

The Yellow Face



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SHERLOCK HOLMES

PART ONE

Sherlock Holmes did not like aimless physical exercise, but one spring day I persuaded him to go for a walk with me in the park. We walked for two hours, and it was almost five when we returned to Baker Street.

'I beg your pardon, sir,' said our page-boy, as we entered, 'there was a man waiting for you. He was a very restless gentleman. He walked all around the room saying, "Isn't Mr Holmes going to return?" Finally he left.'

'You see,' Holmes said to me, 'I needed a case, and now I have lost this one because we went for a walk in the park.'

'Hullo! That's not your pipe on the table. Well, that man must have a very big problem because he left his pipe. It is obvious that he likes this particular pipe very much.'

'How do you know that he likes it very much?' I asked.

'Well,' explained Holmes, 'I think this pipe costs around seven-and-sixpence. Now, look it has been mended twice with silver bands that probably cost more than the pipe itself. So, this man must like his pipe very much if he prefers to mend it instead of buying a new one with the same money.'

Just then, as Holmes was talking, we heard someone walking up the stairs, and then a man walked into the room without knocking.

'I beg your pardon,' said the man, 'I should have knocked, but I am very upset, and I need help.'

The man then took off his hat, and sat down on a chair.

'My dear Mr Grant Munro...' began Holmes.

Our visitor jumped from his chair. 'What!' he cried. 'You know my name?'

'If you want to preserve your incognito,' said Holmes smiling, 'then you should not write your name on the inside of your hat, or else you

should turn the inside of your hat away from the person whom you are addressing.'

'Anyway, my friend and I have heard many strange secrets in this room, and we have had the fortune to help many people. Please tell us the facts of your case.'

'The facts are these, Mr Holmes,' he said. 'I have been married for three years, and my wife and I were very happy until last Monday. Suddenly a barrier appeared between us, and she has become like a stranger to me. I want to know why. But, Mr Holmes, I am sure that my wife loves me.'

'Please let me have the facts, Mr Munro,' said Holmes, with some impatience.

'Effie, my wife was a young widow only twenty-five years old, when I met her. Her name then was Mrs Hebron. She went to America when she was very young and lived in the town of Atlanta, where she married a man called Hebron who was a lawyer. They had one child, but there was a yellow fever epidemic there, and both her husband and child died of it. I have seen his death certificate. After this tragedy, she decided to leave America, and come back to England to live with her aunt.

'I should also mention that her husband left her a large amount of money. This money was invested, and she can live very well with the income from it. She met me after six months in England. We fell in love with each other, and we married a few weeks afterwards.

'I am a hop merchant, and I, too, have a good income. We rented a nice house in the country near Norbury. There is an inn and two houses near our house, and a single cottage across the field in front of our house. Until this recent incident my wife and I lived very happily there.

'There is one more thing I should tell you. When we married, my wife put all her money in my name. I did not think this was a good idea, but she insisted. Well, about six weeks ago she came and asked me for some.

'"Jack," she said, "when you took my money you said that if I ever wanted some, I should just ask you."

'"Certainly," I said, "it's your money. How much do you want?"

"One hundred pounds," I she said.

"What for?" I asked, very surprised by the large amount.

"Oh," she said playfully, "you said that you were only my banker, and bankers never ask questions, you know."

I was not happy about this because this was the first time that there was a secret between us. I gave her the cheque, and forgot about the matter. It may have nothing to do with what happened afterwards, but I thought that I should mention it.

'Anyway, I told you that there is a cottage near our house. Well, I like walking past that cottage, and last Monday, as I walked past the cottage I saw an empty van going away from the cottage, and furniture in front of the cottage. Someone was finally going to live there.

I was looking at the cottage, when suddenly I saw a face watching me from an upper window. There was something strange about the face, Mr Holmes, that frightened me. I was not very near, but there was something unnatural and inhuman about the face. It was yellow and rigid. I walked closer to the house, but the face suddenly disappeared.

