

Chapter 3

The local police descended upon this tragedy posthaste and put off our requests for assistance. They had not been informed of our arrival or indeed of who we were; they merely regarded us as “men of interest in the crime.” By turns I pressured them into granting us an audience with their captain. It was explained in due time that the captain would get in touch with us.

“Let us simply get nourishment while we wait,” Holmes stated. “Could you gentlemen be so kind as to recommend a place?”

The lead officer replied, “I believe you will find that Becket’s will provide you with both a very tasty meal and some refreshments.” He kindly called a cab, which took us to Becket’s.

No sooner had we entered the establishment, than we heard a ruckus and observed many people running to the kitchen area. We caught a glimpse of several people running away from the establishment along the shoreline but as it was beginning to get dark outside, we could only see movement. Holmes and I hastened to follow this unusual movement, but alas, the building blocked our path and we were only able to determine that three people ran into a waiting boat that took off easterly in great haste.

Oshkosh’s finest were again on the scene in a most timely fashion and this time the captain was there as well to meet us. The captain recognized Holmes and me and greeted us with great respect, asking how we happened to be in his city. Holmes filled him in on the professor’s contact and how it came to be that this most famous detective was in Oshkosh. The captain was most grateful and asked for his help in solving the professor’s death.

Holmes readily agreed and asked what was currently going on in the city. I watched this exchange with curiosity, as Holmes had not delved into the current situation as I had expected him to.

The captain explained that Oshkosh was a very dynamic city known as the hub of the art community in the region. Furthermore, there were storekeepers that carried the highest quality of goods, which are envied, throughout the area. Currently, there was a consortium of fine jewelers hosting the Waugoo Diamond tour, which had caused quite a stir. “I imagine that is what the professor had asked you over here for,” the captain surmised.

Holmes was getting quite impatient with the good captain’s rhetoric as this was common knowledge and the professor had already shared it with him. He tolerated this commentary to continue for a brief period before interrupting with “What was going on in this fine eating establishment when we arrived?”

The captain dismissed this as some hungry beggar trying to steal food, that the chef chased him away before he could take anything. “There is nothing more to be done here,” the captain announced.

Holmes asked if he could talk to the chef and upon receiving approval from the genial proprietors, Kris and Sarah, went into the kitchen. There he found a very upset man muttering to himself and chopping vegetables with gusto. As Holmes approached the chef, I took the opportunity to look around the kitchen and its environs.

Holmes approached the chef and asked with a keen interest, "What happened here?"

"They were after my prize white truffles that I planned to use in my signature dish for the grand dinner celebrating the Waugoo Diamond," the chef answered.

"Did you see the person responsible?"

"No, but I swung my cleaver at them and I think I cut one of them."

"Where did you see them?" Holmes asked.

"Over by my storeroom where I keep the elite foodstuffs for special occasions. There were two of them but I could not see their faces. They were all covered up."

"How did they escape?"

The chef pointed. "Through the delivery door, but it can only be opened from the inside."

"Have you told the police this?"

The chef shrugged. "What was the use? They think it was someone hungry."

"And you do not?" Holmes asked sharply.

"I do not," the chef affirmed.

"Why is this?"

"They did not take plates of food that were already prepared but went to my special storeroom as if they knew what was there."

Holmes looked the chef in the eye and said very quietly, "This is very important: How would they know you had special foodstuffs at this time?"

"Possibly because we have been chosen to provide the meal for the main celebration of the Waugoo Diamond and we are known for our special presentations and unique tastes," the chef answered proudly.

While Holmes was digesting this information, my attention was captured by something I thought he should examine. "My dear Holmes," I exclaimed. "I have found something I think you need to see." With that, I took him to the exterior of the building and showed him the pry marks on the delivery door and multiple footprints in the area of varying sizes. There were some filings on the ground along with drops of blood leading to the riverbank. Holmes said, "Well done, Watson, but there is no trail in the water to follow, so our work is just beginning."

Chapter 4

Holmes and I finished our fine meal as we gleaned details of the professor's death from the fine captain. The details of the death were as follows:

The professor died from blunt trauma to the head with his own walking stick.

There were many people around him but no one saw anything unusual.

A lady who owns a coffee house nearby heard some shouting about a jewel and "Where is it?" approximately the same time of the incident.

There were no fingerprints on the walking stick.

The professor had been known to be controversial in the past but had not received any death threats that the police were aware of.

Holmes took all this information in. His sharp eyes revealed nothing but I knew him well and could only imagine how he was processing this information. He considered all of this for a short time.

“Put into plain words, in your opinion is there a diabolical link between this diamond, the professor’s death and the incident at Becket’s?” he asked the captain.

“I am not sure,” replied the captain, “but I would appreciate it if you could assist in the investigation.”

Holmes turned to me and said, “Well, our next stop is to see the coffee master that overheard the shouting.”

I told him that she owned the Lakeshore Coffee House on Main Street.

“Well done, Watson,” spoke Holmes. “Let us go and find her posthaste.”

As we made our way down to the coffee house, I asked Holmes why we were going in the back way, to which Holmes replied, “This city is quite unique in that the good shopkeepers have provided the citizens with multiple entries into their shops. So if there is a blockage in one entrance, they can still frequent the shop by entering in another.”

“Oh, that seems like an elementary business plan to me,” I replied with a smile. Holmes gave me a withering glance.

