

48 Hours 481

Chapter 481 I Have My Plan

There was a forest behind the hillside covered in valerian.

A wooden cottage lay hidden in the woods, its atmosphere breathtaking. Right outside, the clear water of a shallow creek glistened and trickled by, as ancient, unknown trees whose branches seem to be entwined with each other under some mysterious force were woven into a colossal umbrella, blocking out the sunlight.

Having the perfect lighting at almost all times of the day, it was probably that one cottage in the woods everyone didn't mind having.

The owner of the wooden hut had a peculiar hobby. His pets were not the regular cat and dog, but a group of crows. These birds differed from their counterparts, silently perched on the roof without letting out a single caw as if they were fast asleep.

In the dark room, a pale man with wings suddenly woke up from his bed. Beads of sweat lined his forehead, and his eyes flickered. The most attractive part of him was the pair of wings that grew on his back. When spread out, they were at least four meters long and two meters wide. They seemed wide enough to fill the entire room.

The observant would quickly point out that his wings fluttered ever so slightly.

It was then that the sound of a harp playing came from outside. It's soothing and melodic tune flowed through the house's door and into the man's ears, calming his mind. He sat up on the bed for a while, put on his slippers, and walked to the table where he picked up an unfinished bottle of Coke.

The sugar in the drink further calmed him down, and he couldn't help but let out a sad sigh as he watched his slightly bulging belly. He then walked toward the door, stopping to throw the empty bottle into the trash can. When he saw the figure sitting on the sofa in the living room, he frowned and shook his head.

The strangely dressed older man on the sofa clapped after listening to the beautiful harp performance. "Thank you, Pasithea, for the amazing performance. I felt like I was in the golden halls of Vienna. And if I may, Pasithea, I raise my hat as a tribute to you!"

The woman with greying hair nodded in thanks. Putting away her harp, she sheepishly tiptoed out of the cabin, trembling under her skin.

When she walked to the door, the man looked at the old man warily, asking, "Why did you show up here?"

The older man did not answer him. He paused for a while. "I still remember how beautiful she was among the Three Graces. Reminds me of Daphne. No wonder you couldn't help but offend Zeus for her back then. How's your back? I bet it doesn't feel so good falling from such a high place."

"So, you've come here to laugh at us?"

"No, it's just a shame that we can't defy the laws of time. The once-powerful goddess is getting old."

"Pasithea isn't in the best condition. After all, there are simply too few who know her name these days," the man said. "It won't be long before she disappears from this world."

"That's a real shame," the old man said. "It appears this is the fate of the old folks. After all, nothing goes against the law of time. One day the world will forget us all... eventually."

The man snorted coldly, "Is that right? I think you've been quite happy recently. Heard you went to Silicon Valley to find that guy."

"Hatred will not help us survive. Evolution is a natural law," the old man went on, ignoring his counterpart's jibe. "So, you are planning to betray us by following the laws of nature and joining the enemy?" The man took a knife from the wall and walked towards the older man. "Just listen to yourself! You are just as disgusting as those bastards. I should have warned the others about you. Oh, I almost forgot. Time is ruthless, and you only look forward but never look back, right?"

The latter shrugged. "Listen to what you are saying, Hypnos. You should know that no one cares about the past more than me. I still remember those names that have vanished from the hands of time. I've asked you to come to me no matter what you're facing. My door will always be open to you."

Hypnos snorted coldly and sat down beside the older man. Snatching an apple from the fruit plate, he began peeling it with a knife. "This is a mistake. We shouldn't have agreed to play the game in the first place. Instead, we should have followed the old traditions and gather everyone to fight them. Yes, we may be at a disadvantage, but we've won a war against the titans before. I don't know what kind of brainwashing you've done to Zeus... Why would he accept such a ridiculous request?!"

"We can't do that, unfortunately," the old man explained patiently. "This is completely different from the war with the Titans. Judging by the current situation, we'll be dead in no time if we keep fighting." "Not for me," Hypnos replied. "Pasithea is too weak to wait until the next round. I must help her to achieve results in the next round."

"Chosen anyone yet?"

"Yes, I did meet a candidate this time. The girl's name is Shen Xixi. I've been following her for a while... but I saw something else in the dream this time..." When Hypnos thought about the terrible scene that he saw, he couldn't help but shudder. He then saw the corners of the older man's mouth turning upwards. Quickly realizing something, Hypnos replied vigilantly, "You came to me because of this?"

"That's right," the old man admitted, "I hope you can forget the things you saw."

"Is he related to you?" Hypnos bit the apple.

"I am doing it for your own good. Knowing too much is not a good thing sometimes," the old man said.

"Are you crazy? Why did you provoke that thing?!" Hypnos asked angrily, "Don't we already have enough enemies now? Even they don't dare mess with that thing. If that thing is awakened, we will be greeted with an all-out disaster! Thanks to the stupid works of mortals, its name is now widely known to everyone. Not even our combined force defeats it. Put a little finger on it. Didn't you see it? His name is in the newspapers, novels, movies, and games!"

“Calm down, calm down, Hypnos. I only did this because I’ve actually come up with a plan,” the old man replied leisurely. “So far, the situation is still under my control. In exchange, I can help Pasithea to find an excellent agent. Well, you can’t pick the girl named Shen Xixi because someone else is already watching her... She has entered the trial phase. As for Seth, I can also help you deal with him and prevent him from making multiples copies of Dreamland of Death. Once I deal with him, you don’t have to run here and there anymore.”

Chapter 482 He Is Coming Back

Han Lu did not wake up until the night. This time, she slept a total of 14 hours. Even so, she still felt drained after waking up, her long slumber unable to make up for the past days of lost sleep. She eventually opened her eyes, much to Zhang Heng’s relief. He still wasn’t sure why Hypnos disappeared after letting Han Lu go when he clearly held the advantage. As of now, Han Lu was thankfully out of danger. Zhang Heng said, “For safety’s sake, you’d better call me or send me a text every morning. You don’t have to do it for too long. One month will do. I want to make sure that Hypnos will not target you anymore.” “No problem...” Han Lu paused, “...you saved me.” “Uhh, I’m not too sure about that.”

Although Zhang Heng suspected that Hypnos’ sudden retreat could have something to do with him, he had no intention of claiming glory without collecting sufficient evidence.

“You can’t deny that you are the one that saved me.” Han Lu did not hesitate, “If you didn’t read the message I sent you, I would have died in my sleep,” she went on thoughtfully. “Thank the key item provided by Shen Xixi’s team as well. Otherwise, we would have never been able to enter your dream world.”

“I will find a way to repay them... it’s thanks to you that they are here to help me. Let’s get back to our previous topic—you saved my life. If I count what happened at the hospital, this is the second time you’ve saved me. So... What do you want?” Han Lu asked directly.

“...I don’t lack anything for the time being, but I will come to you if I need anything.” Zhang Heng stood up and put on his coat. “I skipped a whole day’s class, so I’m going back to school now. I cooked you a meal while you were asleep and put it on the table. You can have a good meal after a shower.”

Nothing unusual happened in the next two weeks. Zhang Heng had also successfully obtained his driver’s license, though he had to wait for his car’s registration plate. He had to first apply for a number before trying the lucky draw that happened twice in a month. The winning probability of that was comparable to that of the lottery. Even with Lucky Rabbit’s Foot, it was impossible to win on the first draw.

