to me, Ernest was far ahead of us.

"What does Uncle want with the mice?" he asked as we continued across the yard.

"To experiment with. We're cataloging the effects of various poisons."

"Are you trying to find the best one?"

"No. Although that might be a possible result. Imagine you were to find a dead—er, animal..."

I paused before completing the explanation, weighing my words. Aunt Iris probably wouldn't want me to talk about poisons killing animals, and certainly not people, the true explanation for the experiments. My father's younger sister had had trouble having children, and she doted on her only child almost to the point of suffocation. She kept him in a shift long after most boys no longer wore infant clothes. And she refused to cut his hair. If it hadn't been so curly, it

would have reached farther than his shoulders. That she had allowed him to come to the workshop to get us was out of the ordinary. She rarely allowed him to be outside for fear of his catching a chill. Which meant her curiosity about Mycroft's companions outweighed any concerns she had regarding her son crossing the fifty yards between the house and the workshop.

In the end, I chose a rather mundane explanation for my uncle's work. "If you found a dead animal like a cow or sheep, you might want to know what it had eaten so you could protect others from eating the same thing. Noting whether they foamed at the mouth or stopped breathing because their throat constricted could tell you something."

"I had a puppy. Papa said it ate something that made it sick, and it died. Maybe if you'd been there, you could've saved it."

"Right now, we're still learning what the different poisons might be. But in the future, I suppose so."

"Papa bought me another puppy. His name is Speckles, 'cause he has spots on his back..."

This new monologue continued all the way to the house and wandered from puppies to horses to the train ride from London to speculating what we would be having for dinner. Never had I been more grateful for arriving at the house than when we stepped inside and were directly met by his mother.

Unfortunately for Aunt Iris, she took after the same side of the Holmes family as my father—stocky with a wide

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girth. At least she hadn't inherited his baldness. At the moment, she had pulled her dark hair away from her face, allowing the curls to descend down her back. All the same, the scowl she now gave me resembled my father's.

"There you are," Aunt Iris said, folding her arms across her ample bosom. "I was going to send someone out to look for you."

"Uncle Ernest wasn't in his workshop. He was in the barn. Did you know he's catching mice to poison them? I got my hand caught in a trap, but it didn't hurt. See?"

"Truly, Sherlock, I would hope you would keep a better watch over your younger cousin. What if he had injured himself in the trap or been bitten by mice? Heaven only knows what dreadful fever he could catch. And it would have been *your* fault." Her gaze traveled from my head to my boots while I removed my jacket, and she gave a harsh sniff. "What sort of shirt is that you have on?"

"My *baritsu* costume."

"I suppose you don't have time to change. Come along and meet your uncle's guests."

After hanging up my jacket on a peg and kicking off my boots, I followed a few paces behind her. Despite the distance, I could clearly catch her mutterings. "Violette in that indecent outfit of hers. The boy in pajamas. I don't know how we can keep the Holmes name from scandal with such goings-on."

Only Father's etiquette lessons and my recognition that her visit should be over shortly after the holidays kept me



from responding to her complaints. If she understood what circumstances had driven my mother to decide she needed to be able to defend herself, she might have had more sympathy. One had only to confront a killer once to determine some training in self-defense was essential.

When we entered the parlor, my father, uncle, and a stranger I assumed to be one of our visitors rose to greet my aunt. I observed Mycroft was absent and assumed he had gone to his room to change for dinner. I shouldn't have been shocked or disappointed he hadn't waited for me to arrive. He would have placed a higher priority on dressing for dinner than greeting me.

Ernest gestured for me to step farther into the room.

"Come here. I want you to meet one of my oldest friends from—"

"India," I said, extending my hand to the lean, short gentleman with graying hair and beard standing quite erect by my uncle's side.

"How did you know?"

"Quite easily, actually. Despite the traveling clothes, your bearing indicates military service. Your dark skin speaks of years in the sun under harsh conditions. Given your friendship with my uncle, the most obvious location would be India."

"Ingenious," he said, and gave a crisp bow. "Colonel Herbert Williams at your service. And what can you tell me about my niece, Miss Meredith Cummings?"

I bowed to the young woman seated next to him and

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observed her for a moment. Trevor had been correct: despite my limited experience with women outside our village, I had before me one of the most exquisite examples of feminine beauty I was ever to meet. A silver brooch held the collar of her bright turquoise traveling dress closed at the bottom of a long, slender neck. A peacock feather crowned her hat, perched on dark hair, pulled back to expose a heart-shaped face. The ruddy color of her cheeks suggested exposure to elements not common to the English climate but served to complement the deep blue of her eyes. Her slightly hooked nose formed her only flaw, but it simply enhanced the overall effect.

