

THE MAN WHO FELL FROM HEAVEN: A Sherlock Holmes Mystery

By Frank J. Morlock

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CHARACTERS

Jack Clinton, a painter
Dr. Gerald Manly
Evelyn Manly, his sister
Nellie Ashford, a widow
Inspector Murray of Scotland Yard
Dr. McKay, a forensic pathologist
Sherlock Holmes
Dr. Watson
Mrs. Norton

Scene I. A sick room in Dr. Manly's home.

Jack Clinton lies asleep in bed. Dr. Watson is conferring with Dr. Manly.

Watson

Well, he'll be all right, I think. Nervous shock, a frail disposition, but I think, Gerald, there is no danger.

Gerald

That's my opinion, too, Dr. Watson, but since Clinton is my future brother-in-law, I thought it behooved me to get a second opinion. We aren't colleagues for nothing.

Watson

What an extraordinary occurrence, Gerald. I am not at all surprised at his reaction. I dare say I would have had a heart attack.

Gerald

What! After all your adventures with Sherlock Holmes. You must have the nerves of a mountain lion.

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Watson

Yes, but I've been prepared for my adventures beforehand. I've never had a dead body drop through a skylight in the middle of a horrendous thunder storm.

Gerald

Yes, a most hair raising event still poor Clinton was not exactly a model of fortitude.

Watson

You say he's an artist?

Gerald

Yes. Pretty good, if I am any judge. And he actually makes a living from it.

(Enter Evelyn, a lovely young woman in her early twenties.)

Evelyn

Ah, Gerald, dear. And Dr. Watson. How is he?

Gerald

Dr. Watson has confirmed my diagnosis nervous shock, nothing more. In a month your fiancé will be fit as a fiddle.

Evelyn (looking fondly at Clinton)

Thank you for coming, Dr. Watson.

Watson

I could hardly do less, after all, Dr. Manly is an old friend.

Evelyn

I just don't see why a burglar would pick Gerald's studio to burglarize.

Watson

There's no predicting what criminals will do.

Evelyn

Well, falling through the skylight served him perfectly right. But, good God, it nearly killed Jack.

Watson

Well, rest is the best thing for him. Don't worry, he'll pull out of it.

Gerald

I think your opinion goes a long way to reassuring my sister. Evelyn doesn't believe me. I'm only her brother, doctor or not.

Evelyn

Oh, Gerald, you know I think you're the very best doctor there is.

Gerald

Anyway, Watson, let's leave the nurse to her patient.

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Watson

Frankly, with such a pretty nurse, I should contrive to remain sick, if I were Clinton.

Gerald (ushering Watson out)

Come along, Dr. Watson. I'm interested in hearing some account of your friend Mr. Holmes.

Watson

I haven't been to see Holmes lately

(Watson and Gerald exit. Evelyn goes about the room, opens the window, plumps the pillows for Clinton. Voice of newspaper hawker outside can be heard.)

Voice

Well known resident of Finchly Road lost in channel. Body not found. Read all about it. (fading) Well known resident lost at sea

Jack (starting up)

What was that?

Evelyn (alarmed)

Please keep calm, Jack dear.

Jack

"Body"? I'm sure I made out "body".

Evelyn

Lie down at once and be still, you bad boy.

Jack

Please tell me what's going on, Evelyn. Is it about the other night?

Evelyn

Heaven's no. That's old hat by now. No the latest sensation is that a man was washed overboard apparently and it wasn't discovered until the boat reached Ostend.

Jack

Oh who was it?

Evelyn

Robert Ashfield. Gerald knows him. Now, be still and try not to get excited. I've got the paper already.

Jack

I knew Ashfield, too.

Evelyn

How?

Jack

I painted his wife's portrait.

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Evelyn (taking up a newspaper and reading)

"A cablegram from Ostend was received at Dover early this morning announcing that on arrival of the mail boat, one of the passengers was found to be missing. There can be little doubt that the missing man was Robert Ashfield, of Leadenhall, and Coombs Hall, Finchly Road, the owner of considerable tea plantations in Ceylon and widely known in the city." It's a very sad thing, isn't it?

Jack

Yes. I believe I did his wife's portrait a year or so ago. An extraordinary woman. A real beauty.

Gerald (reentering)

Ah our patient is up.

Evelyn

The newsboys have been seriously disturbing poor Jack.

Gerald

Something astonishing has come to light.

Evelyn

What is it?

Gerald

The body that came through the skylight has been identified.

Jack

What? Who was it?

Gerald

That's the amazing thing.

Evelyn

What's amazing about it?

Gerald

The body has been identified as belonging to Robert Ashfield who was washed off the Dover boat.

Jack

But, that can't be possible.

Gerald

Of course, it can't be possible. It's a case of mistaken identity, I'm sure.

Jack

What a strange coincidence.

Gerald

Jack will have to be present at the inquest more's the pity. He's not so ill as to have an excuse for not appearing.

Evelyn

Gerald, I'm frightened.

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Gerald

Don't be absurd. There's no danger.

(There is a knock on the door. Gerald goes out and returns with Inspector Murray and Dr. McKay.)

Gerald

I will permit you to question him, but try not to get him too excited.

Murray

Certainly, Dr. Manly, certainly.

Gerald (to Clinton)

John, Inspector Murray and Dr. McKay would like to ask you a few questions. Are you up to it?

Jack

I'll do my best.

Murray

Good afternoon, ma'am.

Evelyn

Good afternoon.

Gerald

My sister Evelyn, and Mr. Clinton's fiancée.