Zhang Heng was not in a hurry, anyway. The car could be driven under the name of Han Lu’s company. In fact, Zhang Heng had taken his four dormmates for a meal the very night he got his driver’s license. And they deliberately picked a place far away from the school. Chen Huadong was a little apprehensive about Zhang Heng’s driving skills, unable to stop reminding him to look out for oncoming traffic. He held onto his seatbelt nervously as Zhang Heng drove, but the moment there was a little road congestion, he saw how Zhang Heng skillfully navigated through the traffic. In the end, he shut his mouth and let Zhang Heng do what he did best. As he got off the car, he approached Zhang Heng to ask who his coach was, hoping to get a recommendation. With no hesitation, Zhang Heng passed Chen Huadong the coach’ WeChat contact. Chen Huadong was already dreaming that he would become king of the road after 20

days of intensive training. There was always a gap between idealism and reality. Zhang Heng learned nothing special from the driving school except for standard driving techniques and traffic regulations. On the other hand, his extraordinary driving skills were from the owner of a fishery shop in the Tokyo Drift quest.

Since he was the driver, Zhang Heng was the only one that didn't touch the booze. After the meal, he drove the slightly drunk Ma Wei, an utterly unconscious Wei Jiangyang, and a seemingly fine Chen Huadong back to the dormitory.

After attempting to carry Wei Jiangyang to his bed, Zhang Heng turned on his computer, and that was when the power cut off. Before this, he had been doing some research about the scientific expedition to Greenland 17 years ago. That was when he found two Facebook pages of the members and a Twitter account. Since he could get no useful information on Twitter, and the Facebook profiles were private, Zhang Heng's could not carry on with his investigation. Thanks to his hacking skills mastered up to Lv2 upon returning from Whistleblower, he managed to retrieve their passwords covertly. Finally, he got to log into their accounts to seek for more information. Zhang Heng first logged into Nicholson's Facebook account. Formerly a SEAL member, he was 50 this year. From the photo, he looked adamant; his chest muscles were in good shape, and he had a pair of muscular arms as well. He was in a pair of beach pants in the photo, squatting on the sand while roasting oysters on the grill. Behind him was a young girl hugging him affectionately by the neck. After that, Zhang Heng reencountered the young girl in other pictures. She was standing with another older woman. If he guessed correctly, those two should be Nicholson's daughter and wife. After the expedition, Nicholson returned to Colorado, where he started a small construction company. Due to poor management, it closed down four years ago. He later became a truck driver. He wasn't on Facebook very often. Most of the photos on it were of him with his family, and although he was 50-years-old, he often received greetings from pretty ladies thanks to his tough appearance. Nicholson, however, ignored all of them.

Apart from that, Zhang Heng also noticed that Nicholson regularly updated his Facebook profile in March, May, and August every year. It could be a coincidence, or he was hiding something. He also posted about stuff he did while he was still a SEAL. Despite all that, he posted nothing about the scientific expedition, as if he didn't want anyone knowing about the trip to Greenland seventeen years ago. The Facebook account of psychiatrist Marshall carried a little more excitement. He frequently shared his thoughts about work and notable events in his life. Then, late at night, especially before dawn, Marshall would post something that didn't make much sense. It went in the tone of: [He has spotted me...] [I still remember... Those crazy whirlpools... Torn apart...] [Eyes! His eyes... He is coming back!] These were all posts written from his perspective. Thanks to his secrecy, nobody ever knew what he had to endure in the dead of night. The 42-year-old Marshall was different from Nicholson. He had not married until now and had only one girlfriend he dated for around five years until they separated last year. According to Marshall, it was because she couldn't stand his sleepwalking. But intuition told Zhang Heng that there were deeper reasons behind the breakup. The week after Marshall split with his girl, he never updated his Facebook again. Zhang Heng had no idea what happened to him.

Chapter 483 Deductive Reasoning

Zhang Heng managed to note down the addresses of the former SEAL and psychologist right before the power went out. Whether the United States or Greenland, they were a great distance from the city he

was located in, not to mention how further investigations had to be carried out once he got there. It meant he needed at least a week or two to get the information required.

Nevertheless, not long after the new semester started, Zhang Heng started becoming known as the guy who skipped classes. His string of good luck was finally coming to an end. Thanks to the Dreamland of Death debacle, he was recorded twice by the school for skipping class. The school had begun to take notice of him, and for the time being, he had to comply with whatever they wanted. Hence, the last resort was to delay his summer break plans. At the end of the month, Zhang Heng made another trip to Sex and the City bar. This time, the bartender wasn't behind the bar mixing cocktails. Instead, she was slacking outside the lounge, leisurely lighting up a cigarette as she looked at the men and women on the dancefloor.

"What you have entrusted to me is now done," she told Zhang Heng as he approached. "Huh???"

The loud music drowned out her voice, and Zhang Heng had to move closer to hear what she had to say. "I found someone who can help you repair that katana. He's the most powerful blacksmith I've ever known, where he once forged weapons for the gods. He can not only restore your katana to its former glory, but he can even give it some upgrades!" "But?"

"But... in exchange, the price you'll have to pay is 2000 of your game points. Besides, you still have to find the lower and upper pieces of the katana before he can help you." "All he needs to is put the two pieces together, and he wants to charge me 2,000 game points?! This is no small amount we are talking about. That sort of points can buy me a Grade-C game item. And I'm talking about the popular ones here." Zhang Heng still remembered that the final price of the Escape Dagger cost him only 2,050 points. He paused for a moment, then continued. "Besides, you haven't told me what grade the katana is."

"Unfortunately, I can't identify it until the blacksmith restores it," replied the bartender.

"So, this is like a gamble?" Zhang Heng frowned. The katana in question had been obtained from Scarlet in the last round of the game. Upon returning to the real world, he passed the katana, together with a flash-drive and copper ring to the bartender. He even requested for a restoration expert to try fix the broken saber. Little did he expect the price would be that extravagant. No matter how he looked at it, blowing 2,000 points to repair an unknown grade item was a risky endeavor. Even a Grade-C item might not achieve this value, and if it turned out to be a Grade-D or E or even worse, a Grade-F item, Zhang Heng would suffer a significant loss.

"Anyway, I've found someone for you, and the decision is in your hands," the bartender lady said.

"Wait until I find the lower half of the katana, and I will think about it," replied Zhang Heng.

The remaining piece should be with Scarlet. And since it was not going to be easy getting it from her, Zhang Heng thought it best to leave this matter temporarily. He pushed open the lounge's door and walked to the empty deck. Taking out the alarm clock from under a stool, he set the time and started his seventh round of the game.

[Verifying player identity...]

[Verified, randomly selecting the seventh round for player 07958...]

[Extraction completed. Your current quest is: Deductive Reasoning]

'A logician can infer the existence of the Atlantic Ocean or Niagara Falls from a drop of water without having to see or hear it. Life is like a chain. We only need to look at one part of it, and we get to see the whole picture.'

[Task objective: complete investigating a case with your new roommate, and find the criminal first!]

[Mode: Single Player] [Time flow rate: 240] (1 hour in the real world is equivalent to 10 days in this game. After 30 days, the player will be forced to return to the real world)

Friendly reminder, the game will officially start in five seconds. Please be prepared. The moment he heard this round's title, Zhang Heng's mind immediately pointed toward a reknown name in detective novels. Could the game really be afoot?

