

little piece of gold with three diamonds in it, and threw it down on the table.

With a cry of happiness, the banker picked up the broken piece from the crown of diamonds.

'You have it?' he whispered. 'I am saved! I am saved!'

'There is one other thing that you owe, Mr Holder,' said Sherlock Holmes.

'Owe?' The banker picked up the pen. 'Name the amount, and I will pay it.'

'No, it is not money that you owe. Your son is a very fine boy. You should be proud of him, and you must now apologize to him.'

'So Arthur did not take them?'

'I told you yesterday, and I repeat today, that he did not.'

'You are sure of it! Then let us hurry to him. We shall tell him that the truth has been found.'

'He knows it already. I had an interview with him. He did not want to tell me the story, so I told it to him. He had to agree that I was right. He added the few details that were not clear to me. Your news of this morning, however, may open his lips.'

'Then please tell me what this mystery is about!'

'I will tell you, but first I must tell you something else. Sir George Burnwell and your niece, Mary, have run away together.'

'My Mary? Impossible!'

'It is, unfortunately, certain. You and your son did not know the true character of this man. He is one of the most dangerous men in England. He has lost large amounts of money on cards and horses. He is a man without a heart.'

'When he told your niece that he loved her, she believed him. She did not know that he had said the same thing to a hundred women before her. She saw him nearly every evening.'

'I cannot and I will not believe it!' cried the banker, with a white face.



*'When he told your niece that he loved her, she believed him.'*

'I will tell you, then, what happened in your house that night. When your niece thought you had gone to your room, she went downstairs. She talked to her lover through the window which looks into the little road by the side of the house. He had stood there for a very long time, so his footprints had pressed right through the snow.

'She told him about the crown, and he wanted it very much. I have no doubt that she loved you, but he had a strong power over her. She saw you coming downstairs again, so she closed the window quickly and told you about the servant and her wooden-legged lover. That was all perfectly true.

'Your boy, Arthur, went to bed after his interview with you, but he slept badly because he was worried about money. In the middle of the night he heard a soft step pass his door. He got up, looked out, and was surprised to see his cousin walking very quietly along the passage.

'He quickly put on some clothes and waited there in the dark to watch. Very soon she came out of the room and, in the light of the passage lamp, your son saw that she was carrying the crown in her hands. She walked down the stairs and he waited behind the curtain near your door. From there he could see everything that happened in the hall below.

'He saw her quietly open the window, give the crown to someone standing outside, and then close it and hurry back to her room.

'He realized immediately how bad this would be for you. He rushed down the stairs, without his shoes, opened the window, jumped out into the snow, and ran down the road. Sir George Burnwell tried to get away, but Arthur caught him. There was a fight between them. Your son pulled at one side of the crown and Sir George at the other.

'In the fight, your son hit Sir George and cut him over the eye. Then something suddenly broke, and Arthur found the

crown in his hands. He rushed back, closed the window and went up to your dressing-room. When you came in, he had just noticed that the crown had been bent in the fight. He was trying to straighten it.'

'Is it possible?' whispered the banker.

'You then insulted him when he felt he deserved your warmest thanks. He could not tell you the truth without getting Mary into trouble. She had done nothing to deserve it, but he kept her secret.'

'She was shocked when she saw the crown,' cried Mr Holder. 'Oh, my God! I have been a blind fool! And he asked me to let him out for five minutes! The dear boy wanted to look for the missing piece at the scene of the fight.'

'When I arrived at the house,' continued Holmes, 'I went very carefully round it and looked at the prints in the snow. I knew that no snow had fallen since the evening before.

'I went along the narrow path, but too many people had walked on it. Just beyond it, however, at the far side of the kitchen door, a woman had stood and talked with a man. The round print on one side showed that he had a wooden leg.

'She had to leave him quickly, because she had run back to the door, leaving deep toe prints and light heel prints. Wooden-leg had waited a little, and then had gone away. I thought at the time that this might be the servant girl and her lover. I learned from you that it was.

'I then looked at the little road at the side of the house, and found a long and interesting story written in the snow. There was a double line of prints of a man wearing boots, and a second double line made by a man with no shoes on his feet. I was sure, from our conversation in the morning, that this second man was your son.

'The first had walked both ways, but the other man had run quickly. In some places his prints went over the prints of the

boots, so I could see that he had come after the other one. The prints led to the hall window.

'Then I walked to the other end, down in the road. I saw where Boots had turned round. It seemed that there had been a fight. Finally, I found some blood, and I knew that I was right.

'Boots had then run down the road, and more blood showed that he had been hurt. At the other end of the road, the snow had been cleared, so I could not follow him.

'When I entered the house, I examined the hall window. I could see at once that someone had gone out through it. I could also see the print of a wet foot coming in.

'I was then beginning to understand what had happened. A man had waited outside the window and someone had brought him the crown. Your son had seen this and had followed the thief. They had fought, and pulled at the crown. The strength of both of them had bent it.

'Your son had returned to the house with the crown, but had left a piece with the other man. All this was clear. The questions now were: Who was the other man? And who had brought him the crown?

'When you take away the impossible, you are left with the truth, although the truth often seems very unlikely. I knew that you had not brought the crown down, so it was your niece or Lucy Parr. But why would your son take the blame for Lucy's actions?

'There was no possible reason. But his love for his cousin was an excellent reason for keeping her secret. I remembered that you had seen her at that window. I also remembered that she was shocked when she saw the crown in your son's hands. Then I was sure I was right.

'And who could the other person be? A lover, of course. Who else could make her forget her love for you? I knew that you did not go out much, but one of your visitors was Sir George

Burnwell. I had heard of his behaviour with women. It seemed quite likely that he had the diamonds.

'Well, I went to his house yesterday, dressed as a poor man. I spoke to one of his servants and I learned that Sir George had been out all the night before. Finally, I bought a pair of his old shoes. I took them to Streatham, and they were exactly the same size as the footprints.'

'I saw someone in the little road by the house yesterday evening,' said Mr Holder.

'Yes, that was me. I knew who the criminal was, and I went to see him. At first, of course, he denied everything. But when I told him all the details, he picked up a heavy stick and came towards me.

'I pointed a revolver at his head before he could hit me. Then he decided to be sensible. I told him that I would give him a thousand pounds for each of the diamonds. I also promised him that he would hear nothing more about the matter.

'"Oh no!" he said. "I have sold all three for six hundred pounds!" He gave me the address of the man he had sold them to. After some discussion, I managed to get the stones for a thousand pounds each.

'Then I visited your son Arthur and told him the good news. I went to bed at two o'clock in the morning, after a really hard day's work.'

'A day which has saved England from great public shame!' said the banker. He got up from his chair. 'Sir, I cannot find the words to thank you. Your skill is even greater than people say. And now I must go and apologize to my dear boy. Your news about poor Mary hurts me greatly. Not even your skill can tell me where she is now.'

'I think we can be sure,' replied Holmes, 'that she is in the same place as Sir George Burnwell. We can also be sure that she will soon be punished enough.'