Father's cough brought me out of my reverie.

I smiled and said, "Also shortly arrived from India and recently engaged, but no longer. The area around the finger a slightly lighter shade—"

"Oh," she said and drew her hand to her breast, covering it with the other.

Another cough—this time from my mother—told me I had overstepped convention again.

I bowed, knowing my face now burned a bright crimson. "Sorry. You asked, and I—"

"Quite all right," she said. "You have keen powers of observation."

"Thank you."

I stepped away, taking a spot beside the door, knowing I'd be sent to change directly.

“Colonel Williams, what brings you to the country this time of year?” Mother asked.

Before the man could answer, my uncle broke in. “Whatever the reason, I insist you stay here with us.”

Father glanced at Mother. He had to be considering how full the household was already, and his other sister, Rose, and her family still hadn’t arrived. Mother gave the slightest nod of her head. She must have already worked out the arrangements because her smile seemed genuine when Colonel Williams responded to her brother’s offer.

“Thank you very much, Ernie. We could use a few days’ rest before continuing on our way.”

“Excellent,” Ernest said and slapped the man on his arm. “Let’s see to your luggage.”

The colonel shifted his feet. “We’re traveling rather... light at the moment. Most of the baggage was shipped on ahead. We have just two valises—”

“Only two?” Aunt Iris asked. “I can imagine a man traveling with such limited baggage, but surely Miss Meredith requires more than the contents of one valise?”

“I’ve found a large wardrobe a tedious burden, Mrs. Fitzhugh.” Meredith turned to my mother. “I do, however, have a maid traveling with me and would appreciate it if you would be able to accommodate her as well. I believe she’s currently with your housekeeper.”

“A maid? Yes, of course.” She rose. “If you’ll excuse me, I must consult with Mrs. Simpson about her and preparing

your rooms. Come with me, Sherlock. We both need to change before dinner.”

“If you please,” Meredith said, stopping my mother’s forward movement. “Are those Turkish trousers? I’ve seen something similar while in India but have only read about their introduction here.”

“They are indeed. While some consider it indecent for a woman to show her limbs”—her gaze drifted to her sister-in-law for a split second—“I daresay the fact that females have lower appendages should not be a shock to anyone.”

“And you, Master Sherlock, are you wearing a *gi*?”

Meredith’s keen knowledge of both my mother’s and my dress surprised me. “Mother and I have been studying *baritsu*. How did you know?”

“In India, we are very familiar with Far Eastern culture. I have seen such costumes before.”

“I have employed a master to teach us this form of Japanese physical culture. His drills require loose-fitting garments for movement.” Mother smiled and glanced at those assembled. “You will all have a chance to meet him at dinner. He’s gone to change, as both Sherlock and I must do if we are to dine on time. If you will excuse us, we’ll see you again shortly.”

Mother instructed me in a low voice as we ascended the stairs to our bedrooms on the second floor. “I’m afraid I’m going to have to ask you to sleep on the third floor with your cousin for a few days, so Miss Meredith might have your room.”

I nodded, not at all surprised with this announcement. The moment Mother nodded her head at Father, I deduced her solution to the room arrangements. One had only to do the calculations to know we had too few bedrooms for the number of houseguests. And I, being the youngest, was the most natural choice to be sent to the nursery where Trevor was staying. While I had no philosophical objections to returning to my previous quarters, I did balk at sharing the room with Trevor. Only my inability to identify another option kept me silent. Perhaps after Mr. Moto left, I might be able to at least move to his room in the servants' quarters for some privacy? Until then, I would have to bide my time.

At the top of the stairs, Mother said, "Miss Meredith will probably want to freshen up as well. Take some clothes for now, and I'll have one of the maids transfer more to the third floor during dinner."

I sighed and crossed to my room to follow out her orders.

Once I'd changed and carried some items to the children's bedroom on the third floor, I almost ran into a woman when I exited the nursery. Tall and dark-skinned with long, black hair, she wore yards of saffron-colored fabric wrapped around her waist and twisted upward under a gray wool shawl in deference to our cold climate. But her eyes drew one in. They were rimmed in black with deep brown irises that darted back and forth as she gazed first at me, then about the hallway.

"I am so sorry," she said in a voice with tones that trav-

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eled up and down the scale in the most fascinating way. “I was looking for my mistress’s room.”