Murray

Pleased to meet you, ma'am. Not to waste your time, sir, could we begin? You are a painter, I believe?

Jack

Yes, sir. An artist. Portrait painter, to be exact.

Murray

You're thirty years old?

Jack

Yes, sir.

Murray

And how long have you occupied the studio?

Jack

Oh, about two years.

McKay Can you describe it for us?

Jack

It's an old building set back from the road. I can't say how old. It's ideal for an artist. The models' retiring room is curtained off. The top light over it is in the center of the roof about six feet by four, and divided into separate panels.

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McKay

Can the skylight be opened?

Jack

I believe it can, but I have never done so.

Murray

How far is it from the floor to the skylight?

Jack

About twenty–five feet, I believe. There are two doors to the studio. The main entry opens on a vestibule. The vestibule, in turn, opens into the body of the studio. There is an entry in the back which opens directly into the models' room.

Murray

Were both doors locked during your absence?

Jack

Certainly. I came in through the front door and I had both the ordinary key and the latch key.

Murray

Can you say positively that duplicates of these keys have never existed?

Jack

I can't quite go that far. I've never seen a duplicate and never had any made.

Murray

The back door opens with the same keys?

Jack

No. The back door is opened with a separate key. The door is always locked from the inside. I never use it myself.

Murray

Where is that key now?

Jack

In the lock, I suppose.

Murray

Are you sure you did not take it away with you?

Jack

Possible, but I don't think so.

Murray

How long had you been absent?

Jack

I left town on Tuesday a week ago.

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Murray

It was known to your friends that you would be absent for several months?

Jack

They knew I would be gone a considerable period of time, yes.

Gerald

I told Clinton that he needed a rest. He's over-strained. He was to spend the summer in France.

Murray

What caused your unexpected return?

Jack

I got a cable about some important business, so I came back. It was late a terrible crossing because of the weather and I went straight to bed.

Murray

Where do you sleep?

Jack

Directly off the vestibule. I didn't go into the rest of the studio.

Murray

Did you fall asleep?

Jack

Yes. About one o'clock in the morning, I heard this tremendous crash and shattering glass. I got up to see what damage had been done, and I found this body in debris under a lot of glass.

Murray

Did you know the man?

Jack

No he certainly didn't look familiar. When I perceived that life was extinct, I must have fainted. Then I recovered and must have gone for the police.

Murray

You say "must have gone." Do you mean to suggest somebody else may have gone?

Jack

No. It comes back to me that I did speak to a policeman.

Murray (in a kindly manner)

It would help if you were a little more definite. Try to recall the exact course of events.

Jack

I fear I cannot. I was very exhausted from traveling. I did not even know at the time that I had hurt myself and I was quite surprised the next morning to find my hands and feet were so severely cut.

Murray

Were your feet unprotected?

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Jack

I believe I had slippers on.

Murray (pulling slippers from under his coat)

These?

Jack

Yes. The soles are cut through.

McKay

How is it you are able to state with certainty you were roused at one in the morning?

Jack

I really had no idea at the time. I deduced it from what I learned since.

Murray

Please try to be more careful. That sort of thing confuses the issue.

Jack

I'm sorry. I'm just trying to do my best.

Gerald

Really, Inspector you can hardly expect a person in his condition to answer with absolute precision.

Murray (drily)

Quite so, Dr. Manly. (pause) You have a man who acts as a caretaker?

Jack

Yes. His name is Elias.

Murray

What sort of company does he keep?

Jack

Really, I can't say. He is sober and reliable. He is a Methodist. I believe his intelligence is somewhat limited.

Murray (sharply, probably a Methodist himself)

I see no necessary connection between your last two remarks.

(Gerald guffaws and receives a savage look from the Inspector.)

Jack

I did not intend to suggest any.

Murray (not quite mollified)

Indeed! Well, if Elias had bad acquaintances, he might have communicated your absence to them, might he not?

Jack

I suppose it possible but I don't think he has bad acquaintances.

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Murray

Let me say, Mr. Clinton, that this case presents certain difficulties. The deceased was found lying across a chair. His head hung down and rested against the floor. You were brought back to the house by a constable. You had a coat, but no socks on. Your boots were not laced. The slippers were found in the bathroom with fragments of glass, wet with blood. Your hands and feet were badly cut. As for the deceased, his clothes were sopping wet. His face and head badly cut. There was no name on his watch. He had eleven pounds and some silver in his pockets. He had several handkerchiefs marked with the monogram "A". The deceased also wore an overcoat, but the maker's name was not on it. The frock-coat had, however, the maker's name intact. As far as the room itself was concerned it was undisturbed. Except that the key to the back door was not in the lock or anywhere to be found. We were able to go to the coatmaker who thought the coat had been made for Mr. Robert Ashfield a few weeks before. He later identified the body as belonging to Robert Ashfield.

Evelyn (exclaiming)

The man who disappeared from the Dover channel boat!

Murray

Precisely.

Gerald

It's a case of mistaken identity, that's all.

Murray

No. The body has been positively identified by several persons. It is hardly the most extraordinary aspect of the case. Dr. McKay, would you please give your report.

McKay

Certainly. I arrived on the scene after being summoned by the Constable. After satisfying myself that life was extinct, I proceeded to examine the body. I was greatly puzzled as to the manner of death.

Gerald

Why?

McKay

That water was running from his garments was not astounding considering the heavy rainfall. But the inexplicable part was that the deceased presented every indication of having met his death by drowning.

(There is a solemn silence.)

