

The case of the Missing Teacher

It was a dull, dreary morning at 21b Baker Street. I sat under the window, writing the report from our last case "A study in pink", when a gentle rapping came from the door, like a whisper against the wood.

"Please sir, I need your help." Asked the girl at the door, who was wearing a cloak and bonnet.

"Come in out of the cold and tell us why you are here?" I held the door open for her, and she nervously stepped in. I showed her to a seat by the fire. "Holmes, could you come to the parlour? We have a guest."

Striding into the room, Holmes said "A guest? Ah a guest. Good morning Miss....?"

"Miss Everly. Abigail Everly." The girl bowed her head. "You're Sherlock Holmes!"

"Indeed, I am, now how may I be of service?"

"Please sir, I need your help. Our beloved teacher Miss Robinson has gone missing and feared dead. There was blood all over her classroom, her cloak and umbrella were still in her room. I overheard a policeman say she must have been killed, as there were no signs of her at her home. Then a detective arrived to speak to Mr Tyson our head teacher. Not long after, the inspector threw the doors open, with two policemen pulling Mr Tyson between them. They handcuffed him and took him away. I heard them say he must have killed her. But he couldn't have, he wouldn't..." Embarrassed, she paused, a single tear ran down her cheek. "He lets many of us go to school for free, he looks after us. He is a kind man. He wouldn't do such a thing."

"Well, this is quite the mystery then." With that, Holmes picked up his cape and deerstalker and made his way towards the door.

Swiftly, we took a horse and carriage to the school, after dropping Abigail at home. Holmes confidently strolled past the constable on the gate and found the crime scene. Deep in thought, Detective Lestrade stood in the doorway. Politely, I nodded my bowler to the detective, and he nodded back. Looking up at Holmes, Lestrade reported "We suspect she was struck in the head with a brass bust of Queen Victoria, because the one from her class is missing. When interviewing Tyson we took him to his office and there we discovered the missing bust covered in blood. He denied any knowledge of how it got there, however we had to arrest him. It must have been him." Predictably, Holmes rolled his eyes patronisingly at the long-suffering detective.

Without warning, Holmes vanished into the next-door classroom and reappeared holding a Queen Victoria Bust, as each class must have one. "What on Earth have you picked that up for?" queried Lestrade. Holmes clearly did not feel the need to reply. Carefully avoiding the blood splatters on the floor, he made his way to where Miss Robinson's bonnet and cloak hung. Holmes struggled to lift the brass bust up to where the bonnet hung with the cloak.

"How tall would you say Master Tyson is?" Holmes asked, never looking away from the bonnet.

"5 foot 4. Considerably short for a man." replied Lestrade.

"And Miss Robinson?"

"I don't know her personally, but from the length of that cloak, she'd be around 5 foot 7, maybe 8."

"These busts are all made of solid brass, it would take some strength for any man to lift it to the height of her head." Exclaimed Holmes.

Then, he handed me the bust and picked up the yard stick in order to measure the blood splatter on the floor. I could see the cogs in his mind whirring as he measured each drop carefully. Excitedly, he stood and pointed at Lestrade "You buffoon, you have believed what you were supposed to believe. You've believed the story the *real* killer has contrived. However, the evidence is all here..." He pointed at the blood splatter. "Watson, you're a doctor..."

With the prompt I saw the connection "There would be more blood in a wider pattern if a woman of her size had been hit with the bust... So what could have been used instead?" Frustrated by the news, Lestrade sighed deeply.

"A yard stick perhaps..." but he was cut short.

"Holmes, we have witnesses. There was a cricket game happening with the boys outside the window on the grass. As the boys played their instructor Mr Bennett, who has worked at the school for years, overheard a fight between Master Tyson and Miss Robinson"

"Who else could have heard that fight?" demanded Holmes.

Charging into the classroom next door, an old man, who looked like Charles Darwin, lifted his head to greet us. "Gentlemen, what's this all about? This is a sad day for all of us."

"Mr Windsor?" Asked Holmes. The old man nodded to confirm. "Did you hear a fight yesterday between Master Tyson and Miss Robinson?"

"I heard nothing, but it wouldn't surprise me. She was a good teacher, but with thoughts above her station. The woman wanted his job, she wanted to be Headmaster after Tyson retired. He was probably worried she would try to get rid of him. He obviously decided to act first. Headmaster! No place for a woman! She should have known her place."