I pointed to the stairs. “It’s down one floor. I can show you.”

With a dip of her head, she followed me to the second floor and to my bedroom. An open valise and Meredith’s bright traveling cloak both lay on the bed. Mother had guessed correctly she would want to change. But without her maid?

“Yes, this is the room,” the woman said. “Thank you very much, Master...?”

“Sherlock,” I said with a quick bow. “Sherlock Holmes.”

Another dip of her head. “I will see to my mistress’s unpacking then.”

When she entered the room, I caught a hint of a spicy scent, reminiscent of Cook’s cinnamon buns. My stomach growled, and I moved to the stairs to join everyone for dinner. After descending a few steps, my—Meredith’s—bedroom door opened. I peeked up the stairs to see the maid step into the corridor and toward the servant stairs.

I wondered if she would need help finding her way to her quarters and was contemplating following her when Mrs. Simpson called to me from the first floor.

“Master Sherlock, dinner is served. They are waiting for you.”

After a final glance in the maid’s direction, I decided she would find it one way or another and made my way to the dining room.

Our family meals tended to be quiet affairs with polite conversation in the language of the day. In an effort for both Mycroft and me to become fluent in several languages, my parents insisted that table discussions occur in different tongues, depending on the day of the week. Usually, we would have spoken French for the evening, but in deference to our guests, English prevailed.

Uncle Ernest, often distracted and quiet, regardless of the topic, was more boisterous than I'd ever seen him. He and the colonel had a number of tales about life in India, to everyone's amusement.

My brother's behavior, on the other hand, was the exact opposite of our uncle's. Never had I seen him so taciturn. He barely greeted me, even though we hadn't seen each other since his arrival. In addition, he kept his head down, staring at his plate. Also out of character, he wasn't eating so much as pushing the roast beef about in the sauce. My brother never turned down second helpings, but today he hadn't even finished his first. Was he sick?

Halfway through the meal, I glanced at my mother to see if she had spotted his peculiar behavior. Her head was turned in the other direction, but I did catch Mycroft's gaze lift for a moment and land on Miss Meredith. When he caught my notice of his action, he returned to drawing patterns in the gravy with his fork, but I observed a dark crimson creep above his collar and form a bright spot on each cheek.

Was our guest's presence at the root of my brother's odd conduct?

A minute later, my suspicions were confirmed when she turned to me and said, "Your brother mentioned you will be going to Eton after the holidays."

Mycroft jerked in his chair as if someone had poked him, and had the question not made my own stomach contract, I might have laughed out loud at his response.

The very thought of returning to classes eliminated any remaining appetite. I'd only been in school a few weeks when my father had called me home because my mother had been accused of murder. During my time at Eton, I'd found the public-school experience most undesirable. I hadn't got along well with either the other students or our instructors.

I realized my contemplation of my future had gone on too long when she blinked at me, waiting for a response. I sought out the most positive aspect I could.

"I'm looking forward to joining the boxing team again."

"Boxing?" she asked.

"He's quite good, you know." Uncle Ernest spoke up from the other end of the table. "Taught him myself."

"But given his slim build, I thought it best to consider another method that would rely less on brute strength. And I wanted to learn as well. Hence, the *baritsu* lessons." Mother glanced at our quiet Japanese master. "I had read of the self-defense method and placed an advertisement in the London papers. Mr. Moto responded with quite excellent



references. I'll be sorry to see the lessons end, but he already has another engagement."

"Not that she has need of such practices," my father said, practically interrupting her. "It's more for the physical drills. Good for the health, you know."

"Quite a bit different from our times back in India, eh, Herbert? Needed to be in tip-top shape for a reason. Always some skirmish or another we had to put down back then."

Our guest shifted in his chair but gave an indulgent smile to my uncle. "You were lucky to leave when you did, Ernie. The rebellion was—" He glanced about the table and wiped his mouth. "It changed everything, you know."

"How do you see the shift?" Mycroft asked, speaking up for the first time. "Surely the government has a better grasp of the politics in that country than the East India Company?"

Colonel Williams glanced about before responding. "You might think so, but you have to understand, the *Company* had worked there for centuries. The government, on the other hand, has a different focus. Not always the most harmonious of relationships."

"If I understand things correctly," I said, "it was exactly a lack of understanding of certain customs that created the problems in the first place."

"Quite right, but now other instabilities exist," Meredith said. "The Russians are moving to the west and north, the Chinese to the east—"

"Imperialists, the two," Mr. Moto said, speaking up for

the first time. All heads turned in his direction, and he raised his chin slightly to meet our gazes. “The Russians, the Chinese, they *desire* my country too.”