McKay

The whole body was completely cold. The eyes closed, the pupils dilated. There was a severe scalp wound on the back of the head, but serious though it was, it was not enough to cause death. The death was fairly recent, but not recent enough to have been caused by the fall from the skylight. These findings were confirmed on autopsy. The lungs were spongy and distended and contained froth. Finally, the stomach was full of water.

Gerald

What kind of water?

McKay

Salt water.

(Another long silence.)

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Gerald

Was there no other way death could have occurred?

McKay

No. He suffocated from drowning.

Gerald

What about the scalp wound?

McKay

It was not caused by the fall. It was caused by a blunt instrument.

Gerald

Well, this certainly seems to be a case for Sherlock Holmes himself!

Murray

There's no need to be flippant, Dr. Manly.

Gerald

I am quite serious, Inspector Murray. In fact, my colleague, Dr. **Watson**, who is Holmes' close associate, was here to examine Clinton less than an hour ago.

Murray (unenthused)

Indeed. You know Dr. Watson?

Gerald

Very well. And, as you know, he is Holmes' amanuensis.

(Murray looks irritated, but before he can say anything, there is a knock at the door.)

Evelyn (going out)

I'll see to it.

Jack

You say the body has been positively identified as belong to Robert Ashfield?

Murray

By his wife by his brother, by his business associates.

Jack

But, as I understand it, he was on the Dover Channel Boat earlier that night.

Murray

He was seen there, too, by his wife and

(Reenter Evelyn.)

Evelyn

Gerald, Mrs. Ashfield has come to consult you.

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Murray (surprised)
Mrs. Ashfield?

Gerald
I am the family physician, as chance would have it.

Murray
Would you ask her to step in? This may prove a fortunate coincidence.

Gerald
Certainly, if she is well enough.

(Gerald exits and returns momentarily with Mrs. Ashfield, and her companion, Mrs. Norton. Everyone rises except Clinton, who bows while remaining seated in the bed.)

Gerald
Mrs. Ashfield came to consult me because she had been unable to sleep. This is Mrs. Norton, her companion.

Murray
Mrs. Ashfield, I wonder if it would be possible for you to answer a few questions at this time.

Mrs. Ashfield
Certainly, Inspector Murray. I will do everything I can to help.

Murray
I realize it is rather soon for a second interview, but

Mrs. Ashfield
It's quite all right. I have a strong constitution.

Murray
In that case, please tell us again how your husband came to make this fateful journey.

Mrs. Ashfield
My husband told me he had business in Ostend. He told me about it on Saturday. At first he thought of going alone, but on Tuesday, it was settled we would go together. He went to the City that morning. About three o'clock I got a telegram to pack his razor. I met my husband at the Cannon Street Station he was very late and in a hurry. When we arrived at Dover there was no fog, but the weather was foul, and I was nervous to go on. So I sent the baggage to the Lord Warden hotel. I went on board with my husband for a few minutes. I actually stayed on the quay till the boat put out. Then I went to the hotel.

Murray
When did you first learn your husband was lost at sea?

Mrs. Ashfield
The next morning by cable.

Murray
Is it possible your husband went off the boat after you had gone to the hotel?

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Mrs. Ashfield

Not unless he was rowed ashore or the boat came back.

Murray

Was he a good sailor?

Mrs. Ashfield

I believe he was. He never complained of being ill at sea.

Murray

Do you have any idea how much money he had about him?

Mrs. Ashfield

I can't say. He was not likely to be short when taking such a trip.

Murray

Are you certain of your identification of the body?

Mrs. Ashfield (showing emotion for the first time, sobbing)

Absolutely.

Murray

There you have it. The boat pulled out at near midnight with Ashfield on board. Then sometime around one in the morning Mr. Ashfield comes crashing through Mr. Clinton's skylight. There was no train back to London after midnight and several witnesses place Ashfield on the boat.

Gerald

If we accept the conclusion to which we seem to be forced then we must question our beliefs in the established order of the universe.

(Silence. All stare at Gerald and no one speaks as the lights go slowly down!)

BLACKOUT

Scene II. Jack Clinton's studio.

Clinton is having tea with Mrs. Ashfield.

Mrs. Ashfield

You artists are such romantic beings to us poor average people. It is quite thrilling to be allowed to enter your workshops.

Jack

I fear you will miss the thrill. Thanks to Evelyn the place is more like a drawing room than what I am used to. My cherished tradition of dirt and disorder have been disenthroned.

Mrs. Ashfield

I almost feel as if I were usurping Evelyn's place. (pouring tea) Pity she can't be here. She is so sweet that one really can't see enough of her. Too bad she had to be with those tiresome people this afternoon. Don't look so horrified, Mr. Clinton. Evelyn told me herself they were horrible.

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Jack

Do I look horrified? I was doing my best to look sympathetic on Evelyn's account, of course.

Mrs. Ashfield

Of course, you look sympathetic. Please look sympathetic again for me, this time.

Jack (laughs)

Ha, ha.

Mrs. Ashfield

I was expecting a wan smile but you are so much in love that you cannot even spare that for another. Byron must have libelled men when he wrote: "Man's love is of man's life, a thing apart. The woman's whole existence."

Jack

He certainly stole it from the French which makes him a double criminal.

Mrs. Ashfield

I do not like coupling the word criminal with a name like Byron's. A genius can do no wrong.

Jack

Yes, much can be forgiven genius.

Mrs. Ashfield

Any crime. Much, too, should be forgiven to people who are the reverse of geniuses.

Jack (genially)

I am quite willing to forgive all such people.