As we entered the enclave of the coffee house, Holmes and I glanced around and saw it was home to many establishments including boarding houses. I was just about to enter the coffee house when Holmes stopped me and pointed to a small brick wall at the end of the enclave where a foot stuck out. We cautiously went to investigate and saw, to our amazement, yet another body lying crumpled in a fetal position. Holmes sent me to notify the good captain while he looked around for clues.

Officers started arriving and took over the scene, moving the body randomly. One of the officers recognized Holmes from the professor’s scene and thought him to be a person of interest in this crime scene as well. Before the officer could act on his thoughts, the captain arrived and went into conference with Holmes and me. Holmes pointed out to us the following details: The area was dark with very limited entrance to the small brick wall. The wall itself was quite particular just standing there but did conceal the body to all but the most observant. The body was lying on its left side with a large puddle of a dark substance trailing down the belly of the victim. There were no weapons noted in the area nor did it look like a struggle; it looked more like a collapse. Without the puddle of dark substance, one would think this person was simply sleeping.

Holmes, the captain, and I entered the coffee house to interview the owner, Mistress Deb, on the professor’s death as well as this most recent happening.

The captain stated, “You must know that this is a very law abiding city and we have few major issues. Yet in one night, we have two deaths to investigate along with other unusual happenings.”

“Could it be the curse of the Waugoo Diamond starting?” I asked.

Holmes and I noted the look of fright on the otherwise pleasant face of Mistress Deb, who came to greet us.

Introductions made, Holmes made quick work of getting the information he needed from her. As Mistress Deb poured us a cup of her special brew to take the chill of the night away, she stated, “I heard several loud voices talking about the jewel. ‘Where is the cursed jewel? Who has the real jewel?’ and then I heard the professor shouting,

‘Leave me alone, you cretins,’ and then I heard nothing. I just assumed they were arguing over the diamond. But I was hoping they were not talking about my coffee.”

Holmes asked Mistress Deb where she was at the time and she stated that she had gone into the enclave to water her plants, which was only a few blocks from where the professor met his demise. She did not recognize any of the voices except the professor’s, as he had come into her establishment many times. She denied seeing any disturbances in the enclave nor had she noticed the body near the wall.

Once she had answered all of Holmes’ questions, he asked one more. “You made a reference of hoping they were not talking about your coffee. What does that mean?”

Mistress Deb replied, “It is my own creation and people are always after it. I call it my jewel blend. I only blend it for special occasions and it is a secret that has been handed down in our family.”

Despite the jolt of the coffee I had recently sipped, I was unable to suppress a loud yawn. “It has been a very long day for us with the travel and all,” I quickly apologized. “Is there perhaps a place that we could bed down for the night, as we were going to stay with the professor?”

Mistress Deb asked the captain if there were rooms available over her competitor coffee house that we could use, as she would feel safer with us close by until this mess had been resolved.

The captain replied, “I do believe that Master Aaron has some spare rooms upstairs of the New Moon and you will be very comfortable there. He is a fine man and a pillar of the community. I will meet you for breakfast and update you on our latest victim.”

Chapter 5

Morning arrived and we found ourselves much refreshed. As we entered the New Moon establishment for breakfast, I noticed that Holmes appeared more reflective. The seclusion and solitude of the evening had proved very beneficial to his intense mental concentration. It would be during this time that every nuance of information was sifted and resifted, weighed and measured against all possible theories, and alternative theories he could devise would be examined, and finally he would determine which pieces of evidence to date were important and which were not.

Master Aaron greeted us warmly and showed us to a table where the captain already was seated. The captain wasted no time and began to share the information of the evening as follows:

The enclave where the body was found was called Beckwith Alley, although it is not marked as such. There are entrances to many establishments from this alley. It is rumored that the victim, a young man in his early 20s, was employed by one of the businesses with such an entrance. This business, House of Heroes, dealt in new and antique reading material. The victim had recently moved into the city and did not have any criminal history. Cause of death was rapid blood loss related to a serious cut on his arm, which severed an artery. He appeared to be running very desperately according to his footprints and then suddenly changed to walking tiptoe down the alley until he collapsed where he was found.

“We will be talking with his employer when they open this morning and I would appreciate your coming with me during the investigation,” the captain told us. Holmes readily agreed and signaled Master Aaron over to place his order and strike up a conversation with him.

I have often seen Holmes interrogate people in such a conversational manner that they revealed much of themselves without ever feeling like they were being pressured. Master Aaron was a young, energetic man who ran an established coffee house with excellent food. He was very involved with his clientele and was respected within the community for keeping confidences that he had overheard. Holmes asked him if he was aware of the happenings within his fine city over the past 24 hours and he replied in the affirmative. Holmes then asked if he knew the name of the man they had found in the alley and Master Aaron stated that he believed it was young David Spillane.

“He was a pleasant enough man who often came in for lunch and evenings,” Master Aaron told us. “He kept to himself but recently he had met several gentlemen and a young lady who joined him, but he did not look happy in their company. I did not know them and have not seen them since. We do a very brisk business here but I make it my business to know my customers and keep a respectable place.”

Holmes leaned into Master Aaron’s shoulder and whispered, “Pray tell, I know that you could have overheard something that may help us solve this mystery of what happened to David. I would keep your confidence and greatly appreciate any assistance you can give me. For indeed there are strange goings on in Oshkosh at this time.”

