

Prologue

It was the first Friday in September of 1898. A day of relaxation and very little excitement that would be forgotten and pushed into the profundities of memory but would one day come rushing back like a wave upon the shore. A massive wave that would flood the mind with the memory of an event and an overheard conversation: A wave, which would leave its mark upon the sand forever.

The time was five-o'clock that Friday evening when Mr Sherlock Holmes returned to his hotel in Chatham after attending a performance featuring a mezzo-soprano by the name of Lady Duprey. Just two days earlier, he had been looking into a possible case.

Holmes was seated in the main area of the hotel, casually observing the behaviours of the guests and reading the local paper when he overheard an argument between the desk clerk and a young man.

"I've got you now, you thief!" cried the clerk.

"I don't know what you're talkin' about," replied the young man, who looked to be about eighteen.

"You know very well what. You were throwing rocks outside the other day. You broke my window and stole money from my box."

"If you will excuse me, sir," came a woman's voice. "I don't mean to interrupt, but I'm afraid you are making a mistake. This young man is quite innocent."

Holmes folded his paper down and glared up to find the woman's voice belonging to Lady Duprey.

"I am sorry, Lady Duprey, but what do you know of this? You

couldn't possibly know of this matter. He's guilty and all the facts lead to it. Look at his attire and how he behaves."

"I am afraid your facts have led you in the wrong direction. The true facts are right in front of you, but you have failed to notice them. You are looking for a young girl, around six years of age, sticky fingers, a keen eye, and—dark hair, yes—and quite use to taking what she needs, to survive. A gypsy girl, I believe. I have seen one about."

"That's absurd!" declared the clerk. "What makes you say such, madam?"

"The facts!" she spat aloud. "Your glass was broken just below the door knob, which suggest someone very short who needs to reach from under, and not over, in order to reach the lock and unlatch it comfortably. If the person were tall, save four feet at least, they would have broken the pane from above. The latch is roughly fifteen centimetres above the knob."

"Nonsense, madam!"

She ignored him and continued on while Holmes listened intently to the conversation.

"Secondly, the footprints in the gravel and the yard are very small and of a girl's shoe. Shoes that are too large and very worn, I might add. The toe is hardly visible even from where she ran. The weight is mainly focused on the middle and back of the shoe. Therefore, the shoes are too large. There are also some traces of dirt on the edge of the door and the glass panes with little handprints. A little gypsy girl has broken in and stole your money."

"Now I've heard everything," blurted the man. "You are a woman who sings and is very notable for your voice, but you are not the police nor a detective. I'm afraid I just cannot take your word on this. I know what I know, and he's guilty."

"Please! I didn't do anything!" proclaimed the younger man. "Please, miss, don't let him call the police! I swear I'm innocent!"

"I am sorry. I have said all I can." She then turned to face the clerk. "It is a pity that this young man must suffer because you refuse to see all the facts."

The clerk spoke as Lady Duprey began to walk away.

"How dare you, madam!" He voiced, "Are you accusing me of being dim?"

She immediately turned and retorted, "I do dare, and no I did

not say you were dim; I merely said you fail to notice what is directly in front of you. The man who sees all is blind because he only sees what he wishes to see, whereas the man who is blind sees all because he hears what the other fails to see. After you have the wrong person arrested, you may wish to venture outside and look about. Have a *pleasant* day.” Lady Duprey spun about, grabbed the daily paper, and was off.

Holmes sat in thought, as he turned round in his chair. His brows drew down, in concentration, before he gazed up upon the broken pane at the rear door. His eyes gleamed with anxiety and excitement as he leaped up and pounced to the door to examine and put the lady’s theory into practice.

He scoured the ground like a hound and snatched his magnifying glass out as he studied the prints. At that moment, there was a faint sound from behind the bushes. Holmes twirled around to see a little gypsy girl running away. His mouth had lightly fallen open in astonishment of his findings. He swiftly turned his head back towards the hotel lobby.

“By Jove!” he uttered, as his brows knitted down, once again.

Holmes darted through the door and rushed to the desk clerk.