Mrs. Ashfield

Do you know that I have persuaded Mr. Sherlock Holmes to investigate the mystery?

Jack

Really?

Mrs. Ashfield

He attended the inquest in disguise, of course.

Jack

It strikes me Sherlock Holmes is a bit of a humbug.

Mrs. Ashfield

I think so, too. But there's no denying his ability. He wants to see you.

Jack

Certainly. But I doubt I can tell him more than I told the coroner.

Mrs. Ashfield

I insisted he make an appointment. Otherwise, he might pop up in the middle of the floor. I shouldn't be surprised if he pretends he was hidden under your bed that terrible night.

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Jack

It would be convenient if he had been. I'm afraid, however, that even Sherlock Holmes may be forced to declare himself beaten by this case.

Mrs. Ashfield (glumly)

The inquest was very thorough.

Jack

Still the verdict was a little perplexing. "Found drowned." In the middle of London on dry land.

Mrs. Ashfield

It was the only possible verdict. The only possible conclusion.

Jack (wryly)

A miracle. Did I tell you that a minister wanted to preach a sermon in my studio?

Mrs. Ashfield

What have you done with it?

Jack

I rented it to a Circus. They're selling tickets of admission. Doing quite a business.

Mrs. Ashfield

How ridiculous.

(A knock at the door.)

Mrs. Ashfield

That will be the celebrated Sherlock Holmes.

Jack (going to the door)

I'll let him in. This should be interesting.

Holmes (entering)

I know you very well by sight, Mr. Clinton and I am very pleased to have this opportunity of making your acquaintance. What a great improvement this studio is upon your last.

Jack (annoyed at Holmes' one upmanship)

Did you pay sixpence, a shilling, or a half crown to see my old place?

Holmes

I am not in the habit of making useless outlays and so I took great care to pay my visit before the place passed into the hands of the showman. In fact, I was there the very morning after this well, curious corpse made its inconsiderate descent upon you.

Mrs. Ashfield

Would it be indiscreet to ask how you're getting along?

Holmes

By no means. To be quite frank, I fancy I'm beginning to see daylight. There are one or two vital points in the theory that I've formed that are still wanting and that's just the trouble. It's a devilish case.

Scene II. Jack Clinton's studio.

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Jack

So most people said.

Holmes

Not in that sense. It's just my way of cursing. But I know I am on the right track. I've never known my instinct to mislead me.

Jack

I presume you consider I can be of assistance to you?

Holmes

Obviously. Else, I should scarcely have the good fortune to be here now.

Jack (ironic)

You are most kind.

Holmes

You will understand that I cannot at this stage mention anything of the conclusions at which I have arrived. I merely wished to have a chat with you about your manservant.

Jack

About Elias? Well, I shouldn't be inclined to think any harm of him. He is rather a bore. He inflicts his little religious sermons on one and it is almost impossible to remain polite.

Holmes

I suppose that is when he poses? You see I am not unacquainted with your doings. I know you use him as a model.

Jack

I shouldn't be surprised if you knew my thoughts even when I'm sleeping.

Holmes

I don't mind being chaffed. But, I particularly want to know if you've noticed anything in his manner of late that has attracted your attention.

Jack

Well, he has struck me as cheerful unusual for one of his religious beliefs. Also, he looked rather well fed.

Holmes

In fact, as if he had been having more money to spend than before?

Jack

Possibly. But I have no idea where he gets it. The truth is, I generally ignore Elias.

Holmes

I'll tell you. He has been regularly employed in the afternoons by Mr. Cyrus Ashfield.

Mrs. Ashfield

My husband's twin brother.

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Holmes

Indeed. And it appears that Cyrus Ashfield, after grubbing along rather modestly for twenty years has suddenly developed energy as great as great, let us say, as that of his late twin brother.

Jack

But, didn't his brother leave him a good deal of money?

Holmes

One third of the estate. One third to Mrs. Ashfield and one third divided between the children of his first marriage.

Jack

Well that explains it. Why shouldn't Elias be cheerful?

Holmes

Yes. But why should Cyrus Ashfield hire Elias?

Jack

That is rather a coincidence.

Holmes

I am of your opinion. Well, I have taken enough of your time, Mr. Clinton. Oh, by the way, I had the honor of calling on Dr. Manly last night. I made the acquaintance of his charming sister. What delightful people they are!

Jack

Sorry I couldn't be of more help.

Holmes

On the contrary, my dear Mr. Clinton, this interview has been indispensable, indispensable.

(Holmes bows and leaves.)

Mrs. Ashfield (after Holmes leaves)

I think that man is a complete idiot!

BLACKOUT

Scene III. Jack Clinton's studio.

Jack is working on a picture. He is evidently not satisfied with it. There is a quiet knock and Mrs. Ashfield slips in.

Mrs. Ashfield

May I come in? Why, you look quite pleased and I was really prepared to find you looking black at being disturbed. You must be much more angelic than I gave you credit for.

Jack

I wish it were in my power to live up to your conception of me.

Mrs. Ashfield

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What charming modesty. But, go on painting. I suppose you can work and listen at the same time.

Jack (lightly)

I shall try.

Mrs. Ashfield

What I've really come about is to ask you to dinner tonight. The guest of the evening is to be Mr. Sherlock Holmes. Dr. Manly has promised to come. Evelyn is enchanted, and I am to give you her message that you are to be enchanted, too.

Jack

Only because Evelyn says so.

Mrs. Ashfield (with mock chagrin)

Oh, dear if I am to be so completely ignored as that, I shall feel merely as a woman just a little bit jealous.

