

A CASE OF INDENTITY BY SIR CONAN DOYLE

(Continued from page 16) In '77, and there was something of the sort at The Hague last year. Old as is the idea, however, there were one or two details which were new to me. But the maiden herself was most instructive.

"You appeared to read a good deal upon her which was quite invisible to me," I remarked.

"Not invisible, but unnoticed. Watson. You did not know where to look, and so you missed all that was important. I can never bring you to realize the importance of sleeves, the suggestiveness of thumb-nails, or the great issues that may hang from a boot-lace. Now, what did you gather from that woman's appearance? Describe it."

"Well, she had a slate-colored, broad-brimmed straw hat, with a feather of a brickish red. Her jacket was black, with black beads sewn upon it, and a fringe of little black jet ornaments. Her dress was brown, rather darker than coffee color, with a little purple plush at the neck and sleeves. Her gloves were grayish, and were worn through at the right forefinger. Her boots I didn't observe. She had small, round, hanging gold ear-rings, and a general air of being fairly well-to-do, in a vulgar, comfortable, easy-going way."

Sherlock Holmes clapped his hands softly together and chuckled. "For my words, Watson, you are coming along wonderfully. You have really done very well indeed. It is true that you have missed everything of importance, but you have hit upon the method, and you have a quick eye for color. Never trust to general impressions, my boy, but concentrate yourself upon details. My first glance is always at a woman's sleeve. In a man it is perhaps better first to take the knee of the trouser, which is a most useful material for showing traces. The double line a little above the wrist, where the typewriter presses against the fabric, is beautifully defined. The sewing-machine, of the hand type, leaves a similar mark, but only on the left arm, and on the side of it farthest from the thumb, instead of being right across the broadest part, as this was. I then glanced at her face, and observing the dent of a pinched at either side of her nose, I ventured a remark upon short sight, and typewriting, which seemed to surprise her."

"It surprised me," I said. "But, surely, it was very obvious. I was then much surprised and interested on glancing down to observe that, though the boots which she was wearing were not unlike each other, they were really odd ones; the one having a slightly decorated toe-cap, and the other a plain one. One was buttoned only in the two lower buttons out of five, and the other at the first, third, and fifth. Now, when you see that a young lady, otherwise neatly dressed, has come away from home with odd boots, half-buttoned, it is no great deduction to say that she came away in a hurry."

"And what else?" I asked, keenly interested, as I always was, by my friend's incisive reasoning. "I noted, in passing, that she had written a note before leaving home, but after being fully dressed. You observed that her right glove was fingered at the forefinger, but you did not apparently see that both glove and finger were stained with violet ink. She had written in a hurry, and dipped her pen too deep. It must have been this morning, or the mark would not remain clear upon the finger. All this is amusing, though rather elementary, but I must go back to business, Watson. Would you mind reading me the advertised description of Mr. Hosmer Angel?"

"I held the little printed slip to the light," I said, "on the morning of the 11th, a gentleman named Hosmer Angel. About 5 ft. 7 ins. in height; strongly built, sailow complexion, black hair, a little bald in the center, bushy whiskers, and slight infirmity of speech. Was dressed, when last seen, in black frock-coat faced with silk, black waistcoat, gold Albert chain, and gray Harris tweed trousers, with brown gaiters over elastic-topped boots. Known to have been employed in an office in Leadenhall street. Anybody bringing, etc., etc."

"That will do," said Holmes. "As to the letters, if you continue to glance over them, they are very commonplace. Absolutely no clew in them to Mr. Angel, save that he quotes Balzac once. There is one remarkable point, however, which will no doubt strike you."

"They are typewritten," I remarked. "Not only that, but the signature is typewritten. Look at the neat little 'Hosmer Angel' at the bottom. There is a date, you see, but no superscription except Leadenhall street, which is rather vague. The point about the signature is very suggestive—in fact, we may call it conclusive."

"Of what?" "My dear fellow, is it possible you do not see how strongly it bears upon the case?" "I cannot say that I do, unless it were that he wished to be able to deny his signature if an action for breach of promise were instituted."

"No, that was not the point. However, I shall write two letters, which should settle the matter. One is to a firm in the city, the other is to the young lady's stepfather. Mr. Windbank, asking him whether he could meet us here at 6 o'clock tomorrow evening. Mr. Windbank, as you will, should do business with the male relatives. And now, doctor, we can do nothing until the answers to those letters come, so we may put our little problem upon the shelf for the interim."