When he opened his eyes, the street sign in front of him confirmed his previous conjecture.

— Baker Street.

He shifted his gaze to the house on the opposite side of the road. Just as expected, he saw the unmistakable number: 221B The infamous 221B Baker Street, residence of the author of 'A Practical Manual of Beekeeping,' and the 'Study of Queen Bee's Quarantine.' After retirement, he had settled down to write those outstanding books. Zhang Heng stepped forward and walked through the muddy roads littered with horse excrement. The ashen skies of 19th Century London were as gloomy as ever, where a perpetual gray mist hung over the city ominously like the face of a typhoid patient.

A man with a bowler hat drove a carriage past Zhang Heng, splashing mud on his trousers. Before he could say anything, the carriage had disappeared into the street.

There was nothing he could do about it, so Zhang Heng reached out and knocked on the door.

After a while, someone answered the door. Appearing in front of him was a jovial, middle-aged lady. "Oh! You must be the new tenant!" she chirped joyously. "Mrs. Hudson?" Zhang Heng asked. In the novels, Mrs. Hudson was the proprietor of 221B Baker Street. Doubling up as the part-time cook and cleaner of the apartment, she generously included those services in the rent. The real-her seemed a lot younger than described in the novels. Frankly, she could pass off as a woman who hadn't yet turned forty.

"Yes, Mr. Zhang. Now where's your luggage?" Mrs. Hudson queried enthusiastically while looking behind Zhang Heng. "Uhh.. I left them with a friend. I'll pick them up later... anyway, I brought little, and I traveled light. Can I see my room first?" "Of course!" said Mrs. Hudson. "Hurry up and come in! This will be your home from now on. It's relatively well furnished, and the lighting's good as well. There is a clear view of the street below when the curtains are drawn...." She then hesitated for a while.

"What's wrong?" asked Zhang Heng. "...It's your roommate. He's a little strange, but I can assure you that he's a decent man. He has his quirks, though. No one is perfect," Mrs. Hudson sighed. "Anyway, I hereby welcome you to our tiny plot of land."

Zhang Heng raised his eyebrows. "My roommate, where is he now?" "He's gone out to attend a concert, but considering the time, I think he should be back soon." Just as Mrs. Hudson was done talking, someone knocked on the door again. Mrs. Hudson turned around to open the door. This time, it was a lanky and sharp nosed man about six-feet tall. He tossed his fingers around in the air, still wandering the

oceans of music until he noticed Zhang Heng behind Mrs. Hudson. “Ahh, it seems my roommate is here! Glad to have made your acquaintance. I am Sherlock Holmes. Holmes will suffice,” he smiled awkwardly and stretched out a palm filled with blotches of ink and traces of reagents.

Chapter 484 I’m Glad You’ve Introduced Yourself

Zhang Heng and Holmes shook hands. The latter didn’t let go right away, though. “You’ve lived at sea for a long time. Seaman? Nomore likely someone who makes decisions on board... the captain or the chief mate? But that was probably a long time ago. Hmm... Interesting. You shouldn’t have been occupying such a high position at your age.

Forgive me—I don’t know much about the politics of the East... You’ve experienced war, more than once, and have seen blood. But you’re not a soldier. This is starting to get interesting. You’re trained in archery. I must say, you are quite the jack-of-all-trades, you’ve been to many places before... Are you a traveler? Last but not least, I hope that I would have a chance to hear you play the piano!”

“Wow! That’s very impressive. Did you just deduce all of that?” Zhang Heng asked. “just a little parlor trick. If I told you, it wouldn’t be impressive anymore. Also, do pardon me, if I should have offended you,” Holmes smiled amiably. Despite the friendly gesture, Zhang Heng could sense the underlying smugness and condescension in his tone, qualities he was so famously associated with. Chronicling someone’s entire life in the first meeting was in itself not a very polite thing to do.

Even though he did ask for Zhang Heng’s pardon at the end, it sounded more like an appropriacy rather than an apology. It was probably a common fault in all geniuses since time immemorial. They often placed themselves in the center, acting recklessly, and almost never taking the feelings of others into consideration.

Sherlock made a move to withdraw his hand but Zhang Heng didn’t let go. “Lacks knowledge in literature, philosophy, and astronomy, and extremely limited understanding of politics, but profoundly knowledgeable in chemistry, a serious bias in botany, knows nothing about gardening, but is extremely well-versed with all kinds of taboos, which you, unfortunately, happen to subscribe to. You should stay away from them.... With your willpower, I believe it is possible. You are good at identifying soil, possess a wealth of but unsystematic knowledge of anatomy, and you’re skilled in boxing, fencing, and Bartitsu.

You have a brother who is a government official; he is smarter than you, but you hate admitting it. Your grandfather was a country squire, but the family fortune declined. By the way, I also hope to hear you play the violin, on the premise that you play it properly, of course. Otherwise it would just sound like an animal howling.” Zhang Heng said all that in one breath. This time it was his new flatmate’s turn to stare. The detective turned to the landlady.

“Did you tell him everything about me?” he asked Mrs. Hudson. The latter shook her head. “I have no idea what is it that you do all day in your room, Mr. Holmes, but I only hope that you do not turn the room into a mess again.”

“Ha!” Holmes frowned as if pondering on a problem. After a minute, he said, “... about my knowledge in chemistry—you were able to tell from the reagents on my hands. As for the violin, you felt the callouses on the tip of my fingers when we shook hands, and I just mentioned that I’ve just been to a concert, so it’s not that difficult to tell. As for my fencing skills, my épée is on the balcony.

You must've seen it when you were downstairs. The boxing, on the other hand... I used to do it but some of the habits remained. That's not too surprising. The Bartitsu aside... how were you able to deduce my accomplishments in various disciplines? It's no secret, and after we've lived together for a while, you'd be able to tell. But this is our first time meeting each other. And my brother-I almost never mention him. Even Mrs. Hudson doesn't know he exists. What about my late grandfather? How did you know?"

"Arthur Conan Doyle told me. Don't take it to heart." Zhang Heng smiled and finally withdrew his hand. "Arthur Conan Doyle? Who is he?" A look of confusion crossed Holmes' face. "I don't remember having such a friend."

Mrs. Hudson, who had been listening by the side, said, "I'm glad you've introduced yourselves. Although, it is but slightly strange, because most people introduce themselves, not... But, oh, never mind, what's important is that you've gotten to know each other. I'll bring some refreshments so you can continue your conversation!" "That'll be wonderful!" Holmes had clearly taken an interest in Zhang Heng. He removed his hat and coat, hung them on the rack, then settled down on the sofa where he produced a pipe and began filling in the tobacco.

"Mr. Zhang Heng, I must admit that you're far more fascinating than I imagined. I hold certain old-fashioned stereotypes about Orientals. In fact, I was worried that you would move out within two days like my previous roommates, but now I am sure that we will get along very well." "Mr. Holmes, I also find your observation and deduction skills absolutely intriguing, and I hope to learn from you." Zhang Heng made himself comfortable on the sofa opposite the detective. "Oneresting. There are indeed many people who come to my doorstep for help—whether it be a private detective or the police officers in Scotland Yard—whenever they encounter difficult and complicated cases which they cannot solve by themselves, seeking for my counsel on the evidence they've collected. But they only want to eat the fish... you're the first one who actually wants to learn how to fish."