Jack

It is really unkind of you, Mrs. Ashfield, to embarrass me with such a speech. Fortunately, I am convinced you do not in the least believe what you reproach me with.

Mrs. Ashfield

What is the use of denial when you see through me so thoroughly. What penalty do you impose on me, Sir Judge?

(Clinton stubbornly works at his painting.)

Mrs. Ashfield

What a terrible question I've put to you. I only just realize it. (pause) But, you will be wondering why this sudden reunion this evening.

Jack

You don't mean to say Mr. Holmes has

Mrs. Ashfield

He has not.

Jack

Then what has he done to deserve to be feted tonight?

Mrs. Ashfield

It's for what he's going to do.

Jack

But isn't that rather imprudent flattery?

Mrs. Ashfield

Oh, no. He's going to tell us his theories and explain his difficulties.

Jack

So. I misunderstood.

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Mrs. Ashfield

But enough of myself. Let me praise your picture for a change.

Jack

I had much rather you talk about yourself than praise my picture.

Mrs. Ashfield

Is my praise worth so little?

Jack

Again, you pretend to mistake my meaning.

Mrs. Ashfield

I plead guilty, Sir Judge.

(Pause.)

Jack

You have no definite plans?

Mrs. Ashfield

I have not made them definitely yet. I think I had rather praise the picture after all.

Jack (referring to the picture)

How do you think Evelyn has come out?

Mrs. Ashfield

She is just kissable! I suppose you will be setting to work on the last figure now.

Jack

Immediately that is imperative.

Mrs. Ashfield

Of course, you have a model coming in. Is she as pretty as Evelyn?

Jack

I fear she is not. That is, the one I have in mind. In fact, the girl is impossible.

Mrs. Ashfield

Oh!

Jack

I shall have to find someone else.

Mrs. Ashfield

But won't that delay ?

Jack

Yes, but there's no alternative unless

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Mrs. Ashfield

Unless?

Jack (getting it out with difficulty)

Unless you would sit for the figure.

Mrs. Ashfield

I shall be delighted.

Jack

It will have to be nude.

Mrs. Ashfield

I don't mind at all.

Jack

I

Mrs. Ashfield

Yes, Jack, dear

Jack

I'm afraid Evelyn might mind

Mrs. Ashfield

Well, let's not tell her. It will be entre nous. I shall expect you then before half past seven.

Jack (defeated completely)

I shall be punctual.

(Mrs. Ashfield leaves with an air of triumph. Jack slumps down with his head in his hands. The shadow of Sherlock Holmes appears by the window.)

BLACKOUT

Scene IV. Mrs. Ashfield's drawing room, after dinner that same night.

Holmes, Mrs. Ashfield, Clinton, and Gerald and Evelyn Manly are present.

Holmes

As I explained to Mr. Clinton, I took care to visit his studio before it had become a public recreation. But I had nothing there to help me. The only basis I had to work upon was the verbatim of the inquest. (pulling a pamphlet from his pocket) My idea was to subject this report to a searching examination. Early in the proceedings, the Coroner, who was very able by the way, considered the examination of Mr. Clinton's servant Elias of some importance, but later abandoned that line of inquiry. Now it struck me that here was a track that might be followed with advantage and so it has proved.

Jack

Nonsense! I beg your pardon. You must not take my exclamation literally. It was merely an expression of surprise.

Scene IV. Mrs. Ashfield's drawing room, after dinner that same night.

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Holmes (giving Clinton a cold look)

Quite a natural one, my dear, Mr. Clinton. I assure you, I take it as a compliment. But, to proceed. As you know, Mr. Clinton, Elias has been working for Mr. Cyrus Ashfield and now seems to be flourishing rather suddenly.

Gerald

All this is interesting but to what on earth does it point?

Holmes

In time, in time.

Gerald

I must confess that you make me feel quite thick-headed.

Holmes

Perhaps you will soon have an opportunity of exercising your ingenuity and raising yourself in your own estimation, Dr. Manly. (pause) But, I have not yet finished with the inquest. Would you care to read the passage I have marked, Dr. Manly?

Gerald (taking the manuscript)

Certainly.

Holmes

This is the evidence of the porter on duty at the wharf gate.

Gerald (reading)

The Coroner: You are perfectly sure you noticed who passed out?

Witness: Certainly, sir.

Coroner: You were not talking to anyone?

Witness: Only to No, sir; nobody in particular.

Coroner: Then, you were talking to somebody?

Witness: Yes, sir.

Coroner: How, then, were you able to observe so carefully?

Witness: I was only talking just for a moment, sir.

Jack

What is all this about?

Holmes

Have patience.

Gerald (reading)

Coroner How, then, were you able to observe so carefully?

Witness: I was only talking just for a moment, sir.

Coroner: To whom were you talking?

Witness: To Mr. Barham, sir.

Coroner: Who is Mr. Barham?

Witness: He's an aeronaut.

Coroner: An aeronaut?

Witness: Yes, sir.

Coroner: What was he doing on the wharf?

Witness: He only came for a chat.

Scene IV. Mrs. Ashfield's drawing room, after dinner that same night.

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Holmes

You see the significance of this, I am sure?

(Everyone looks helplessly on.)

Holmes

Undoubtedly, Barham was making a fool of the gate keeper. As for Elias, I do not think he was actively guilty. But I am sure he was in readiness to act if called upon and that he knew the crime was meditated.

Mrs. Ashfield

Crime! Do you suggest there has been foul play?

Holmes

I have no doubt whatever on that point.