'Then I went to the door and knocked. A tall woman answered the door. I told her that I was her neighbour, and asked her if she needed any help.

"If we need any help, we'll call you," she said and shut the door in my face.

'That night I did not tell my wife about the strange face and the rude woman, but I did tell her that people were now living in the cottage.

'That same night something strange happened! In the middle of the night, when I was not completely asleep, I became aware that my wife was dressed and was leaving the room. She looked very frightened and nervous. I waited for about twenty minutes, and then she returned.

"Where have you been, Effie?" I asked as she entered. She moved back quickly with fright.

"Are you awake, Jack?" she cried with a nervous laugh. She told me that she had wanted some fresh air, but I did not believe her. What was my

wife hiding from me?

'The next day I had to go to the City, but I was so worried about my wife that I returned early to Norbury at about one o'clock. Walking home I went past the cottage. I stopped for a minute in front of it to look for that strange face. As I stood there, imagine my surprise, Mr Holmes, when the door suddenly opened and my wife walked out!

"Oh, Jack!" she said, "I came here to see if our new neighbours needed anything. Why are you looking at me like that? Are you angry with me?"

"So," I said, "this is where you went during the night?"

"What do you mean?" she cried.

"You came here. I am sure of it. Who are these people?"

"I have not been here before."

"I know you are not telling me the truth. I am going to enter the cottage and discover the truth!"

"Please, don't go in, Jack," she cried. "I promise that I will tell you everything some day, but if you enter now, you will cause great sadness." Then she held me tightly, and I tried to push her off.

"Trust me, Jack!" she cried. "You will not be sorry. If you come home with me, all will be well. If you force your way into that cottage, our marriage is finished."

"I will trust you," I said, "if you promise never to come here again."

'She was greatly relieved. Then as we started to leave, I looked up and there was that yellow face watching us out of the upper window. What link could there be between that creature and my wife?

'After that everything went well, but one day I returned home early. I discovered that my wife had been to the cottage again, so I went to the cottage. I walked into the house and found no one, but upstairs I found a comfortable room, and on the mantelpiece stood a full-length photograph of my wife. I am sure that our maid had warned them that I was arriving, and they all went away. That is why I didn't find anyone there.

'When I saw my wife again I told her that there could be no peace between us until she told me the truth. That was yesterday, Mr Holmes, and then I decided to come and see you for help.'

After hearing this strange story, Holmes sat silent for a few minutes, thinking. Then he said, 'Are you sure that the yellow face was a man's face?'

'Each time I saw it,' he replied, 'I saw it from a distance, so I am not sure.'

'When did your wife ask you for the money?' asked Holmes.

'Almost two months ago.'

'Have you ever seen a photograph of her first husband?'

'No, there was a great fire in Atlanta after her husband's death, and all her papers were destroyed.'

'And yet she had a death certificate. Have you ever seen it?'

'Yes, she got a duplicate after the fire.'

'Have you ever met anyone who knew your wife in America?'

'No.'

'Has she ever talked about visiting America again?'

'No.'

'Has she ever received letters from there?'

'No, I don't think so.'

'Thank you,' concluded Holmes. 'Now, go back to Norbury, and when you see that those people have returned to the cottage, call us. It will be easy to solve this mystery.'

PART TWO

Then Mr Grant Munro left, and Holmes and I discussed the case. 'I am afraid that this is a case of blackmail,' said Holmes.

'And who is the blackmailer?' I asked.

'Well, it must be that creature with the yellow face. Upon my word, Watson, there is something very attractive about that yellow face at the window, and I would not miss this case for worlds.'

'Have you got a theory?' I asked.