“Ah, Mr Holmes! How may I help you?”

“Lady Duprey. Where may I find her?”

“I am sorry, sir. She just checked out. She was in a hurry. I don’t know where she is headed. She usually does not leave so quickly after a performance,” replied the clerk.

“And you don’t know how I may find her?”

“No, sir. She never leaves her personal information. No one even knows her full name, for that matter. Never asked. She’s quite well known around these parts, for her music. Most everyone trusts her. The ones that know her.”

“Well, apparently not you,” Holmes blurted.

“I don’t follow?”

“No, of course not. Good day, sir.”

Holmes had retreated to his room to pack and prepare to catch his train back to London and return to the comforts of his old quarters at Baker Street.

“Ah, Holmes! I trust your case went well?” inquired his old friend, Watson, while reading the morning paper and enjoying a cup of coffee at the table.

“Oh, yes. It was a very simple one. The police were quite able to

handle the entire ordeal. Everything was taken care of in two days. It was hardly a case of any interest. However ...”

There was a pause of silence. Dr Watson was curious, so he spoke out.

“Ah ha! You said however. Therefore, *something* exciting happened. Pray tell, dear fellow?”

A faint grin came to his lips as he sat in his chair and turned towards his long-time friend.

“Have you ever heard of Lady Duprey?”

“Let me think. Oh yes. Is she a mezzo-soprano? I haven’t seen or heard her, but I’m told she has a very unique voice.”

“Ah, but not as unique as her mind.”

“How so? I take it you have met her, then?”

The faint curl upon Holmes’s lips grew into a generous grin.

“Well, not face to face. I did attend her performance, and I was at the same hotel.” He grasped his pipe, lit it, and cocked his eye in Watson’s direction with a smile as the pipe remained between his lips.

“Come on, Holmes. You have a story behind all this, and I’d like to hear it,” he urged.

“Very well. I shall not bore you with all the details, but I must admit to being quite intrigued and baffled at the same time. The desk clerk accused a young man of breaking the glass door and stealing money. After I examined the door, I knew he had not.”

“How does this fit in with Lady Duprey?” Watson continued with his coffee.

“I was first reading the paper when I heard her arguing with the clerk that the young man had not done the crime. He argued back saying the evidence was plain in sight. She countered back with a list of the obvious facts she had noticed. She stated that the glass was broken below the knob; therefore, the person in question was not the man but a child: a little gypsy girl, to be exact. She continued on that the girl would be roughly the age of six with dark hair and worn shoes.”

The doctor pulled his cup from his lips and laughed.

“You must be joking, Holmes. How on earth did she ever come up with that?”

Holmes did not laugh but merely glared at his colleague.

“I am not joking, Watson. There was more information that she gave. The clerk dismissed her idea and sent for the constable. I found her details so compelling that I decided to go outside and put her theory into practice. There were tiny handprints and footprints from a girl’s shoe, rather worn. Anyone tall would have broken the glass above the lock to reach it and not under. And then, there she was, running behind the bushes. A little dark-haired gypsy girl of about six.”

Watson was so taken aback that he froze in place with his cup centimetres from his lips and his mouth wide open. He did not know how to respond. He sat his cup down, never looking at the table, and made his way to the chair across from Holmes. There, he sat in disbelief as he stared at his friend. Finally, he spoke.

“Holmes, that’s impossible!”

“My sentiments exactly. Or so I thought,” said Holmes, over his pipe as his eyes remained fixed upon his friend. “I have no answers as to how she was able to come to such a conclusion. Unfortunately, I was unable to speak with her. She promptly left from the hotel within minutes. The clerk could not tell me why she left so hurriedly or even how I could contact her. Quite a narrow-minded fellow, I might add. Oh well. *C’est la vie*. One cannot dwell on what has past. I suppose this little ordeal shall have to remain a mystery to the both of us.”

Holmes knocked out his pipe, leaned back, and closed his eyes.

“All true, eh?” Watson asked, still in disbelief.

His friend gently nodded and replied, “Yes. All true.”