Gerald

All this is indeed astonishing. Now, if you can explain the miracle away, I shall hold my head high once more. I never was so humiliated in my life as when, by ridiculing the affair, I gave Evelyn an opportunity of crowing over me which she did most unmercifully.

Holmes

I fear I have not yet succeeded so completely as that but I have got quite far enough to hold you out the hope of crowing over your sister in your turn. I am sure Miss Manly will not be too peeved with me for helping her brother.

Evelyn

I shall admire you tremendously.

Holmes

I must tell you further facts. One startling piece of news was that Cyrus Ashfield, the twin brother of the deceased was at Dover on the same eventful Wednesday evening in the company of the aeronaut Peter Barham.

Mrs. Ashfield

That is certainly a coincidence.

Holmes

This Barham makes balloon descents and takes passengers for a fee. Now finally, I learned that a full-sized balloon was observed, three days later by the Danish boat Horsa from Copenhagen, drifting across the North Sea. A long rope was suspended from the car.

Gerald

Incredible!

Holmes

All these facts have been established.

Mrs. Ashfield

I am beginning to be frightened of you.

Holmes

My dear Mrs. Ashfield, I assure you, I'm a perfectly harmless sort of mortal.

Scene IV. Mrs. Ashfield's drawing room, after dinner that same night.

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Jack

And you believe that somehow Ashfield was murdered drowned at Dover, put in the balloon which apparently blew out of control and discharged poor Ashfield on my skylight? Then the balloon blew out to sea

Gerald

It's totally improbable.

Holmes

I have not yet succeeded in constructing a perfect theory. The facts are suggestive but how exactly it could have been done, I am driven to admit, I don't yet know.

Jack

How long would it take for the balloon to get to London?

Holmes

According to the most expert calculations I have been able to obtain, about one hour.

Gerald

But, how the dickens did they get Ashfield off the boat? He was last seen on the boat.

Holmes

That is the damnable part of it.

Evelyn

Maybe this Barham fellow followed the boat in his balloon. Then he could have caught Mr. Ashfield with a grappling hook.

Gerald

Bravo, Evelyn! But, how would that have caused Ashfield to drown?

Evelyn (seeing the dilemma)

Oh, dear!

Holmes

I think your suggestion is impossible.

Gerald

I'm certain there's a simple explanation we're all overlooking.

Mrs. Ashfield

It certainly is tantalizing to feel oneself so evidently on track, yet to be utterly foiled in this way.

Jack

Is there enough evidence to arrest the brother?

Holmes

Cyrus Ashfield? No

Gerald

But the circumstances are so suspicious

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Jack

I have it. Splendid!

Evelyn

Jack has it!

Jack

Why, it's really simple. Cyrus Ashfield must have somehow lured Ashfield off the boat. Once off the boat, he could easily have been drowned, then set adrift in the balloon.

Holmes

That is an extremely brilliant explanation the only trouble is, Cyrus Ashfield spent the night in a hotel where he was seen by many persons before the time the Dover boat left with his brother.

Jack

Well, maybe Barham did the actual murder.

Holmes

Possibly. But we cannot prove any motive.

Jack

Money from Cyrus Ashfield.

Holmes

Good but so far, I am unable to prove that. There's one other possibility.

Mrs. Ashfield

What is that?

Holmes

That Robert Ashfield is still alive.

Jack

Then, who came through my skylight?

Holmes

Why, Cyrus Ashfield.

Mrs. Ashfield

Are you saying my husband murdered his own brother, and is now taking his place?

Holmes

It's a decided possibility. The problem is motive.

Jack

Why murder your brother so you can pretend to be him and inherit a third of what you already have?

Holmes

There seems to be no motive at all for Robert Ashfield to have wanted to kill his brother. It seems unlikely that the richer brother would be content to change places with Cyrus since Robert occupied a magnificent position, and his brother Cyrus was little better than a petty shopkeeper.

Scene IV. Mrs. Ashfield's drawing room, after dinner that same night.

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Gerald

There's no motive.

Mrs. Ashfield

Much as I respect your judgement, I don't believe a word of it.

Holmes

The trouble is, neither would a jury. There's a piece of the puzzle that's missing. When we find it, everything will fall in place.

Jack

But, will we find it?

Holmes

Who knows? I will do my best.

BLACKOUT

Scene V. Clinton's studio.

Jack is talking to Mrs. Ashfield who has just arrived.

Mrs. Ashfield

Dear friend, I hope you do not mind my coming to you so soon again. I always feel happy in this studio. By the way, I had a letter from dear Evelyn. I am sorry her brother's still so depressed.

Jack

Yes, he should never have gone with Sherlock Holmes to Dover. He needs a rest and now he's bothering his brains about this seemingly insoluble mystery. Once Gerald's mind starts puzzling him about something

Mrs. Ashfield

Yes, Gerald has a real intellect. Mr. Holmes has written me, too, about his theory.

Jack

And does he still hold by it?

Mrs. Ashfield

He believes eventually he will be able to determine how it was done.

Jack

Does he still think your brother-in-law is your husband?

Mrs. Ashfield

That's ridiculous. Cyrus, he certainly is and not Robert. I do hope it isn't true about Cyrus murdering Robert. I cannot believe he would do it.

Jack

You told me a while ago you had some idea of traveling. Have you decided?

Mrs. Ashfield

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I am in the same nebulous condition as before. And, as I have no real need to make up my mind I don't. How's the painting coming along?

Jack

Better since I started using you as a model.

Mrs. Ashfield

Do you know, I like being your model.