Mycroft pointed his knife toward Father, obviously warming to the subject and overcoming whatever restraint he’d displayed to this point in the meal. “I’ve told you. The world is changing. While our focus has been on Europe, forces in other parts of the world are encroaching on various British holdings. We must be vigilant, spread our attentions wider.”

“Well said.” Colonel Williams rapped his knuckles on the table. “I’m quite impressed with your sense of world affairs. So good to see a young person with vision beyond what’s happening in Oxford.”

“He’s always had an interest in world affairs.” Mother straightened her back and glanced at Mycroft and me, bestowing a smile on each. “As you can see, both my sons are well-read.”

Aunt Iris cleared her throat at this point, giving a warning signal similar to her brother’s. “How would you compare the *weather* here to that in India. I trust you don’t find it too cold?”

With my aunt’s effort to keep conversations away from matters that might upset the feminine constitution, the topic drifted to the prospect of snow in the next few weeks.

Following dessert, the men moved to the library on the left, and the women, to the parlor on the right. I stood in the foyer and transferred my weight from one foot to the other,

considering my options. While I enjoyed my mother's company, with my aunt's presence, I knew the conversation there would most likely focus on some sort of female gossip, which my mother would tolerate for etiquette's sake. And according to my father's standards, I was too young to join those in the library. Mycroft had only been afforded the privilege in the past year. Under normal circumstances, I would have gone to my room to pursue my own interests. But at the moment, I had no room of my own. At this hour, Trevor might still be awake, and I had no desire to answer his endless supply of questions. I needed an excuse to keep him from talking.

My music.

As part of Mother's plans for entertaining everyone when Father's other sister and her family arrived, I had been practicing with Constance, the daughter of our steward's assistant, on a number of songs for the season. If I could sneak my instrument from the schoolroom without my cousin seeing me, I might be able to slip away to my uncle's workshop to practice.

While the plan seemed simple in principle, its execution wasn't.

The moment I stepped onto the third-floor landing, Trevor ran into the hallway, followed by his governess.

"I've been waiting for you. I saved some of my cake, in case you want it."

"I just came up for my violin. I was going to practice—"

"Can I listen? I promise to be quiet."

“I was actually going to go to the workshop—”

“Mother said as long as I was with you or Miss Bowen, I could go outside.”

I glanced at his governess, hoping she would assert her authority and require him to stay inside. Instead, she raised and dropped her shoulders. He probably tired her out as much as he did me.

“But you’re in your nightclothes,” I said, seeking some way out of this predicament. “And it’s cold outside.”

“I’ll put on my boots and coat over them. My boots are still by the back door. I’ll go get my coat.”

He was off before I could protest again, Miss Bowen running after him with the admonishment to put on socks and button the coat. It seemed impossible to say no to the boy. Even the governess appeared to indulge him. For a moment, I wondered if it made more sense to remain upstairs and practice there, but at least the walk to the workshop might convince him to return to the house.

I stepped into the schoolroom to retrieve my violin case and glanced about, recalling the maid’s presence in the area earlier. I observed no changes, but then, it was rather dark, the only light coming from the moon through the window. I picked up my case and returned to find Trevor now bundled in a coat, wool pants, and a scarf wrapped about his head.

“I still have on my nightshirt,” he said, his voice muffled by the knitted wool. “I just put on my pants over them like you did with your *baritsu* costume.”

His remark surprised me. Given his incessant talking, I’d

not been aware of any attention on his part. This observation of my attire indicated he was more aware of his surroundings than I'd given him credit.

The wind had picked up a bit and passed through the coat I'd donned at the back door. I prayed my cousin's wrap was warmer than mine. Aunt Iris would have my head if her "precious boy" caught a chill.

When we entered the workshop, I went straight to a table for a lantern. The moment light filled the space, Trevor gasped.

The workshop was a peculiar and, on the surface, quite disorganized space. Originally a barn, the high ceiling created a sense of openness, until one took in all the projects—in various stages of assembly, disassembly, or total abandonment—scattered about on numerous workbenches and storage crates. In the back, separated from the rest of the room by a folding screen, was a sitting area complete with some of my parents' discarded chairs, a low table, and a cot.

My cousin's interest, however, focused on the table at the edge of the lantern's ochre glow.

"Are those the mice? I didn't notice them when I was here earlier."