Master Aaron stepped back, looked Holmes in the eye for a period of time, and then said, “I heard some talk of a jewel that may not be a jewel but truly is a jewel.” This did not make much sense to me and at the time I wondered if they were talking about a group that plays here some evenings called Jewels for the Queen. David, now that I ponder on it, occasionally played the piano for this group and was quite good. The older gentlemen that was with them considered himself a gourmet and always asked what was in my soups. He loved my soups and called them jewels. The players used that word quite freely and it was an unusual word to use. I do take pride in my soups and only use the freshest ingredients. I used a selection of spices of my own creation which I will never share although I did feel a great deal of pressure from this gentleman to do so. But I always refused. There was something about him....” Master Aaron trailed off.

Holmes asked, “Is it common for your guests to be so mysterious and demanding?”

“No sir,” Master Aaron answered, “and I wish I could share more about this gentleman but he just gave me a feeling, quite unlike most of my customers, and I was glad when he did not come back anymore. Although I did feel like I had not seen the last of him.”

At this, the captain interrupted, “Gentlemen, I feel that we have gotten off the trail so to speak and as it is currently opening time for House of Heroes I suggest we go there now.”

Holmes replied, “On the contrary, I think we are particularly hot on the trail and Watson here knows of my methods much better than you do, but I fear even he has not quite grasped the significance of these findings. But let us take our leave and we can return later.”

Chapter 6

As we walked down the Main Street of this fine city, I had to confess to myself that I hadn't seen a connection to any of the incidents we had observed and I was feeling quite bereft. We arrived at House of Heroes and upon entering I was taken back to my boyhood days. Oh, the wonders I saw! Instantly, I was 10 years old again, lying in front of the fire with my beloved comic books, reading the adventures of Ivanhoe, King Arthur, and others. Rapidly I returned to the present when Holmes observed my longing and asked, "What do you think of this, Watson? Don't you think it is an interesting place?" I knew that Holmes had never read a comic book in his life but he still knew their value and how highly collectible they were in certain circles.

We walked to the counter and introduced ourselves to the owner, Master Scott, who was reserved and somewhat wary of Holmes and me but totally at ease with the captain. Holmes immediately took over, asking Master Scott if David Spillane did indeed work for him.

"Yes, he has been here for several months," Master Scott answered. "In the beginning, I could not have asked for a better employee but recently his work has suffered and he was often absent."

"When did you notice the change in him?" Holmes asked.

Master Scott thought for a moment before replying, "About a month ago, he received a letter and since then his behavior changed but he did not want to talk about it."

"Do you know what the letter said?"

"After David read it, he ripped it up and threw it into the basket, but one day when I was emptying the it I noticed pieces of words and I attempted to put the letter together. I do love to do puzzles and usually am quite good with them."

"Do you still have the letter?"

"I was unable to put the whole letter together, but I do have some of the words. Let me look for them in this drawer."

Master Scott pulled out a piece of paper where he had pasted some torn words and letters in a random sentence. The words were jewel, Soo Line, First E, rare, valuable and Wa. He had put together sentences from the destroyed letter which stated, "You need to help us as we helped you when you needed it. You have been there and we will be there shortly." But there was nothing more, no signature, no date, nothing.

While it was interesting, I thought it was futile to continue with such little data but Holmes said, "This is my special hobby and these words, letters and sentences tell me a great deal. Tell me, Master Scott, do you know the difference between an Archie comic book and a Fantastic Four comic book?"

Master Scott looked surprised. "Of course!"

"Well," continued Holmes, "I bow to your expertise in the field of comic books, but this is my field and what you have found are indications. Although utmost pains were taken to remove important clues, the writer still left enough information to determine that the letter was written by an educated man who wished to pose as an uneducated one, and his efforts to conceal his own writing suggests that he may be known to you."

"We are coming now rather in the regions of guesswork," said the captain.

But Holmes replied, "I would say rather into the region where we balance probabilities and choose the most likely. It is the scientific use of the imagination, but we always have some material basis on which to start our speculation. Now you would call it a guess but I am almost certain that this letter was written in a hotel."

"How in the world can you say that?" exclaimed the captain.

"If you examine it carefully you will see that both the pen and ink have given the writer trouble. The pen has spluttered twice in a single word and has run dry three times in the short sentences, showing there was little ink in the bottle. Now a private pen or ink bottle is seldom allowed to be in such a state and the combination of the two must be quite rare. But you know the hotel ink and the hotel pen, where it is rare to get anything else. We must begin checking the hotels in this area to see if we can find a similar pen."

As Master Scott looked again at the words, he commented that the flourish of the pen was similar to one he had used at the local bookstore when he was taking writing classes. The owner of Apple Blossom Books preferred to furnish all needed supplies for her students.

"Now Master Scott," asked Holmes, "is there a piece of business that David could have been monitoring from this establishment?"

"We have many rare comic books as well as other state-of-the-art reading materials. It could be anything and I am expecting an exciting shipment within the fortnight. Ironically, it is arriving on the Soo Line train."

"Isn't that the only train into the city?" I asked. For it was the train we arrived on as well as the professor.

The captain told us it was the only reliable train, but that there was another freight train that ran daily through the city. "Hmm," he continued, "the Waugoo Diamond is also arriving on the Soo. Do you think that is what they were after?"

"Difficult to say at this point," stated Holmes. "Perhaps we should start visiting the jewelers in town that are bringing in this jewel."

He turned to Master Scott, asking if anything of interest had happened to him lately.

"Why no, Mr. Holmes, I think not," Master Scott replied.

"You have not observed anyone following or watching you?" Holmes pressed.