Holmes paused for a moment. "I don't mind sharing the skills I've unearthed, but some things are easier said than done. It would take a lot of practice. There had been people who had shown interest in learning from me but they always end up giving up in the end. But you're different. You already possess excellent observation skills. Very well, perhaps you'll be a quick study."

"I know I have made it very clear on the advertisement, but for the caution, I feel it best that I go through everything again. The two of us will be renting the flat, and we'll be splitting the rent. We'll each have a bedroom to ourselves, and since I was the first to move in, I have already selected my room. But I can assure you that your room is just as comfortable. We'll share the sitting room, but I have precedence when I need to work. Sometimes I will conduct experiments in my room, and maybe play the violin-I hope you don't mind. Oh, you can inform me in advance if you have any habits or hobbies."

"Just one-I hope that you don't play your violin in the wee hours of the morning."

"A reasonable request. I will do my best to keep that from happening." Holmes sounded sincere but noncommittal. He obviously did not trust himself to keep the promise and was prepared to renege.

"Then I have nothing else."

“Very well, then let us toast to our co-living.” Holmes then shouted into the kitchen, “Mrs. Hudson, we changed our minds! We won’t be having an afternoon tea—it’s time to drink! Could you please bring my treasured bottle of Port to entertain our mysterious Oriental guest?”

Chapter 485 The Unidentified Corpse Of Thames

The pleasant wine party did not last too long before it was interrupted by an uninvited guest. The uninvited guest was a tall man with a fair complexion and grayish-yellow hair. He frowned when he entered through the door.” “Something bad has happened.”

“You always come to me when you are in trouble. I’m not even surprised anymore.” Holmes sat on the sofa, having no intention to deal with the uninvited guest right now. He wanted to introduce Zhang Heng to him first. “Gregson, chief of Scotland Yard. I’m comparing him with his peers,” he looked at Gregson again, “Zhang Heng, my mysterious and lovely new roommate from the far east. We are discussing the influence of professional opponents. We are also trying to eliminate my treasured Port wine as well. Since you are here, would you like to have a glass with us?”

“I am afraid this is not a good time to drink,” the inspector said, glancing at Zhang Heng at the same time. “Don’t worry. This friend of mine can be trusted, and his lips are sealed.” Holmes said, “You can tell me anything that you want to tell me right here.” “Okay.” This wasn’t Gregson’s first rodeo with Holmes. Upon hearing that, he discounted Zhang Heng and spoke his mind.

“I encountered a challenging case.”

“I doubt it, but you can go on.” “In the afternoon, the police on patrol found a dead body at the River Thames. We asked a nearby boatman to help us to retrieve it. The victim is a young girl but that’s all we know. Our efforts in uncovering her identity remain fruitless. There were no clothes, jewelry, and other useful items that could help us to identify her. We don’t know her name, where she lives, what she does, and whether she has any friends or relatives. In short, we don’t know anything about her. No one has reported anyone missing recently. You said that you are most interested in this kinds of sticky cases, so I came to you as soon as possible.” “A wise move.”

After listening to Gregson’s description, Holmes showed a touch of excitement on his face. He turned to Zhang Heng and said, “My friend, I am sorry that we have to end the party early.” “It doesn’t matter. Work is paramount,” Zhang Heng expressed an understanding. Holmes got up, put on his coat, before suddenly saying, “Where is your hat? Theory class is over. You should put what you have learned into practice next.” Zhang Heng was a little surprised. He could see that Gregson didn’t want him involved in this case. Besides, he and Holmes had only met for two hours. Even though they shared a good chat, Holmes didn’t need to invite him to solve the case.

As of now, Zhang Heng had a primary mission he needed to complete. He did not expect to be granted that opportunity on the very first day he entered this world. Holmes was the kind of person with astute observation. Zhang Heng happened to have many secrets with him. The two hours that Zhang Heng spent chatting with Holmes was stressful. Even though he mentioned wanting to learn from Sherlock, he wanted to not appear too eager and leave a bad impression.

However, it now seemed that Holmes had a habit of dragging his roommate with him to solve any criminal case. In the novel, not too long after he knew Watson, he would drag him to every crime scene

he came across. If Zhang Heng remembered correctly, Watson lived with Holmes for several weeks during that time. And they knew each other's temperaments rather well, This time, however, Holmes and him were only slightly closer than acquaintances.

The inspector wanted to say something about it, but in the end, he decided to keep his mouth shut. Zhang Heng gladly accepted Sherlock's invitation, and the three of them got into a carriage parked at the roadside.

Most of the narratives in "Sherlock Holmes" took place in the late 19th century. At that period, Britain was in the Victorian era. The industrial revolution was taking place and England expanded its colonies overseas. Politics, economy, and culture developed rapidly, resulting in a gross domestic product larger than all countries put together. They were known as the empire that never rested, and it put them at the center of the world.

London, it's capital, was also the world's largest city with a population of more than six million.

Unfortunately, there was an increasing gap between the rich and the poor. To quote Dickens' opening sentence in 'A Tale of Two Cities'—This is the best era and the worst era.

Rapid population boom in a such short period turned London in to a sardine can of extremely crowded proportions. Zhang Heng still remembered some data he came across. In every 1,200 square feet, there were 2,795 families with more than 10,000 people living in the same house. They were like piglets locked in a pigpen.

Most ordinary workers earned less than ten pounds a year, and a large portion of the money went into the landlord's pockets. They were forced to eat low-quality bread mixed with expired flour, potato flour, potassium alum, and chalk powder. Falling sick was not an option, where most didnt have the means to even buy simple clothes or toys for their children. Getting enough rest was a massive problem as well, where most of the population were overworked and exhausted. In contrast, take Watson as an example. The novel states that he worked as a military doctor. Although not a rich man, he could afford a relatively comfortable life in London. Given an allowance of 11 shillings and 6 pence per day, it was equivalent to almost 17 pounds of income every month. As for the landlords and factory owners, they would bag in even more. Hanging around dance theaters each day, they frequently switched sex partners.

The carriage drove towards the River Thames. Holmes was in a good mood along the way, chatting endlessly about the concert he had attended. Unfortunately, it was difficult for his two companions to delve into the topic. Inspector Gregson's mind was on the case, and although Zhang Heng had played the piano before, he knew but a handful of famous 19th century musicians. "I like music, one of the few things that excites me in this dull world. The other thing I enjoy are those criminal cases. The more complicated and brutal they are, the more I enjoy them. Unfortunately, fewer and fewer criminals are willing to use their brains when they commit crimes."

"In most cases, you can actually find similarities in cases that have occurred in the past. So, if you get stuck, try looking back at the old ones, and you will find yourself rewarded by them."

“Did you build an archive in your mancave?” Gregson interjected. “I do have the habit of collecting newspaper clippings with difficult cases on them. However, most of the past cases are stored in here,” Holmes smiled as he tapped on head.

Chapter 486 Go And Solve The Case

It was already dusk when the carriage arrived at the crime scene.