"I had so many reasons to believe in my friend's subtle powers of reasoning, and extraordinary energy in action, that I felt that he must have some solid grounds for the assured and easy demeanor with which he treated the singular mystery which he had been called upon to fathom. Once only had I known him to fail, in the case of the king of Bohemia and of the Irene Adler photograph; but when I looked back to the weird business of the study in Scarlet, and the extraordinary circumstances connected with the Study in Scarlet, I felt that it would be a strange tangle indeed which he could not unravel."

"I let you know, then, that I have caught him," I said. "What where?" shouted Mr. Windbank, turning white to his lips, and glancing about him like a rat in a trap. "Oh, it won't do—really it won't," said Holmes, suavely. "There is no possible getting out of it, Mr. Windbank. It is quite too transparent, and it was a very bad compliment when you said that it was impossible for me to solve so simple a question. That's right! Sit down, and let us talk it over."

"Our visitor collapsed into a chair, with a ghastly face and a glitter of moisture on his brow. 'It—it's not actionable,' he stammered. 'I am very much afraid that it is not. But, between ourselves, Windbank, it was as cruel and selfish and heartless a trick in a petty way as ever came before me. Now, let me just run over the course of events, and you will contract me if I go wrong.' 'The man sat huddled up in his chair, with his head sunk upon his breast, like one who is utterly crushed. Holmes stuck his feet up on the corner of the mantel-piece, and, leaning back with his hands in his pockets, began talking, rather to himself, as it seemed, than to us. 'The man married a woman very

much older than himself for her money," said he, "and he enjoyed the use of the money of the daughter as long as she lived with them. It was a considerable sum, for people in their position, and the loss of it would have made a serious difference. It was worth an effort to preserve it. The daughter was of a good, amiable disposition, but affectionate and warm-hearted in her ways, so that it was evident that with her fair personal advantages, and her little income, she would not be allowed to remain single long. Now her marriage would mean, of course, the loss of a hundred a year, so what does her stepfather do to prevent it? He takes the obvious course of keeping her at home, and forbidding her to seek the company of people of her own age. But soon he found that this would not answer forever. She became restive, insisted upon her rights, and finally announced her positive intention of going to a certain ball. What does her clever stepfather do then? He conceives an idea more creditable to his head than to his heart. With the connivance and assistance of his wife he disguised himself, covered those keen eyes with tinted glasses, masked the face with a mustache and a pair of bushy whiskers, sunk that clear voice into an insinuating whisper, and doubly secure on account of the girl's short sight, he went to the ball. He appears as Mr. Hosmer Angel, and keeps off other lovers by making love himself."

"It was only a joke at first," groaned our visitor. "We never thought that she would have been so carried away. 'Very likely not. However that may be, the young lady was very decidedly carried away, and having quite made up her mind that her stepfather was in France, the suspicion of treachery never for an instant entered her mind. She was flattered by the gentleman's attentions, and the effect was increased by the loudly expressed admiration of her mother. Then Mr. Angel began to call, for it was obvious that the matter should be pushed as far as it would go, if a real effect were to be produced. There were meetings, and an engagement, which would finally secure the girl's affections from turning towards any one else. But the deception could not be kept up forever. These pretended journeys to France were rather cumbersome. The thing to do was clearly to bring the business to an end in such a dramatic manner that it would leave a permanent impression upon the young lady's mind. I prevented her from looking upon any other suitor for some time to come. Hence those vows of fidelity exacted upon a Testament, and hence also the allusion to a possibility of something happening on the very morning of a wedding. James Windbank wished Miss Sutherland to be so bound to Hosmer Angel, and so uncertain as to his fate, that for ten years to come, at any rate, she would not listen to another man. As far as the church door he brought her, and then, as he could go no farther, he conveniently vanished away by the old trick of stepping in at one door of a four-wheeler, and out at the other. I think that that was the chain of events, Mr. Windbank."

"Our visitor had recovered something of his assurance while Holmes had been talking, and he rose from his chair now with a bold sneer upon his pale face. "It may be so, or it may not, Mr. Holmes," said he, "but if you are so very sharp you ought to be sharp enough to know that it is you who are breaking the law now, and not me. I have done nothing actionable from the first, but as long as you keep that door locked, you lay yourself open to an action for assault and illegal constraint."

"The law cannot, as you say, touch me," said Holmes, unlocking and throwing open the door. "Yet I never was a man who deserved punishment more. If the young lady has a brother or a friend, he ought to lay a whip across my shoulders. But it is he continued, flushing up at the sight of the bitter sneer upon the man's face. 'It is not part of my duties to my client, but here's a hunting crop handy, and I think I shall just try my hand.' He took two swift steps to the whip, but before he could grasp it there was a wild clatter of steps upon the stairs, the heavy hall door banged, and from the window we could see Mr. James Windbank running at the top of his speed down the road."