"I seem to have walked into the thick of one of my dime novels," Master Scott answered. "Why in thunder should anyone follow or watch me?"

"We will come to that," stated Holmes. "You have nothing else to report to us before we go into another matter?"

"Well, it depends on what you think worth reporting," said Master Scott.

"I think anything out of the ordinary routine of life is well worth reporting," Holmes replied as he walked to the door. "Just remember, no matter how foolish the incident may seem, it may be what we are looking for."

Chapter 7

"Tell me, Captain," asked Holmes, "which jewelers in this consortium are to bring the diamond into Oshkosh?"

"We have many establishments in our beautiful downtown that sell jewelry," replied the captain. "Our ladies do tend to like the better things in life and our gentlemen

do like to spoil their ladies. We have three major establishments in our downtown. The first is Thimke's Jewelers, which is owned by Master William and run quite efficiently by Mistresses Jean and Patty. The second is Bergman's, which is owned by Mistress Beth, and the third is Reimer's, which is owned by Master Paul and Mistress Lauri. There is another establishment that isn't quite a jewelry store per se but does handle exquisite jewelry, and that is Great Estates, owned by Master Michael."

I became very confused with all of this as I expected one or mayhap two fine jewelry stores in a city of this size. I asked the captain where he would start. He replied that the newest member was Bergman's Fine Jewelry, which was right across the street, so we decided to start there.

As we entered the storefront, we observed a woman at the back of the shop, whom the captain told us was Mistress Beth, hurriedly saying goodbye to a disheveled character. Upon seeing us, this character hurried his steps even faster. Mistress Beth came to the front to greet us and appeared to be a bit flustered. Her fair cheeks were flushed and her pulse was somewhat fast. I was quite surprised to see a female who welded and forged beautiful things using equipment often thought to be only used by men.

The captain asked Mistress Beth about her involvement with the Waugoo Diamond and she became very animated, saying how excited she was to actually see this magnificent jewel. She had only read about it and together with the other jewelers they were able to actually bring this beautiful jewel to Oshkosh so others could also view its beauty. The captain then asked if she believed in the curse, to which Mistress Beth gently laughed and said that only fools believe in curses.

Holmes asked her about the reasons for her relocating to the downtown and she replied that this was a rich environment for her talents and she was excited to be in such company as her peers.

Holmes then asked Mistress Beth about the gentleman in the rear as we were coming in and she stated that he was just someone who was looking for a job but she had none to offer. She quickly changed the subject to the arrival of the Waugoo Diamond and the celebration that was scheduled to take place for this honor. Holmes surprised all when he requested our leave and if we could perhaps exit through the rear as it was closer to our next destination.

We had exited the jewelry shop only a short distance when Holmes gave a little cry of satisfaction, and following the direction of his eager eyes, I saw a cab with a man inside which had halted on the other side of the street but now was proceeding slowly onward.

"There's our man, Watson, come along! We should have a good look at him if we can do no more."

At that instant I was aware of a scraggly white beard that one could say was an overgrown goatee, wild, bushy white hair, and piercing eyes that were turned upon us through the side of the cab. We rushed to follow but the cab was too far ahead and there was naught to do but to stop.

"Who was that man?" I asked

Holmes replied, "I have no idea, but that is the man that was in the shop with Mistress Beth and I am not sure if he is either a benevolent or a malevolent in this charade, but I sense that he is important."

Chapter 8

Onward to Great Estates to meet with Master Michael, who was waiting for us and had just finished one of his famous estate jewelry auctions. He was known to deal with precious and semi-precious jewelry and Holmes was eager to meet with him. Upon entering Great Estates, we found the owner frantically opening boxes and ripping through the contents, only to go to the next box and repeat this process. So engaged was he in this activity, that Master Michael was unaware that one of the world's most famous detectives and his assistant were in his shop.

After a short time of observation, Holmes loudly cleared his throat, which prompted Master Michael to turn around posthaste with a worried look on his face.

"Can I be of service, gentlemen?" he asked, pulling himself together.

Holmes introduced us and asked if we could be of service, as he appeared to be in somewhat of a distressed situation.

Master Michael replied, "I have just returned from a successful jewelry sale at a market next to Becket's and I am missing one of my most prized cartons."

"Do you have a listing of the contents of the missing carton?" asked Holmes.

"I do somewhere. Let me look at my ledger on the desk." He took his leave to the rear of the building while we remained at the front. We heard a loud, "Help! Oh my goodness, help!" and we rushed to the sound of the cry. Entering the office, we found a single, motionless figure lying stretched out on the floor with sightless eyes staring up at the ceiling. It was a man in his mid-forties, of medium height though broad shouldered, with crisp, curling black hair, a short, stubby beard and dressed in a heavy broadcloth frock coat. His hands were clenched with his arms thrown abroad, while his lower limbs were interlocked as though his death struggle had been a grievous one. On his rigid face there was an expression of horror and it seemed to me to be one of hatred. I have never seen such a terrible contortion. Combined with his human features, he proved to be quite frightening. I had seen death in many forms but never had it appeared to me in a more fearsome form.

Holmes knelt down and quickly examined the cold corpse.

"There is no wound nor any blood present," he spoke as his nimble fingers flew everywhere over the corpse. Finally, he lowered his head and sniffed the man's blue lips and nodded to himself. When he arose, he told Master Michael to notify the authorities immediately.

"What could the cause of death be?" I asked Holmes.