Jack

Do you?

Mrs. Ashfield

I believed all those silly romantic ideas of artists getting involved, shall we say, with their models. Very romantic.

Jack (strangled)

Do you?

Mrs. Ashfield (removing her clothes)

But you always behave with perfect decorum. What a surprise for the public who think something quite scandalous is going on? (suddenly, to Jack, who has turned away, after looking at her hungrily) Why do we keep up this meaningless fencing, this half hinting at our inner lives? I want to see ME growing under your hand. Why should Evelyn be here day after day and not I who love you! Why? And you feel the same. Conscience has made cowards of us both.

Jack

It's true. I've been a coward. It's a wonder we both haven't gone mad. **Evelyn** has felt the change in me. I can never make her happy now.

Mrs. Ashfield

Evelyn is too good. I love her myself. Even if you never see any more of me, you mustn't marry her unless you love her. She's too good for that.

Jack

Yes, she is far too good for that. But why do you talk of my seeing you no more? I must see you. I know Evelyn. Her nature is not like ours. She can bear pain with resignation.

Mrs. Ashfield

But, will she heal?

Jack

This love of ours is a divine gift. Shall we scorn it? Shall we regret it? Love is here with us now. Happiness is a precious thing, Nellie. Have we a right to cast it from us? Can we make such a sacrifice?

Mrs. Ashfield

Sacrifice! Sacrifice is for the strong. Let us both frankly admit we are not strong. (kissing him) Is it not delicious to be weak?

Jack

I have never loved anyone before. This this alone is the real thing.

Scene V. Clinton's studio.

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Mrs. Ashfield

I am glad my husband died, dear. Because it brought me you.

Jack

I have a confession to make.

Mrs. Ashfield

What is it?

Jack

I'm glad he's dead, too. Did you love your husband?

Mrs. Ashfield

No. He was kind and good and very fond of me. If you were very fond of me, I should kill myself. Five years of happiness that's all I want of life.

(Jack and Mrs. Ashfield embrace passionately. The shadow of Sherlock **Holmes** and then another figure appear briefly at the window as darkness falls.)

BLACKOUT

Scene VI. Clinton is pacing up and down in the studio.

It is late at night. Gerald Manly comes in.

Gerald

Hello, Jack.

Jack

Oh, Gerald your startled me.

Gerald

Sorry, old man.

Jack

Where's Evelyn?

Gerald

She's not feeling well. You look as if you were expecting someone.

Jack

As a matter of fact, yes. I was expecting Nellie.

Gerald

She won't be able to make it.

Jack

Is she sick?

Gerald

Scene VI. Clinton is pacing up and down in the studio.

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She's dead.

Jack

That's impossible!

Gerald

I was called in, but it was too late.

Jack

But how? I just saw her this morning

Gerald

Suicide.

Jack

No no. Not Nellie.

Gerald

I thought I'd better tell you myself. I know you've become involved with her.

Jack

I'm sorry, Gerald. I know you must feel I've betrayed Evelyn.

Gerald

Oh, never mind on that score. Do you have a drink? I could use one and so, I think, could you.

Jack

Yes, yes, of course over there.

Gerald (going to a cabinet and returning with Brandy and two glasses) I'll get them. (pouring Jack a drink) Here, now drink. (Jack drinks) That's a good fellow.

Jack (quietly, more composed)

How did it happen?

Gerald

She took poison.

Jack

But, why, why? We were planning

Gerald

She became despondent about her husband.

Jack

About her husband? But she loved me. I, I That's crazy.

Gerald

No, Jack. She realized that her part in the murder could no longer be concealed.

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Jack

Her part? What are you talking about?

Gerald

We Nellie and I, planned his murder.

Jack

You!

Gerald (laughing)

It was so simple, and it has given rise to such ridiculous nonsense.

Jack

You murdered Robert Ashfield?

Gerald

Jack, have you never suspected I was Nellie's lover? I rather pride myself it would have taken a shrewder man to suspect it. But, then I was never a hypocrite. All I did was keep it secret.

Jack (in shock)

You were Nellie's lover?

Gerald

We became friends dear friends after I became the family physician about two years ago. She cared nothing for her husband. She absorbed all my philosophy she grew to fear neither God nor the Devil. I alone made her life livable. I did all in my power to dazzler her yet, she wouldn't admit she loved me. Of course, she yielded her body to me willingly enough.

Jack (his head in his hands)

She never told me! Never!

Gerald

The fact is, Nellie was not always truthful. She worked me up to it killing her dolt of a husband, I mean. She couldn't stand being tied to a man of so bloodless a disposition. She hated him. He was driving her mad with his boring kindness. At last an insidious thought came to both of us. At first we hardly dared speak of it. But if you want ideas to master you, resist their first approaches. The idea grew and grew. Then one day, she said "Rid me of him." Rid her of him: I was quite ready.

Jack (unbelieving)

You murdered him!

Gerald

Murder is a vulgar word. Don't be enslaved by tradition, Jack. You must look at reality. Nellie is a remarkable woman. Would the world be the worse off for the loss of a nonentity who differed in no way from thousands of others. His place could easily be filled.

Jack

I think you must be mad.

Gerald

Not unless it is madness to want to live with the woman you love. Anyway, we waited our chance. Immediately

Scene VI. Clinton is pacing up and down in the studio.

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after you left London our chance came. Robert Ashfield announced his intention of going to Dover. So you remember how I came to your studio before you left for France?

Jack

Certainly. To say goodbye.

Gerald

And to pocket the key to the back door to your studio. You see, I had decided where I would do it.