'Yes,' Holmes replied, 'I think her first husband is in the cottage. This is what I think happened: this woman was married in America. Her husband got a terrible disease. That is why he has that horrible yellow face. She ran away from him at last, and came back to England, where she changed her name and started a new life. After three years of marriage, she feels safe again, but her first husband, or some unscrupulous woman attached to him, discovers where she lives. They write to her and tell her to send them a hundred pounds, or they will tell her new husband everything. When her husband tells her that someone is living in the cottage, she knows that they are her blackmailers. In the middle of the night, while her husband is sleeping, she decides to go to the cottage. That night she is not able to convince her blackmailers to leave her alone, so she returns the next day. That was when her husband saw her coming out of the house. She then promises her husband that she will not return, but she wants to get rid of her blackmailers. She decides to go again, and this time she brings a photograph, which they probably asked her for. Fortunately for her, her maid warns her that her husband is coming, and she and her blackmailers leave the house in time.'

'Now we can do nothing except wait for Mr Munro to call us, and then we will see if my theory is correct.'

We did not have to wait long. After tea we received a message from Mr Munro saying, 'There are people in the house.'

That night Holmes and I took a train to Norbury. Mr Munro was waiting for us at the station, and he took us to the cottage. When we arrived there, Holmes asked Mr Munro if he was sure he wanted to enter the cottage. Mr Munro said he was sure and we went to the door of the cottage. As we approached the door, a woman suddenly appeared. It was Effie.

'For God's sake, don't Jack!' she cried. 'Trust me!'

'I have trusted you too long, Effie!' he cried sternly. 'Let go of me! My friends and I are going to solve this mystery.'

We rushed up the stairs to the lighted room. In one corner there was a desk, and at that desk there was a desk, and at that desk there appeared to be a little girl.

Her face was turned away from us when we entered the room, but we could see she was wearing a red dress and long white gloves. She turned around to us, and I gave a cry of surprise and horror. Her face was the strangest yellow colour and it had absolutely no expression.

A moment later the mystery was explained. Holmes, with a laugh, put his hand behind the ear of the little girl, and pulled off the mask, and there was a little coal-black girl. She laughed, and I laughed too, but Grant Munro stood staring with his hand holding his throat.

'My God!' he cried, 'what does this mean?'

'I will tell you everything,' cried his wife with a proud face. 'You have forced me, and now we must both accept the situation. My husband died at Atlanta. My child survived.'

'Your child!' cried Grant Munro.

She pulled out a locket, and inside the locket was the picture of a very handsome and intelligent man, but a man who was obviously of African descent.

'This is John Hebron, of Atlanta,' said Mrs Munro, 'and he was a very noble man. I cut myself off from my race to marry him, but I never regretted it for a moment. Unfortunately, our only child took after his people rather than mine. She is very dark, but she is my dear little girl.' When the little girl heard these words, she ran to her mother.

'I left her in America with a trusted servant,' Mrs Munro continued, 'because she was not very healthy, but I never considered abandoning her. When I met you by chance and learned to love you, I was afraid to tell you about my child. I was afraid to lose you. I kept her existence a secret from you for three years, but finally I had to see my little girl. I sent the servant a hundred pounds, and told her to come to this cottage. I took every possible precaution so that there would not be gossip about a little black girl. That is why she wore that yellow mask.

'You told me about her arrival in the cottage, and that night I had to see her, and that was the beginning of my troubles. And now, tonight, you know everything. What are you going to do about me and my child?'

Mr Grant Munro did not say anything for two minutes, and his answer was one of which I love to think. He lifted the little child, kissed her, and, with the little girl in his arms, he gave his other hand to his wife.

'We can talk it over more comfortably at home,' he said. 'I am not a very good man, Effie, but I think that I am better than you thought.'

We all left the cottage together, and then Holmes and I returned to London.

We did not say another word about the case until late that night at Holmes' house in Baker Street, just before Holmes went to bed.

'Watson,' he said, 'if you should ever think that I am becoming too confident in my powers, or that I am not working hard enough on a particular case, please whisper "Norbury" in my ear, and I will be infinitely obliged to you.'

- THE END -

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