He rushed to the workbench, and I followed with the lantern. Several of the rodents scurried about in one wire cage. Other smaller cages housed single occupants, all on their sides and quite dead. A tag on each pen identified the plant my uncle had tested for poisoning. A notebook lay

open, with detailed notes on the poison, dosage, and any symptoms.

“I told you we were doing experiments with them.”

“But I didn’t know they would *die*.” He crouched a little to be able to study the dead ones at eye level. “I’ve never seen a dead thing before. At least not this close.” He wrinkled his nose. “They’re so *still*. Are they frozen?”

“It’s called *rigor mortis*,” I said and poked one with a pencil I found next to the notebook. “This one hasn’t been dead too long. Maybe three hours or so.”

After a moment more staring at the dead ones, he asked, “Shouldn’t we throw them out?”

“Uncle Ernest wouldn’t like it if we disturbed his things. Come this way. I’ll practice in his sitting room.”

Taking the lantern, I headed to the living area in the back. When he was deep in his experiments or other projects (he had a knack for developing weapons and explosives), my uncle might go days without returning to the house, preferring to catch sleep when he could on the cot. Trevor settled onto the settee while I arranged the lantern, fed some wood into the round stove near the wall, and tuned my violin. I decided to focus on one particularly difficult phrase in the Handel piece where the fingering was a bit tricky.

Trevor twitched as I started on the third attempt through the section. Only a few bars in, he said, “Is that all there is to it? It’s rather short and boring, if you ask me.”

“Please, I’m trying to concentrate.” I pointed my bow to

the front part of the building. “Why don’t you watch the mice? Just don’t touch anything.”

“How am I to watch them if there’s no light?” he asked, putting his hands on his hips.

I glanced up to the ceiling rafters. “Light a candle. There’s one on the table here.”

“I’m not allowed to use matches.”

With a sigh, I put down my instrument, set a candle on the workbench next to the mice with a little more force than needed, and lit it. “Now. Leave. Me. Alone.”

The boy blinked rapidly a few times, but he bobbed his head without another word.

I stomped back and continued my practicing. Halfway through my first effort, Trevor was by my side.

“I told you not to interrupt me.”

“But—”

“If you don’t quit bothering me—”

“But the horses.”

I paused. “What about them?”

“They’re making quite a racket. There was a fire once in a carriage house not far from our home in London. A horse was caught inside. It made a terrible sound. Can’t you hear them?”

Another pause as I listened. With the workshop now quiet, I could hear stomping and loud whinnying. While I doubted the barn was on fire, the disturbance was unusual.

I picked up the lantern. “Come along.”

Stepping outside, I studied the structure. No flames were

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visible. In fact, the darkened outline in the moonlight showed nothing out of the ordinary. With the horses still making a commotion, I crossed the wide space to the barn door at a fast clip and pulled it open without much thought. I shone the light into the building. Trevor caught up to me just as I illuminated a form on the barn floor.

A man lay face down in the straw-strewn earth.

My cousin drew in his breath.

“Is he...is he...dead?” he asked barely above a whisper.

I turned to him. Despite the lantern’s amber hue, I could tell he’d paled at the scene before us.

“I’m sure he’s just unconscious,” I said. “But we need help. Run back to the house and tell my mother to please come to the barn with her medicine bag. There appears to be an injured man here.”

He continued to stare into the building, his breathing rapid and shallow.

I stepped in front of him, blocking his view and spoke sharply. “Trevor. Go. Get. My. Mother.”

This time, he focused on me and nodded, taking two steps backward before turning and running toward the house.

As soon as he was out of sight, I stepped into the barn, closing the door behind me. For whatever reason, the horses had calmed, and I could focus on the man. Taking slow, steady steps, I approached the prone figure with caution, as if I expected him to suddenly rise and speak to me. No



movement came from the man, and my instincts told me he was no longer capable of any.

With a swallow, I placed my hand on the man's shoulder and gave it a little shake. No response. I placed my hand below his nose. No breath passed across my palm.

He was most certainly dead.

Having decided he was beyond hope, I studied the area about him, searching for any sign of how he died.

No blood was visible on him or the ground. Any additional search would require my moving him.

My stomach roiled. Living in the country, one often had opportunities to come across dead animals. I'd been hunting enough to have even caused the demise of more than one. But I'd never touched a dead *human*. Of course, I'd touched the man briefly, but to check if he were still alive. It was altogether a different situation knowing the man was no more. The vicar, I was certain, would feel compelled to say or do something to show some sort of respect for the man. I could conjure no such words, and I had only a few more moments before everyone would arrive and my opportunity to find any hint as to what had happened would disappear.