Jack

But, Ashfield was drowned at sea.

Gerald

We'll come to that. That is the best joke of all. You see, Ashfield never intended to take Nellie with him. But he did ask her to purchase the ticket. She bought two tickets.

Jack

Why two tickets?

Gerald

Two tickets. Then she told everybody she was going to Dover with her husband. Nobody would doubt that.

Jack

Yes but still

Gerald

Ashfield, of course, never left London at all.

Jack

But, how ?

Gerald

I met him on his way to the station, and insisted that he come with me to your studio.

Jack

To my studio? But, how were you able to get him to break a business engagement so easily?

Gerald

I showed him a love letter Nellie had written to you.

Jack

But she didn't write me any letters at that time. We hardly knew each other.

Gerald

But, how was poor Ashfield to know that? I told him Nellie was your lover and that you were planning a tryst that very night in your old studio. I insisted we go there to surprise you both. The poor man was thunderstruck docile as a lamb.

Jack

But, how did you explain how you had got the letter?

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Gerald

I said Evelyn had found it. After all, she was your betrothed.

Jack

Good God.

Gerald

And the writing was certainly genuine. So he came along. And when I got him there, I killed him.

Jack

But he drowned.

Gerald

My intent was to stun him and let him bleed to death. I thought he would be dead two months before you returned.

Jack

It was pure luck that I returned.

Gerald

Yes. I could hardly foresee that New York would make such a large offer for your work that you would have to return. Anyway, to get back to it. I seized him as soon as I got in the house, and we struggled for some time. As it happened we ended up in the bathroom. For some reason there was water in the tub.

Jack

Elias was always forgetting to pull the plug.

Gerald

He begged me not to do it. But I remembered Nellie, and how happy we were to be and I hardened my heart.

Jack

But, the coroner said he drowned in sea water!

Gerald

Yes, that amazed me too at first. That was the biggest farce of all. Then, I understood it. You will remember that when you persistently refused to leave England, I recommended as the next best thing that you take a hot bath with artificial sea salt added.

Jack

But Ashfield was seen on the boat!

Gerald

I accompanied Nellie to Dover. It was simple enough to answer to Ashfield's name and then slip off the boat.

Jack

And Cyrus Ashfield and Barham the aeronaut?

Gerald

Pure coincidence. We made our plans without consulting poor Cyrus, and had no intent to involve him. It took Sherlock Holmes to do that. Mr. **Holmes**, you see, has made a mystery where none existed.

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(Holmes and Watson step out of the shadows.)

Holmes

The only mystery, Dr. Manly, was how to get you to confess because you had, more by accident than design, created the almost perfect crime.

Gerald

How did you guess?

Holmes

Well, I examined deceased's correspondence, with his wife's permission. I took the liberty of examining Mrs. Ashfield's correspondence as well, without telling her.

Gerald

And you found?

Holmes

Several love letters to her including one from you.

Gerald

Ah!

Holmes

From that point on, naturally, I knew what had happened, but proving it was decidedly difficult if one of you did not confess.

Gerald

Well it seems I underestimated you, Mr. Holmes. My apologies.

Watson

I should never have believed it, Dr. Manly, if I had not heard it from your own lips.

Gerald

Sorry I'm such a disappointment to you, Dr. Watson.

Holmes

It only remains to add the denouement. After all your efforts to secure Mrs. Ashfield for yourself, she became enamoured of Mr. Clinton.

Gerald

Yes it seems I committed the perfect crime only to benefit my rival and ruin my sister's happiness. And so, I told Nellie I was going to confess.

Jack

And Nellie committed suicide.

Gerald (bitterly)

I only meant to bring her to her senses! I knew she was posing nude for you and I knew to what end she would bring it.

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Holmes

It must have been a great disappointment for you, Dr. Manly.

Gerald

I didn't think she would do anything so foolish. Nellie was a noble creature I tell you, Jack, she was good through and through. She told me she loved you and she begged me to release her from her promises to me. If she concealed the past from you, it was only because she wished to begin a new page of existence.

Watson

Did you ever suffer from remorse?

Gerald

So far as the deed itself was concerned never. Let the mob talk of murder, and let them glorify men like Napoleon who kill by the thousands. I destroyed but one. However, the gods are even with me if you must put a moral on it. The murder turned out to be utterly useless. The only thing I regret is my intense satisfaction at the time. I was free, I was happy, I was in love. Put not your faith in the heart of a woman, Jack! How could I foresee you would rob me of my Nellie?

Jack

I never intended to do it.

Gerald

Poor old fellow, you don't imagine how you have made me suffer but I never bore you any ill will for it. I must tell you Evelyn has never suspected anything at all. You can go back to her. She merely felt a little disquiet. Evelyn is a good girl. Sometimes it is best not to be too clever. Cherish her and be happy.

Holmes

I am afraid, Dr. Manly, that you will have to accompany us to Scotland Yard.

Gerald

Oh, no. I've a precaution against that. I wanted Jack to know. But, I prefer not to hang. (biting poison) You see, I came well equipped.

(Dr. Manly collapses; Watson runs to him.)

Watson

Cyanide!

Gerald

Goodbye, dear fellow. I die happy knowing I shall be resolved into raw dust. As for my cynicism, which you have always refused to take seriously be assured that I am in earnest about it. (dies)

Watson

He's dead, Holmes.

Jack

How will I tell Evelyn?

Holmes

Ah, Mr. Clinton, that is a mystery I am glad I am not obliged to solve.

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CURTAIN