"You don't appear to have liked her very much? Where were you at the time she went missing?" I asked. I watched as Holmes wandered around the classroom, in order to inspect every inch.

"I left school with the other teachers and was at the gentlemen's club after school playing billiards with some colleagues. Ask anyone there. If you don't suspect Tyson you should ask that rascal orphan Joseph Blacksmith. I saw him throwing a stone at Miss Robinson over the fence at lunch time. He was shouting something. She's the reason he's no longer allowed at the school. Though if you ask me, the wretched, little urchin deserved to be thrown out. He got sold to Mr Higgins, who is the owner of one of the stores at Royal Victoria Docks."

Holmes interrupted "I noticed you're missing a yard stick. Do you happen to know where it is?"

The old man hesitated. "It went missing this morning, nothing to be concerned about. Likely another teacher has borrowed it for a lesson, or to discipline one of the children with." I could see Holmes made note of this.

Without a moment to lose, we made our way to the busy, bustling docks. We asked around until we found Joseph. "Joseph, can we speak for a moment?"

"I don't speak t' no mutton-shunters." Joseph hissed at Holmes. The child, whose face was dark and bruised, had calloused hands and dulled, haunted eyes from a lifetime of hardship.

"It's about your old teacher, Miss Robinson. She's been missing since last night, presumed dead, and we know you had an altercation with her yesterday at lunch time."

"That learning-shover got wot she deserved then, she used to batty-fang us near to death. All I ever did was hit the terror back. She got me thrown out 'aw school. So every time I see that nip-lug I throw a stone at 'er. I coulda' had a real job after school, but now I'm stuck 'ere. Anyways, I was 'ere. All night. Ask the governor."

Mr Higgins, who had been clearly listening in, poked his head round the corner. "Boy's a baggar Mr Holmes, make no mistake, but what he says is true. He was here all night, had my eye on him the whole time. He won't be thieving again from me anytime soon." The boy winced in fear, it became clear how he got his black eye.

"Thank you for your time" I said, Holmes had already sauntered off deep in thought. As the sun came down, we made our way back through the smokey streets of London to Baker Street.

Morning arrived, and we made our way back to the school. Holmes has been under a cloud all night and hardly said a word. As we walked through the grounds, we could hear boys competitively cheering. Holmes suddenly came to life, whilst observing the boys as they played cricket. "Watson, get me Lestrade now!" Quickly, I ran to find Lestrade, he was still in the school questioning teachers.

"Holmes needs you, outside now." Lestrade dutifully followed me outside to the spot where Holmes stood.

"Gentlemen, the answer is right there in front of you, don't you see it?" I confess, I looked at the boys and their instructor playing a game of cricket and could not see what he saw.

"The stump! Look! Gentlemen, the stump, it's the missing yardstick. So, what happened to the original stump? If we find that we find our murder weapon. Tell me Lestrade, where do you think their sports kit is kept?" He pointed to a shed at the back of the field. As we approached it, the instructor on the field intensely followed us with his gaze. Cracking the door open, I noticed the cricket instructor starting to move towards the school gate.

"Lestrade," I whispered, "get your whistle, stop that man". With that Lestrade gave chase, he whistled the constable on the gate and had the cricket instructor stopped.

"Holmes, what have you discovered?" I watched as he pulled away a bag. A blood covered cricket stump lay on the floor, with a clear handprint stamped on it. "Whilst it is clear from his running away that he has something to hide, how did you come to this conclusion?"

"Ah! my dear Watson, there we come into those realms of conjecture. My hypothesis? He was jealous of Miss Robinson. Perhaps he wishes to become a school master? Observe, the boys on the field are Miss Robinson's class. He is the only witness to the fight between her and Master Tyson. Mr Windsor heard nothing, thus the fight may never have happened. He is tall enough to have struck Miss Robinson with the stump. He is strong, he could have easily dipped the bust in her blood and moved it to Tyson's office as a decoy. He hit her with the stump, hid it and stole Windsor's yardstick to use as the extra stump. With two teachers out the way, surely the gap in teaching would need to be filled quickly, and who better than an already trusted member of their staff? It will be verified or disproved at the trial of course, easier if he can reveal her location to us."