"There's a cold-blooded scoundrel!" said Holmes, laughing, as he threw himself down into his chair once more. "That fellow is a real criminal, and he will do something very bad, and ends on a gallows. The case has, in some respects, been not entirely devoid of interest."

"I cannot now entirely see all the steps of your reasoning," I remarked. "Well, of course, it was obvious from the first that this Mr. Hosmer Angel must have some strong object for his curious conduct, and it was equally clear that the only man who really profited by the incident, as far as we could see, was the stepfather. Then the fact that the two men were never together, but that the one always appeared when the other was away, was suggestive. So were the tinted spectacles and the curious voice, which both hinted at a disguise, as did the bushy whiskers. My suspicions were all confirmed by a peculiar action in typewriting his signature, which, of course, inferred that his handwriting was so familiar to her that she would recognize even the smallest sample of it. You see all these isolated facts, together with many minor ones, all pointed in the same direction."

"And how did you verify them?" "Having once spotted my man, it was easy to get corroboration. I knew the firm for which this man worked. Having taken the printed description, I eliminated everything from it which could be the result of a disguise—the whiskers, the glasses, the voice, and I sent it to the firm, with a request that they would inform me whether it answered to the description of any of their travelers. I had already noticed the peculiarities of the typewriter, and I wrote to the man himself at his business address, asking him if he would come here. As I expected, his reply was typewritten, and revealed the same trivial but characteristic defects. The same post brought me a letter from Westhouse & Marbank, of Fen-church street, to say that the description tallied in every respect with that of their employe, James Windbank. Volia tout!"

"And Miss Sutherland?" "If I tell her she will not believe me," I said, "but the old Persian saying, 'There is danger for him who taketh the Tiger cub, and danger also for who snatcheth a delusion from a woman.' There is as much sense in 'Hafs' as in 'Hobbs,' and as much knowledge of the world."

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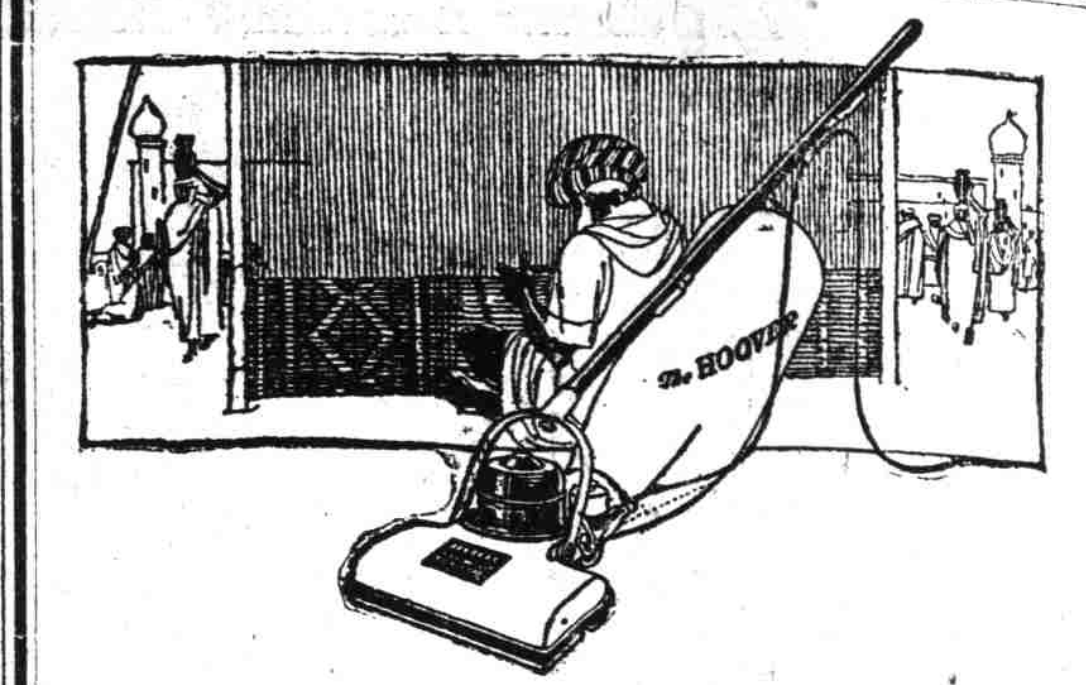
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