Gregson had left two men to keep an eye on the corpse. To disparage curious onlookers, they covered the poor child with a blanket they obtained from the boatman. It was the least they could do to show some respect to the unfortunate victim. The three got out of the carriage, and Gregson noticed that a reporter-like guy was already among the crowd, messing around with his giant camera. “These guys are like fleas. No matter what I do, I can never get rid of them,” Gregson muttered. Clearly, he was upset by what he saw. Up until now, authorities failed to find a single clue to crack the case. Perhaps they could employ the powers of the press to seek the victim’s family. Having that thought in mind, he walked over to the reporter.

Holmes, on the other hand, didn’t rush to lift the blanket. He first chatted with the policeman who found the body and then wandered around for a while before slowly and gingerly walking toward it. Zhang Heng covered his nose as he examined the corpse. During that era, the River Thames smelled horrible. Before the turn of the 19th century, the water here was clear, and schools of fish and shrimps thrived in its waters. However, along with the Industrial Revolution came the city’s expansion, and the river saw massive numbers of factories getting erected beside it. Every inch of industrial waste and domestic sewage found its way into the poor river. The once spotless River Thames began to deteriorate drastically. With mountains of trash and excrement choking up the waterway, the river was now a veritable stinking ditch.

The government was aware of this problem, coming up with a system to filter the sewage underground sewage system and sewers connected to the River Thames to transfer as much waste as possible downstream. Admittedly, and thankfully, the method achieved desirable results in the end.

Zhang Heng looked at the corpse for a while, and like Gregson, he saw very little. Holmes was right. He might have exemplary observation skills, but sufficient knowledge would be needed to support his deduction. Besides the fact that Zhang Heng knew very little about England’s criminal cases, he also didn’t know much about the Victorian era. Whatever he knew about the city came from books he read and movies he watched. At most, he watched a BBC documentary or two about this period.

As a bystander, this knowledge might be enough for him to deal with the people around him. However, it was not nearly enough to solve cases. For example, Holmes could judge the brand and origin of cigarettes a person smoked from the soot on the clothes or the ground. Zhang Heng might also notice these little details that ordinary people failed to notice, but he had no idea what cigarette brands existed in this era. If he got stuck at this step, continuing with the next phase of the deduction would almost be impossible.

Zhang Heng soon realized that the primary mission wasn’t going to be easy to compete. He had to compete against Holmes. And clearly, the time and place did not favor him. This round might seem safe compared to all the other games he’d completed so far, but it was also true that this had to be the most difficult round he’d experienced so far.

Fortunately, enough time was given to complete the quest.

Holmes squatted down and examined the corpse closely. He whipped out a magnifying glass to further examine the child's palms and hair as he went along. He even went as far as scraping the remnants under her fingernails. At this point, he no longer looked like a sloth but more like a well-groomed hunting dog. In the end, he got so close to the corpse he almost laid upon her. He stared intently at her face, and his gaze moved downward slowly. Finally, he paused for a moment when he reached the neck.

Then, he stood up, dusted his coat, and asked Zhang Heng, "What do you see?"

"Well, it should be murder. The victim is a female, 15-16 years old. She seemed to be a little weak. Perhaps an illness of some sort? The cause of death cannot be drowning because she has been hit on the head. Besides..." Zhang Heng paused. "The victim was probably violated before her death."

"Not bad," Holmes smiled. "You are not a forensic doctor, but impressive how you pointed out all these details. Take your time."

Gregson had finally finished dealing with the reporter. He took out a handkerchief, wiped the sweat off his brow, and walked over. "It's a deal. That man is the reporter for The Echo. Let's wait for him to take a picture of the victim and put it on tomorrow's newspaper's front page. We hope the child's family can see it. If they notice it, they should come to the police station to look for us. By the way, any progress on your side?" "I don't know the child's name yet," Holmes replied in nonchalance.

Gregson's emotions were a bit complicated. After hearing Holmes's reply, he was disappointed and but rejoiced a little at the same time. He then "There's only so much we can do now. In fact, I have done everything I can for now. The victim is unclothed, after all. It's hard to find any clues on her. It seems we have to wait for the newspaper to help us."

"That will not be necessary."

Holmes thought it was funny. He lit his pipe, took a deep breath, and the awful stench of the river was ousted by the smoke.

The sheriff was bewildered by what he heard.

"What do you mean by that?"

"If I were you, I would send someone to investigate the John Textile Factory located one mile upstream. The child worked there. The murderer is male and was someone close to this child. He constantly thought of her in a sexual way. He should around six feet, strong, and has scars on his body, especially on his arms."

Holmes look returned to boredom as he turned to Zhang Heng. "Let's go, our work is finished," he said. "It's still early. Fancy dinner? Let's go to Houben Restaurant. They serve my favorite ham over there."

"We may proceed," replied Zhang Heng.

"We will get our own carriage. I don't want to bother you sending us over there, Sergeant." Holmes then turned to the dumbfounded Gregson. "Inspector, why are you still standing here? You have gotten the clues you wanted. Now hurry up and solve the case."

Half an hour later, Zhang Heng and Holmes were seated at Houben's restaurant's dining table.

For starters, the waiter poured them each a glass of red wine. The soothing music the restaurant played drowned out the tragedy that took place on the River Thames today.

Holmes held the wine glass, staring at Zhang Heng in intrigue as if he had discovered something interesting. "You are really patient," he said after a while. "I am becoming more and more interested in you. There is still some time before the dishes are reserved. If you have any questions, do ask, and I will do my best to answer you." "I shall begin by asking the looming questions in mind. How did you know where the girl worked, and how did you know the profile of the murderer?" Zhang Heng asked.

Chapter 487 Let's Make A Bet

"It's not that difficult," said Holmes. "To be honest, after hearing Gregson's words, I thought I was going to be handling a difficult case. I was expecting to solve one similar to what happened on the Isle of Arran in 1832. In the end, I went to the scene and found nothing great about it. Let's talk about the John Textile Factory first."

Holmes paused, "Remember what we were talking about in the afternoon?"

"Are you referring to the study of the shape of hands based on occupation?"

"Yes, I have been researching this area recently. I've met many people from London working in all sorts of fields—masons, fishers, cooks, typists. I would leave the house early in the morning and stay in the slums until the sun went down. As a result, I have spent countless hours studying hand shapes and comparing them with those working in the same industry. The results are remarkable. I am planning to write an article about it," Holmes said. "I was at the river bank just now, and I had made sure to check the child's palm thoroughly. I referred her palm to my research results. Although her body has been immersed in water for quite some time, there is no doubt that she worked in a textile factory. There is nothing wrong with your observation. The long hours of work made her a little weak, and she was probably still sick when she was killed."

"But there are many textile factories in London, right? How can you be so sure that she worked at John's?"

"Good question," Holmes replied, "I think that the location where the body was abandoned must be very close to where the body was found. That one's easy to explain. The body was found during the day. Although it was a little foggy, visibility was relatively fine, not to mention passenger and cargo vessels passing from time to time. If a dead body was floating on the river, it couldn't have floated too far before it would get discovered."

"Wait. I remember you saying that her body has been floating in the water for quite some time."

"Yes," Holmes smiled slyly, "pay attention to my words. I said that her body was soaked, not float."

"Is there any difference between these two words?"

"Of course, judging from the state of the corpse, the victim's time of death of the victim should be last night. The assailant must have killed her by mistake, and he panicked. So, he threw the corpse into the river and tied rocks on her feet for good measure. People would have merely thought that another child

had gone missing. Many leave this town every day when they realize it's no place to make a living. Especially for a girl from the working class like her... not much care about her whereabouts. You need to know that the police handle murders and disappearances very differently.