"Trust your instincts, my dear doctor. This is relatively elementary. As I searched his pockets, I found a calling card with the name of David Spillane."

Master Michael returned and said the police would be here momentarily and then he looked at the corpse himself. When Holmes asked if he knew the man, he replied, "He was one of the men I hired to transport my jewelry from the store to the particular marketplace for sale. I have used him in the past and found him to be strong, reliable and very trustworthy. In fact, I believe he has a brother who sits on the city council. How could this have happened here? I have had many sales without incident and I always felt that this city is very safe. This is most troublesome to me."

Holmes asked Master Michael for a listing of the missing items and he cautiously walked around the body, opened a desk drawer, and produced a bill of lading that indicated the following: gold watch No. 97143 by Barraud of London; gold ring with Masonic device No. 87245; gold pin bulldog head with ruby eyes No. 48982; Russian pin with emeralds and diamonds No. 36872; Spanish choker studded with pearls No. 32980. Holmes directed Master Michael to have the captain find him with further information regarding this poor soul and left word that we were going to continue our quest to the other jewelers in the city.

Chapter 9

As we walked the few blocks to Reimer's, Holmes walked as in a sleepwalking mode, which was not unusual for him as he often did some of his best deductions while walking. His bright eyes betrayed the sharp mind that was putting the puzzle pieces together. I myself enjoyed the brisk walk, looking around this city which was new to me. A most enjoyable place I saw, beautiful buildings, friendly shoppers, and a lovely assortment of goods available from the most gracious of shopkeepers. All of this remained unchanged despite recent events.

A most pleasant storefront awaited us just doors from one of the most delicious smells in the world: chocolate. Now I must confess that I do love my sweets and enjoy my high tea's sweets much more with chocolate than other treats. But I digress and must continue with our task.

As Holmes introduced us to the proprietor, Master Paul, and his lovely wife, Mistress Lauri, he paused and looked very closely at Master Paul and said, "Do I not know of you?"

Master Paul gave a charming laugh and said, "I do recognize you as well, Sir, as the most decorated of all detectives. Yes, I was formerly the Queen's jeweler prior to her Diamond Jubilee and all of the issues that happened during that time. I found that it was better for me to bring my lovely family to the colonies. We have been here for several years and I have found Oshkosh to be just perfect for me."

"Aha!" spoke Holmes; "I understand that you were cleared from the theft of the crown jewels but that they were never found. Is it through these former connections that you were able to facilitate bringing the Waugoo Diamond to Oshkosh?"

"Yes," said Master Paul. "Lauri and I have been working with Mistress Beth, Master Michael, and Master William to bring this magnificent jewel to the fine citizens of the city. Never have any of these wonderful people seen a jewel such as this. In fact, few people have seen it for a variety of reasons: the curse, the security involved, as well as the treats that go with such a magnificent jewel." He continued to speak of the elaborate security they had put together in collaboration with the owner of the diamond and felt that there was little to no risk in bringing the stone to Oshkosh.

"We have planned a great event to celebrate this showing with a grand dinner concocted by the chef from Becket's and a formal dance with music from one of our most famous orchestras, Dr. Kickbutt's Orchestra of Death. My fellow jewelers are presenting their most intricate designs and we are expecting the crême de la crême of Oshkosh's society to be here."

While Holmes carried on this conversation, I wandered around the shop and saw a particular necklace that caught my eye. It was an elaborate gold chain with rubies and

emeralds intertwined with strands of gold in a most unusual setting. Mistress Lauri came over and saw me looking at this piece of jewelry in a most puzzled fashion. She stated that it looked familiar because it was one quite similar to a necklace that Master Paul had created for the Queen before the incident. This particular necklace was so very familiar and yet I was unable to put my finger on why.

Holmes had finished his conversation with Master Paul and was exiting the building, when he looked over his shoulder and asked if I would accompany him to the next piece of the consortium. I knew that Holmes had, in a very remarkable degree, the power of detaching his mind at will and oftentimes preferred to be alone, so I asked only if he was up to my company. "I cannot think of anyone better to spend my time with," was his reply, so off we went.

Chapter 10

No sooner had we turned the corner than we heard a great commotion and yelling. We hurried and bore witness to a most peculiar sight. Two women were chasing a scruffy young man down the street screaming, "You blighter! Stop, thief!" One of the women was armed with an umbrella and the other with a long, dangerous-looking hat pin. The fire in their eyes bore witness that they did not suffer fools easily and that their intentions were serious.

Holmes and I quickly joined the race but the small young man was quite fast, had a very large lead, and when turning down Athearn Alley, seemingly disappeared into thin air. I myself was a bit winded after the chase but the two women were well into their stride and wanted to continue. Holmes talked them out of it and as a foursome, we returned to their place of employment to notify the police.

When we entered the Thimke's jewelry store, Mistress Patty looked at Mistress Jean (for those were the women's names as we had discovered) and said, "Oh my gosh, we forgot about William!" and they rushed into the back room. We followed and found said William lying on the floor holding his head and softly moaning. We helped him to a chair and Holmes asked what had happened.

Master William said, "I am not sure. I opened the door and as I turned around someone hit me on the head and all I heard was the tinkling of broken glass and then nothing."

Mistress Jean came with a cool cloth to put on her employer's head and said that she and Mistress Patty were coming into the shop when they saw a young man grab a necklace and run out the door, whereby they immediately took chase.

Holmes asked if they got a look at the man.