I touched the man's shoulder again and jerked it back as if burned. Even through the jacket, I could still feel the man's warmth, as if he were only asleep.

Licking my lips, I put my hands on his shoulder and forearm, took a deep breath, and pulled hard to turn him onto his side, to expose his face. I confirmed I didn't recognize the man. His odd pants were also quite visible. Much

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more colorful and loose than those worn by any of the laborers or others in the area.

Gypsy pants.

But a quick glance at his hands didn't suggest the nomadic tradesmen. The backs were too smooth. His collar in front was pulled—or pushed—down and revealed white skin underneath. Like Colonel Williams, he had been out in a sun stronger than that found in England but wasn't born with the olive-toned skin of the Romani. And while his face had a stubbly beard, it also lacked the length or fullness I associated with those who had passed through our village.

Whoever the man was, he wasn't as he appeared.

My next thought was to go through the man's pockets to see if their contents would provide some information. Blinking twice, I prepared to touch him again. I raised my hand but stopped as the sound of running feet—many more than just the pair of one person—approached the barn.

I spun about and stood next to the dead man to await the others.

To my surprise, Colonel Williams entered first. He stood just inside the entrance and stared around him, studying the darkened corners outside the circle of lantern light. Father, Mr. Moto, and Uncle Ernest followed him. The colonel's wary stance must have put them all on alert. Instead of rushing to the body, they formed a line across the door and studied the area as well.

Mycroft's absence was immediately apparent to me, but I decided he might have volunteered to stay with the

women. With the exception of my mother, none of them came into the barn. Mother pushed through the men and knelt next to the body, placing her valise of medical supplies next to her.

After a very cursory inspection, she rocked back on her heels. “I had no need to bring my bag. He’s quite dead.”

“I’ll send Simpson for the constable and the surgeon.” Father turned to go in search of our steward.

“I don’t see the need for the surgeon,” Williams said. “If he’s dead—”

Father spun back around to face our guest. “A death has occurred. As justice of the peace, I need to assure protocol is followed. I suppose I should also stay here to make sure nothing’s disturbed.”

He glanced about, I assumed to identify someplace to sit. Nothing immediately stood out to me other than the floor. The image of my proper father, dressed for dinner, sitting on the stable’s dirt floor would’ve made me laugh had the situation not been so gruesome.

Rising, Mother said, “I’ll bring some refreshment and join you, perhaps a blanket as well.”

We all moved to the door, preparing to return to the house, when a scream compelled us outside and toward two struggling figures. Father had had the forethought of grabbing the lantern as he exited and now held it high to illuminate the area.

I wasn’t the only one to gasp when we saw Miss Meredith’s maid squirming in Mr. Simpson’s arms.

“Caught her whilst she was running away,” he said.

In the light, the saffron skirt of Miss Meredith’s maid appeared less bright but still quite recognizable under a traveling cloak. While she continued to struggle in her captor’s grasp, the cloak’s hood fell back to reveal her head and face.

Uncle Ernest stared at her.

“Susheela?” he asked, barely above a whisper.

The woman froze, as did the rest of us.

The colonel was the first to move. He stepped to my uncle’s side and placed a hand on his shoulder. “No, old friend,” the soldier said. “Not Susheela. Her daughter.”

Father’s gaze shifted between my uncle and the woman before turning to Simpson. “Let go of the woman and take a horse from the barn to fetch the constable and Mr. Harvingsham. Do *not* go near the body you’ll find there.”

Simpson released his grip on the maid, but only after giving her a scowl. With a nod of his head to excuse himself, he trotted off to the barn as if the notion of a body there was an everyday occurrence.

“I suggest we all retire to the parlor. I’m sure the constable will want to speak to us,” Mother said. “I’ll ask Cook to prepare some tea for everyone.”

Father nodded to us and turned back to the stables. The rest of us followed Mother toward the house—except for Uncle Ernest, who still seemed immobilized by the identity of Miss Meredith’s maid.

The colonel turned and spoke to him. “Ernie, old boy, come along. I’ll explain it inside.”

At that order, my uncle shook himself as if waking from a dream. The colonel waved a hand to send the two ladies and Mr. Moto ahead. He, my uncle, and I followed behind them.

At the back door, I glanced over my shoulder to the structure that now sheltered the second dead person to be found on our property in so short a time and sighed. After the problems my family had had resolving the last murder, I wondered if Constable Gibbons and Mr. Harvingsham, the surgeon, would be up to the task of solving this current death.