"How did the police discover her body again?"

"Many possibilities. Perhaps the perpetrator was too nervous and he didn't tie the rope properly. Or maybe something dragged the body and the rope snapped..." Holmes went on. "These are not merely conjectures without facts. Other than the timing, I found traces on the victim's wrist... a rope had been tied to it. And now, the whole thing makes perfect sense. Her body had been immersed for god knows how long until the rope was cut off, and her body floated to the surface. "John's textile factory is the closest one in the area, and it is also the first place I suspected. I found some blue crystals in her hair, which appears to be copper sulfate pentahydrate formed when copper sulfate meets water. Coincidentally, a chemical factory happened to be next to John's. This is also the most important basis for my final inference."

"A truly impressive deduction! You almost combined a criminal investigation with precise science," Zhang Heng expressed his sincere admiration.

Holmes did not say anything to the compliment, but the expression on his face told Zhang Heng that he was pleased. So, he paused and continued, "As for inferencing the assailant, it's not that hard to analyze him."

"Appreciate the further details..."

"We all know that he attempted to assault the victim, but that child mounted a fierce resistance. She was brave, and she fought for her life. However, too great was the difference in strength between the two sides. In the end, she failed to escape. The murderer couldn't have had his way on her for too long. While she was being raped, she fought and scratched the perpetrator's skin. The corpse had been underwater for a long time, but tiny skin tissue fragments remain under her nails. The killed could have gotten angry after she hurt him. Losing his mind, he must have strangled her to death."

"Wait... you're saying that the child was strangled to death?"

"That's right," Holmes replied with affirmation.

"But wasn't she hit on the head?" Zhang Heng asked.

"As I said, a fight must have broken out between the two. Judging by her injuries, I'd like to think that she hit her head on a table. That, however, wasn't the fatal blow. She died by suffocation, but not from water. The murderer strangled her until she suffocated. There was a bruise on her neck, but it wasn't obvious since the body has been underwater. I don't believe the layman would have found it. As for why I mentioned that they know each other, it is because it was highly unlikely that two people of different genders would be in the same room after dark."

"What about the assailant's height? You said he's almost six feet tall. How did you know that?" asked Zhang Heng.

"Well, now that, my friend, requires some great deductive skills," Holmes pompously proclaimed. "I simulated the way they... positioned themselves. The woman must have been at the bottom and the

man on top. Then, I compared them with the bruises on the neck to determine his palms' direction and angle. From there, I could predict the approximate height of the perpetrator based on mine." Holmes finally clarified all his previous inferences before the dish was even served.

In many instances, this world worked this way. Hearing the conclusion, they would feel it magical and unbelievable. However, once they knew the inference process, it would seem less mysterious, like knowing how a magic trick was performed.

"Positive reasoning is easy. For example, if you see bread, you will know that it is served during breakfast, and not vice versa. Is an ability that detectives need to exercise and master. If you want to learn, start by guessing his job. From a person's sleeves, shoes, thumbs and index finger's cocoon, fingernails, shirts, facial expressions... and others, you should be able to single out his profession. For example, the gentleman at the table behind you. Via observation, I see he has just returned from Afghanistan, and he is a military doctor."

When he heard that, Zhang Heng put on a puzzled expression for the first time tonight, thinking it was way too much of a coincidence.

Holmes thought Zhang Heng didn't believe what he said.

"We can make a bet to see who can accurately tell more about him. Don't worry. I've never seen that man before."

Chapter 488 Mr. Watson

Holmes swirled the red wine around his glass. "The way this gentleman holds the knife shows that he has had medical training, yet, he has the bearing of a soldier. So, it is clear that he was a military doctor. His face is dark, yet the rest of him fair-so he must have spent a good amount of time in the tropics. His complexion is poor, his face haggard, and he has obviously been wounded on his left arm because it looks a little stiff. So, the question is, where in the tropics can a military doctor get wounded? Clearly, only in Afghanistan."

"Impeccable inference. It looks like I would have to concede the bet," Zhang Heng announced.

"Don't be so quick to give up," encouraged Holmes. "If you win, I will show you my collection of newspaper clippings. You can always come to me if there's anything you don't understand."

"Really?" Zhang Heng's eyebrows rose in intrigue.

"Yes," Holmes answered. "If you lose... Erm... you will have to help me with my experiments whenever you're available."

"Agreed." Zhang Heng then began, "His name is John H. Watson, a graduate of King's College, London, and he served in the 66th Infantry Brigade."

Holmes was speechless for a minute. "Are you cheating? You didn't even see anything. How could you have guessed that? Don't fib, I happen to know the people he's with."

Zhang Heng made a gesture.

Curious, Holmes put down the wine glass in his hand and made his way to the doctor's table. After a while, he returned to his seat.

"Incredible. Mr. Watson claims he doesn't know you." "Actually, I learned about him from a friend. A military doctor who just returned from Afghanistan to London with an injury on his left arm is not a common sight, no?" Zhang Heng deducted.

Watson was the infamous second protagonist and the first-person narrator of all 'Sherlock Holmes' novels, so of course, Zhang Heng knew him better than Holmes did. According to events told in the books, Watson had supposedly spoken to someone that he was unable to find a suitable room for rent in this restaurant. Through a mutual friend, he was then introduced to Holmes, who happened to be also searching for a flatmate. Though it appeared that Watson would now have to find another place to rent.

"You win," Holmes conceded with good graces. "I'll hand you the newspaper clippings when we get back."

"You mentioned that you are writing a journal on the effects of hand shapes based on professions. Can you show it to me when you're done?" asked Zhang Heng .

"You're quite studious, my Oriental friend," Holmes raised his glass. "But for now, let's set everything aside and enjoy dinner."

On the way back, Zhang Heng leaned back in the carriage, closed his eyes for a while, and checked his character panel like he always did.

Name: Zhang Heng

Gender: Male

Age: 20

Player ID: 07958

Games played: 6

Current game points: 1005

Items in possession:

Pestilence Bonebow (B), Infinite Block (B), Filter Lens (D), Paris' Arrow (D), Evil Wall (D), Shadow Key (E), Lucky Rabbit Foot (E), Betty's Shell (E), Hunter's Blessing (F), Water-soluble Metal (F), Oath Ring (F)

Skills:

Sailing Lv.3, Swordsmanship Lv.3, Language Proficiency Lv.2 (Eight languages at daily communication level), Lego Assembly Lv.3, Archery Lv.2, Wilderness Survival Lv.2, Driving Lv.2, Car Tuning and Maintenance Lv.2, Shooting Lv.2, Space Travel Lv.2, Hacking Lv.2, Piano Lv.1, Skiing Lv.1, Rock Climbing Lv.1

Evaluation:

Player is a Lego Master, is slightly luckier than most and has higher chances of encountering enemies. He is protected from shadows, storms, evil thoughts, and plagues. This player is also an experienced sailor, skilled at knife-fighting, archery, shooting, knows how to drive a car, fly an airplane, spacecraft, and various other vehicles. The player is also highly adaptable to the wilderness, has a rich reserve of skills, combat skills included. He is also a trustworthy and noteworthy player.