They replied that it had all happened so fast that they only saw he was of average height with longer brown hair and was dressed poorly. They had not seen him before nor anyone who looked like him.

Holmes asked Master William if he had seen anyone loitering around his building and he said no, he had not seen anything unusual since the Great Estates sale, which happened just down the street. At that time he saw a few men that he had not seen before who were unusual in appearance for this area of the city.

"And have you seen any of this type of men since?" Holmes inquired.

"No, I have not," Master William, answered.

"Have you seen anyone following you?"

“No.”

“Has the street been empty then?” Holmes asked sharply.

“Well, as far as I could see it was. There was a man leaning over the railing about two blocks down but he looked like he was incapacitated from a long night, if you know what I mean.”

“What sort of a man was he?” asked Holmes.

“I am not sure, just a man who looked like he drank too much.”

“His face, his type of dress—did you notice nothing?” Holmes broke in impatiently.

But Master William could not remember anything more than that. By this time, the women had called the local doctor, who was walking in the door to take care of his patient. Holmes turned his attention to the two women, who were assessing the damage to their jewelry case.

“What was taken?” asked Holmes.

Mistress Patty shook her head side to side and said very sadly, “It was a masterpiece that Master William was going to show at the grand ball in honor of the Waugoo Diamond. It was a necklace of rubies, emeralds, and diamonds set in white gold.”

“It was exquisite, simply exquisite,” added Mistress Jean with a sigh.

“Who knew it was here?” Holmes asked.

“No one,” the women replied in unison. And at that point, Master William joined the conversation, his head wrapped securely with a dressing. He assured us that he looked worse than he felt.

“I’ve just thought of something,” he said. “The other morning—oh a week or so ago—I was eating breakfast at the New Moon when that chap who works down the street a bit asked if he could join me and we were talking about the grand ball and the presentation of the unique pieces the consortium was making. The whole city is talking about this so I really didn’t think it was out of the ordinary.”

“*Everyone?*” Holmes asked incredulously.

“Yes, part of the grand ball will be the unveiling of each member’s contribution. One might call it a competition of sorts but the only prize will be the envy of the other jewelers.”

I could see that Holmes was filing this information away for future use.

Chapter 11

“Watson, my friend, the more I hear of this grand ball the more I think we need to know more about it. I am rather in the dark yet about just what is going on here. This is generally a law-abiding city with great citizens and great shopkeepers who work together, but suddenly we have three deaths, several burglaries, and who knows what else is going on.”

Our morning’s exertions had been too much for me and frankly I was tired out at this point. I am not used to such a frantic pace and chasing down hooligans is not my idea of a morning stroll. I wanted to return to my room for an afternoon nap. Holmes is quite the opposite, and often does his best thinking alone with just his mind for companionship. He looked at me closely and said, “My dear fellow, you look exhausted. Why don’t we part company for a bit and meet at Lakeshore Coffee House at tea time.”

After several hours' rest, I met Holmes at Lakeshore Coffee House for tea. He eagerly related to me the events of his afternoon constitutional.

When we had parted company earlier in the day, Holmes had continued his walk down the delightful Main Street of Oshkosh. He was walking slowly, mentally filing away the facts of the morning, when he looked up and saw the cab with the number that had whisked away the gentleman from Bergman's the night before. He hailed the cab, which stopped for him, and asked the cabbie to give him a tour of the city. As they started along the streets, Holmes initiated conversation by asking the man his name.

"My name is Clayton Casper, sir," the cabbie replied.

"Were you the driver of this vehicle last evening?"

"Yes, sir, this is my cab and I am the only one who drives it."

"Do you remember picking up a fare behind Bergman's Jewelers?"

"Yes, sir, but I cannot be talking about that fare, sir," he replied, looking surprised and somewhat leery.

"Pray tell why not, kind sir? My good fellow, this is a serious business and you may find yourself in a bit of trouble if you try to hide anything from me," Holmes informed the driver.

"Well, the truth of the matter is that this fare told me that he was an undercover detective getting the city ready for the Waugoo Diamond and that I was not to share anything about our ride with anyone."

"He said he was a detective?"

"Yes, sir."

"Did he tell you his name?"

"Yes, sir, he said he was a famous detective from England named Mr. Sherlock Holmes."

Holmes sat for an instant and then burst into a hearty laugh. *A touch*, he said softly to himself, *quite a touch. I feel that I have a foil as quick and supple as my own.*

With that, Holmes had the cabbie drop him off where he had left the other Mr. Sherlock Holmes, and found himself back at Lakeshore Coffee, where he was shortly to meet me for tea. Holmes told me that as he had sat waiting for me to join him, he indulged in a cup of tea and noticed Mistress Debra and another lady dressed in shopkeeper garb. They were huddled together talking very quietly and every so often one of them would glance up and look over towards Holmes.

After Holmes and I had our tea, he asked Mistress Debra who the lady was that was in earlier.

"Oh, that is Mrs. Elmer," Mistress Debra replied. "She is a friend of mine who owns a store down the street."

Holmes noted that Mrs. Elmer had looked a trifle upset, to which Mistress Debra said, "Her son hasn't come home from work yet and that is not like him."

With this piece of information, Holmes decided that he wanted to visit Mrs. Elmer at her shop and check out this son of hers. As soon as we entered Christensen's, I began to cough, sputter and turn red, for everywhere the eye went were women's underthings, from delicate lace to sturdy cotton. Holmes smothered a chuckle at my clearly uncomfortable response.