Yeah, that's right. In the Whistleblower quest, in addition to his Level 2 Hacking skills, Zhang Heng's biggest gain was the 382 points he bagged, 300 of which the Tetris game contributed—the biggest easter egg he had found in the game so far.

Of course, the most prominent item was still the second B-Grade game item, the Pestilence Bonebow, that he had taken from the horseman. It was an extremely powerful weapon that could inflict its target with a range of two to five plagues, as long as the arrow released from the bow drew blood.

On the other hand, Zhang Heng was still trying to figure out the C-Grade game item White Horse Crown. The description attached to the item was simple and not very informative. All it said was that it could be used to summon the horseman's white horse and had a lifespan of three usages that would last up to an hour each. But because of how modern it looked, Zhang Heng didn't carry it into this quest.

Truth be told, the Pestilence Bonebow was also somewhat overly-conspicuous, especially the material it was made of. Carrying it around in full view on the streets would prompt his arrest, so Zhang Heng was careful to wrap it in a white cloth. On top of that, he replaced the less versatile Weather Marble with the Oath Ring

Another matter to remark on was that Evil Wall only had one more last use.

Thus, the above was Zhang Heng's status update in the new quest.

Back at the apartment, Holmes invited Zhang Heng into his living quarters. It wasn't exactly what Zhang Heng had in mind at all. The private detective's bedroom was spick and span, with everything organized in the most systematic of manner. Of course, this was when Holmes was his a model-flatmate disposition.

If the quest did not stray from the original writing, where Holmes still endured intermittent phases of melancholy. He would hide in his room the entire day, completely apathetic and uninterested in anything at all, relying on small pills and syringes to keep himself functioning, like a fish out of water whenever there was no cases to solve, no adventures and nothing exciting for him to dissect.

He, or more accurately, most of us, had two such contradictory sides to our personalities.

Holmes pulled out two boxes from under the cabinet, blew off the dust and said to Zhang Heng, "Here, I'm lending this to you. I don't have much use of it anyway-most of the cases are already stored in my head."

"Thank you."

Zhang Heng opened the box and did a quick study of its contents. There were all kinds of newspaper cuttings and notes from various time periods; even articles from the time before Holmes was born. He made deductions based on the articles and jotted his hypothesis on the blank spaces around them.

These things were all that Zhang Heng needed.

Chapter 489 The Article in the Echo

Zhang Heng woke up early the next morning and picked up the on the case of 'Ricoletti of the Club-Foot and his Abominable Wife.' If memory served him right, it was the first case Holmes solved as a detective. The case was mentioned in the book, but no detailed accounts were recorded. Holmes was already enjoying his coffee and toast when Zhang Heng entered the dining room. They greeted each other before Zhang Heng plopped himself down at the table.

Holmes noticed the papers in Zhang Heng's hand.

"Oh, that case was quite an interesting one. Although it was not much of a challenge, it was still the early days of my detective career, and it took me three days to complete the investigation. Now, a case like that would only take me one afternoon."

Zhang Heng chuckled. He did not despise the slight display of overconfidence; rather, such confidence was fundamental to Holmes' persona, the very reason he was loved and sought after by hundreds of thousands of readers. In fact, in his daily dealings, Holmes was a very humble person, but when it came to his field of expertise, he guarded his territory with pride like a lion.

Zhang Heng had just finished his glass of milk when someone knocked on the door downstairs.

Mrs. Hudson opened the door to find a triumphant-looking Gregson standing outside, where all that anxiety that bogged him down before this seemed to have vanished. He wafted upstairs and cleared his throat.

"Has any of you read today's newspaper?"

"I haven't had the time," Holmes looked at their guest with interest.

Gregson presented both gentlemen with an issue of the Echo.

"Take a look. It's fresh off the press."

Zhang Heng took the paper and read the report on the front page aloud.

The reporter first introduced the unnamed female corpse found on the Thames yesterday, then talked about how Inspector Gregson cleverly uncovered the factory where the deceased woman had worked, eventually confirming the identity of the Jane Doe. The article also briefly mentioned that a Mr. Holmes aided the police, but it was mentioned once in the entire article. Instead, several paragraphs were solely dedicated to touting the 'brilliance and wit' of Inspector Gregson.

As Zhang Heng read those words out aloud, Gregson's face flushed pink. "You have provided me with a lot of assistance, especially John's Textile Factory's link to the case. But you were not entirely correct. Anyway, the part in the front is not important... please continue reading."

Holmes wasn't crossed at all. In fact, he smiled in content as if he was already used to it. As a matter of fact, it was precisely why Scotland Yard kept coming to him for counsel-he didn't care much for status and reputation and, therefore, wasn't inclined to have an apoplectic fit over the Yarders taking the

limelight away from him. The truth was quite the reverse, where his interests in those strange cases exceeded all that need for trivial fandom.

Zhang Heng continued reading. The article went on about how Gregson had so promptly brought his men to the textile factory, thereby confirming the girl's identity there and then. Her name was Molly, and she had come to London a year ago, joining her aunt, who had helped her find a job in the textile factory. Because she wasn't a skilled worker, Molly was paid peanuts, but the same couldn't be said for her daily workload. She worked laboriously, earning barely enough to make ends meet. Because her aunt had four children to support, there was only so much help she could offer. So Molly had only herself to rely on in the city —that was until she met Paul.

Paul was a year older than her and had come to London three years earlier to work at the chemical plant next door. Despite his age, he was considered an old fox in the chemical plant, often stirring up trouble when he could. The reporter painted Paul as a treacherous, cunning, and lazy villain, who beguiled the innocent and naïve Molly with sweet words until he finally couldn't keep up with the act. It revealed his true colors.

After doing a bit of digging, Gregson discovered that Molly had gone to see Paul after work that night. The inspector and his team hurried over to Paul's residence, where he found Molly's clothing that witnesses claimed she wore on the night of the tragedy. With such damning evidence, Paul was no longer able to deny his hand in the crime.

In the latter part of the article, the reporter wrote an affecting conclusion:

The people of London are blessed to have an outstanding officer, the likes of Inspector Gregson, who managed to solve a remarkably unusual case in only half a day. He appeals to the public, who, in turn, would provide relevant information, willingly cooperate with the police, and, together, maintain the order of the city.

Those words tickled a delighted Gregson to tears, and he said to Holmes, "I don't mean to be disrespectful to you, but with all due respect, Sherlock, even the smartest of us, makes mistakes. You truly are remarkable – you were able to tell that she worked at John's just by looking at her body. Concerning your deduction about the murderer, it's only natural that there should be a little discrepancy. At the end of the day, it's still up to us, the police, to get things done right."

"That Paul boy is different from what I described the murderer to be?" asked Holmes indifferently.

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"There's a slight variance," Gregson replied with a smile. "The part about him being someone she knows is right, and the part about him having sexual thoughts about her was unmistakable. When we raided his residence, we didn't just find her clothes under the bed the bastard had been thinking about it for a long time, but that's nothing unusual. In many of the cases I've worked on, it's always the men who can't seem to have the slightest control over their urges. It's such a pity that the child Molly was so young. ..."

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Holmes interrupted the inspector.

"What about the rest of my deductions?"

“His height was different. That little bastard wasn’t six-feet tall. He’s only about five and a half feet. He was really quite the feral beast. We had two men holding him down, and he just kept struggling, even trying to bite off one of our officers’ ears. I had no choice but to make him an honest man, with a bit of roughing up, of course. He wasn’t that strong, though. Definitely stronger than Molly, but no stronger than the ordinary man. He was also pockmarked with scars and bruises from many fights, but there were no scratch marks on his arm.”

“You got the wrong man!” Holmes remarked. Gregson snorted and chuckled.

“Just listen to yourself, Sherlock. I know that your deduction wasn’t exactly spot-on, and it might be a little embarrassing for you, but people in our line of work do make mistakes. No matter how good someone is at something, they would still mess up once in a while. Which is why we often say that the most important thing while handling a case is getting the evidence!”

“Having proof is right, but you’ve got the wrong man,” Holmes shook his head. “That kid Paul is not our killer.”

“How is that possible? Think I’m just some rookie who just joined the force?” Gregson argued. “I have been a police officer for many years and handled countless cases! There can’t be any mistakes with such conclusive evidence. What more, that little bastard broke down, admitting that he had always wanted to do Molly.”

“Having such thoughts doesn’t constitute for a crime,” Holmes retorted. “At this age, they are all curious about the body of the opposite sex, but that does not make him a killer.” “The clothes-how do you explain the clothes, then? There were bloodstains on them!” said Gregson. Holmes did not answer the inspector right away. Instead, he turned to Zhang Heng and asked, “Are you available this morning? It looks like we shall have to make another trip to save an innocent soul from wrongful incarceration and prevent the real villains from escaping the law!”

Chapter 490 Baker Street Irregulars

The carriage stopped outside John’s textile factory.

Zhang Heng and Holmes got out of it and at that time, a man with a mouth full of rotten teeth and a sharp chin came up to them.

“Gentlemen, can I help you?” he asked.

“We’d like to go inside to look for someone,” said Holmes.

“I’m afraid that’s inappropriate. Everyone inside the factory is female and both of you are men...” The man shook his head, “That’s not right, that is not right.”

Holmes reached out to his pocket, took out a half-pound gold coin, and threw it into the man’s hand. “We just need a quarter of an hour.”

The latter frowned, pretending to be embarrassed.

Holmes did not bother playing along with his act. He was about to reach out and take the gold coin back when the man protested.

“Okay, okay, okay. The boss is not here today. I can find a way to help the two of you to get into the factory. But let me be clear. You only have a quarter of an hour. I can’t let you stay in there any longer,” said the man and quickly pocketed the gold coin.

He then took the two into the textile factory.

Watt’s invention of the steam engine kickstarted the industrial revolution. The steam engine gradually replaced the water frame, and textile factories did not need to be built by the waterways anymore. Due to the fact that the John Textile Factory was founded a long time ago, it had never been relocated. It was still at its original site. Nonetheless, the equipment inside the factory had been upgraded over time.

This was Zhang Heng’s first time witnessing such a scene. The vast factory was full of machines. Pipelines were being set up under the ceiling, and the continuous belt spinning around the pulleys powered the sewing machines noisily. All the female workers wore hats and aprons, standing in front of the machines, and repeating the dull and tedious; it was repetitive and made them no different than a marionette. In this factory, there were no distinction between humans and machines. The man asked, “Who are you looking for? Maybe I can help you. I know everyone here.”

Holmes and Zhang Heng then exchanged glances. After that, Zhang Heng placed his arm on the man’s shoulder.

“To be honest with you, we actually want to open a textile factory. We are here to learn from yours!”

Immediately, the man became vigilant, “That won’t work! If you have told me about this earlier, I would never have let the two of you come in here!”

“Don’t be so sure,” Zhang Heng said, “We want to recruit a group of skilled workers. If you can help us, we can give you good money.”

The bloke was moved when he heard the offer.

“No, how can I betray Mr. Stotts! He put me up to this job, and he is a distant relative as well. I won’t do anything that would put him at a disadvantage.”

“If you do the job we give you well, you can expect a handsome amount of money entering your pockets,” Zhang Heng said, “more than enough for you to eat, drink and play for a long time.”

As the two chatted, Holmes quietly left the place.

Twenty minutes later, Zhang Heng and Holmes met up again outside the textile factory. The man escorted the two to the road and said excitedly, “I will make a list soon and make sure that all of them are honest and hardworking folk.”

“Sounds like a plan! We will come to you again after we determine the location,” said Zhang Heng.

Seeing that the man was contented and had returned to the factory, Holmes spoke again. "Not bad. I was right about you wasn't I? You were born to do this. With a bit of training, you will outsmart those idiots at Scotland Yard in no time!"

"How about you?"

Holmes chuckled twice, "I who the murderer is."

"Oh? Who is it?"

"Don't worry. I will announce the conclusion once I gather enough evidence. In a way, Gregson is right. Gathering not enough evidence and announcing out our deduction is a big taboo in our line of work. Once you preconceive that someone is the murderer, you will subconsciously ignore the evidence that is not conducive to your deduction. Gregson himself made such a mistake. He wholeheartedly believed that the kid named Paul killed Molly. All the evidence he collected was set to go against that kid." Holmes paused. "The basis of deduction is observation. First of all, you'll need to look for small and often overlooked details through extremely detailed observation. Every small detail is like a dot on white paper. When you can connect all of them, you will be able to find the answer you are looking for."

"It happens that the chemical plant Paul works is right next door. Shall we have a look too?" asked Zhang Heng.

"It couldn't be better," said Holmes. "I'm looking for someone over there as well."

The two then walked to the chemical factory. With men as their main workforce, rules here weren't as tight as the textile factory. There was, however, still a supervisor watching over the factory. Holmes had to spend half a pound to chat with a few people in the factory about Paul. He touched his chin as he returned.

"Interesting."

"How did it go?"

"Different people here have a completely different opinion of Paul, but this is actually quite normal. I expected this outcome. Gregson was here, and he asked the factory manager and concluded that Paul is an old man. He's a troublemaker, lazy, insidious, and cunning. But when I asked his fellow workers, they spoke highly of him, saying that he has a good heart, always willing to help others, and stand up for anyone getting bullied... perhaps it is why the factory manager does not like him," said Holmes.

"Where was he when the murder happened?" Zhang Heng asked. "That's the problem. The chemical factory workers leave work half an hour later than the textile factory workers. After Paul's shift ended, he went to look for Molly as usual. This is a well-known fact, but no one was with him during that time. Hence, he has no reliable alibi, but it still doesn't matter. We will prove his innocence after we catch the murderer."

"Where shall we go next?"

"We have completed all the investigations that we could do carry out. Let the Baker Street Irregulars do the rest," said Holmes.

"Let's go home."

Zhang Heng was no stranger to the Baker Street Irregulars. The entire herd of urchins were dirty and smelly, to say the least, and Mrs. Hudson wasn't pleased whenever they showed up. She would keep her eyes on them all the time, fearing that something would go missing in the living room.

Holmes took out three shillings to the leader of the group named Wiggins.

"Your carriage fees, I want you to keep an eye on the guy named Pearson who works at the Wood Chemical Plant. I want you to see what he does, then report back to me. Oh yes, come and see me alone the next time. Let the others wait outside, or Mrs. Hudson will put me on a stake."

"Yes, Commander!" the group of children shouted while standing upright. After that, they were dismissed with a wide smile on their faces.