Standing behind her counter was the same woman that Holmes had seen talking clandestinely with Mistress Debra, and there was a young lad sitting behind the counter

on a stool. This lad was about 15-18 years of age, with brown hair, wearing brown breeches and a brown print shirt with a brown vest. He looked up and quickly looked away when he met Holmes' eye.

"May I assist you, kind sirs, in choosing presents for your ladies?" the woman asked.

At this comment, I began to sputter all over again and was barely able to inform her that we were investigating the recent incidents in the city. I asked if we could talk to her son who we had heard was missing.

Mrs. Elmer laughed and said, "I am not sure where you heard such a story. My son is a good boy; he works hard and saves his money. Takes right after his father, he does. My husband is on this good city's council and takes a great deal of pride in what goes on around here. We are several generations here in this city and contribute greatly to its growth. Why, we are so excited to have the Waugoo Diamond here in our city, and the ball, oh my—the ball will be ever so grand! I am not sure what I am going to wear as of yet, but it will be spectacular, I can assure you. Yes, quite spectacular," she said as an afterthought. "But my son, no, he has done no wrong and he is just on his way home to study for exams."

She continued, saying, "Another time, perhaps," and with that she sent her son out the door into a waiting carriage. As her son walked out the door, I noticed he had a slight limp, to which I inquired, being a doctor, and was told that he had sprained his ankle playing a game with his friends.

"Now, kind sirs, I have things to do and if you are not interested in purchasing goods, I must take my leave of you. Good day," Mrs. Elmer dismissed us. There was nothing more to achieve here so we exited the store, for which I was greatly appreciative.

Chapter 12

As Holmes and I continued our brisk walk down Main Street, I was filled with both confusion and an impending sense of danger. I glanced over at Holmes and saw that he was lost in thought, his mind assessing and reassessing the events to which we had been witness. I admired my friend his ability to do this. As for me, I considered the long, confusing sequence of events that had befallen us and wondered what kind of sinister influence was at work.

After walking several blocks, we saw Mrs. Elmer's son go into a building on the corner of the street, where we heard strange yet enticing music. We quickly looked at each other and knew our next destination—The Exclusive Company.

Upon entering the shop, music of all types assaulted our ears in a most enjoyable manner. We caught up with the boy and when he saw us he became very nervous.

"Don't tell Ma I was in here. Please, kind sirs, don't tell her," he begged.

"Why not?" stated Holmes imperiously?

"I am trying to make some extra money to buy her this brooch to wear to the grand ball, but she doesn't like me playing with the bands so much."

"Why not?"

"She thinks they are an undue influence on me, being so young and all, but they are just regular guys that they have some talent and make the sweetest music you can imagine," the boy answered.

“What is the name of this group that you are playing with?”

“Dr. Kickbutt’s Orchestra of Death,” came the reply.

“I beg your pardon. Did you say Orchestra of Death?” Holmes queried.

“Oh, kind sir, don’t be misled by the name,” the boy responded. “In the music business one tends to be a bit overstated to get the notice you need to succeed. Why, we are playing at the grand ball. My pa helped get us on the program. Why, if you don’t believe me, ask Master Derrick or Mistress Kate who work here.”

“I shall do that,” Holmes told him, “but I have a few more questions for you. Have you been in the vicinity of Thimke’s Jewelers lately?”

“No, sir, not even a bit close to that area of town, sir.”

“Are you sure? Not even by mistake?”

“No, sir. I am sure as I know my name, I have not been in that area.”

“You are a good son to want to buy a brooch for your mother for the ball. Is this a special brooch from one of the local jewelers?”

“No, sir, I cannot afford one that grand. This is such a grand pin of a bulldog with red eyes. She is awfully fond of the animals, my ma. We have lots of pets.”

“Where are you buying this brooch from then?”

“It is a place called AtomicKatz,” the boy answered. “May I go now, sir? I must practice or the band will not let me play with them and I do need the money.”

Mistress Kate came over just then and asked if she could put on a record for our enjoyment. Such a music store this was! Music of every genre known filled every nook and cranny of the store. I truly enjoy a string quartet and Mistress Kate told me I should see Mr. Derrick, who specializes in this genre.

As there were many young employees in The Exclusive Company, I asked Mistress Kate if she or any of her peers knew young David Spillane.

“Oh, sir, that is such a loss,” she exclaimed. “He was such a good man, such a kind man with such a good heart. We supped together a time or two and he was also friendly with Master Brandon who works here. They both had an interest in old books. I never understood why old books would make young men act so silly but they certainly did.”

“Is this Master Brandon available to speak with?” Holmes asked.

“No, sir, I am sorry he is not. He is currently visiting an ailing relative and is not expected back until after the Grand Ball. You do know we are having the Waugoo Diamond come into town, don’t you? Everyone is so excited. David had hinted at taking me to the ball but now I am not sure if I will be able to go.”

With that Mistress Kate became quite weepy, excused herself and left Holmes and me to continue listening to the music and discussing the finer points with Master Derrick. We ended this conversation with Mr. Derrick referencing what Darwin says about music, he claims that the power of producing and appreciating it existed among the human race long before the power of speech. Watson replied, Oh yes and that is why we are so subtly influenced by it. Holmes was growing bored with our rhetoric as he had other things on his mind and abruptly stated “Off to AtomicKatz!” and he exited from the store. I had to hurry to catch up.

The day had worn down and a slight drizzle had started, the type that chills a man to his bones and my bones were no exception. I was looking forward to a nice cup of tea by a fireplace, but Holmes was not in that frame of mind so we continued.

We walked into AtomicKatz and were pleasantly greeted by two women who were busy putting out wares. Clothing of all types was hung with care and a warm wool cape caught my eye. It was a lovely cashmere that I knew would warm me considerably. Holmes ignored all of the lovely goods and walked briskly up to the counter where he introduced us and learned Mistress Sandy and Mistress Debbie were the owners of this establishment.

“Good ladies, I have come here on a mission of utmost importance to a case that I am working on. May I ask you a few questions?” Holmes asked.

“Of course,” they echoed.

“We would be happy to help you out as much as we can,” Mistress Sandy added.

“Do you have a brooch of a bulldog’s head with red stone eyes?”

Mistress Debbie said, “Oh, yes sir, I can help you with that. I purchased it just recently from a poor lady who had had a bit of bad luck being a visitor to our city and all.”

As she procured the brooch from a shelf, Holmes continued with his questioning. “You say that she had some bad luck?”

“Oh, my good sir, we are a very peaceful city but this poor woman came in quite shaken. She was here from a faraway country visiting her uncle when she was accosted by some young men who stole her handbag containing all of her money and her train ticket home. To get another ticket, she had to actually sell some of her jewelry that she had on her person.”

“Where was her uncle? Could she not just contact him?”

“She said that he had left earlier and taken all of her luggage, but she wanted to sightsee a bit more and was going to take the later train. Poor thing.” Mistress Debbie shook her head sadly.

“Isn’t it a bit unusual for a young lady to be out on her own without an escort?” Holmes inquired.

“I thought so as well, but she assured me she has been a most independent soul all of her life.”

Mistress Sandy spoke up, “Didn’t she hint about a rendezvous with a young man that she met at dinner last evening?”

Mistress Debbie giggled. “I believe she did. Actually, a young man came into the store not long after she had left and was looking at the brooches. He asked if we had any dog brooches but as I had not catalogued this as of yet, I told him no.”

Holmes asked if either of them had ever seen this young man before but they had not, although they admitted that he did look somewhat familiar.

“Do you have the name of the young lady from whom you bought the jewelry?” Holmes asked.

“I do indeed. Let me check my ledger.” Mistress Debbie went into the office, retrieved the ledger, and returned with it. “Here it is. I paid \$10.00 for this brooch from a Miss Jewel Spillane.”

“Do you often buy jewels from unknown persons?”

“We buy estates from a variety of people, some that we know and some that just bring us quality goods that we purchase. We keep detailed records of our purchases and our books are always in order. We trust that the information they give us is accurate. We have both valuable as well as more common goods here.”

Holmes and I thanked the good ladies for their time and we took our leave. Holmes then turned to me and said, “My dear fellow, I am going to need you to meet with the captain and find out what progress he has made within this quagmire of events. I will proceed to Apple Blossom Books. I am interested in finding out more on this mystery writing class to which Master Scott referred.

“Let us meet tonight for dinner and perhaps we can combine our reports into something more useful. But a word of advice: Be careful, for I feel there is more danger than people think.” At this we parted.

Chapter 14

The sun had set and dusk was closing in when Holmes and I parted ways at AtomicKatz. I turned one direction to meet up with the captain and Holmes went the other direction to drop in on Dainty Daisies. He related the following facts to me when we met for breakfast at the New Moon the following morning:

“Mistress Michelle was tidying up her shop, getting ready to close, when I opened the door of Dainty Daisies. I introduced myself and asked how long she had had this charming store. She replied that she had been here off and on for the past several years.

“‘I find that I prefer the downtown to other areas that I have tried to sell my wares,’ Mistress Michelle told me.

“I asked if she was the only person working in her shop and when she answered yes, I went on to inquire if she felt it was a safe practice to be alone here. She laughed easily and said, ‘Oh my, yes. Oshkosh is a most safe place, especially the downtown. Yes, we do get the occasional stranger passing through but we shopkeepers look out for each other.’

“I continued my direct line of questioning by asking if she knew a Miss Jewel Spillane.

‘Spillane...Spillane... that name is somewhat familiar but I cannot place it. There was a lady in my store earlier today that wanted to raise some money very fast. She seemed quite eager to get money, as she said she needed to get away as soon as she could. As you look around, you see that all my goods are handmade. I do not purchase anything, but my friends who own AtomicKatz do, so I sent her there.’

“Did this lady seem like she was being threatened or frightened in any manner?

“‘Well, she just seemed to be in a hurry and kept asking if I was sure that I would not purchase anything from her. She said she had a few nice things but I really wasn’t interested and she did not show them to me.’

“Had you recognized this lady before?

“‘No, she was new to me. She said she was here visiting her uncle but that he was not here any longer and now she had to hurry and leave as well. Oh my, Mr. Holmes, I hope you do not find me rude, but I must take my leave and hurry home to my children. Tonight is a special night and I cannot be late.’

“As she took her leave, I stood on the sidewalk and looked around the city. I found it interesting how quaint and comfortable this downtown is with its many different shops, eating and dining establishments, how close and supportive the shopkeepers seem to be—but something is missing from this equation. And it is up to me to figure it out. As I glanced to my right, thinking that perhaps another fine dinner at Becket’s was in order; I spotted the Apple Blossom Book sign along with an OPEN sign. As my inquiries at Dainty Daisies had not taken nearly as long as I had anticipated, I decided I had time for one more stop before meeting you, Watson.”