

## The Crown of Diamonds

### Part 1 The Banker's Problem

25 'Holmes,' I said, as I stood one morning at the window, looking down Baker Street, 'here is a madman coming. It seems rather sad that his relatives allow him to go out alone.'

My friend got up from his armchair and looked over my shoulder. It was a bright cold February morning, and snow lay deep on the ground, shining in the winter sun.

The man was about fifty years old, tall, rather fat, and well dressed in expensive clothes. But his behaviour did not suit his clothes; as he ran along the street, he waved his arms up and down and shook his head.

'What is the matter with him?' I asked. 'Is he looking up at the numbers of the houses?'

'I believe he is coming here, my dear Watson,' said Holmes.

'Here?'

'Yes, I think he may want to speak to me professionally. Ha!' As he spoke, the man rushed at our door and pulled our bell, making a great noise.

A few moments later, he was in our room. He was breathing hard and waving his arms in the air. But we stopped smiling when we saw the sadness in his eyes.

For a time, he could not speak. His body moved from side to side and he pulled at his hair like a madman. Sherlock Holmes pushed him gently down into a chair.

'You have come to tell me your story, haven't you?' he said. 'Please wait until you feel better, and then tell me about your problem.'

The man sat silently until his breathing slowed down. Then he turned towards us.

'You probably think I am mad,' he said. 'I have a problem that is enough to make me mad. I could live with public shame, although my character has never been questioned. Private problems are also common. But the two have come together, in a terrible way, and have almost destroyed me. Also, I am not alone. The most important people in the country will suffer too, unless you can find a way out of this horrible business.'

'Calm yourself, sir,' said Holmes. 'Who are you, and what has happened to you?'

'My name,' answered our visitor, 'is probably familiar to you. I am Alexander Holder, of the banking company Holder & Stevenson, of Threadneedle Street.'

The name was well known to us. This man was the older partner of the second largest private bank in the City of London. What had happened, then, to bring one of London's leading citizens to this sad situation? We waited until he managed to begin his story.

26 'Time is valuable, so I hurried when the police suggested I should ask for your help. I take very little exercise, but carriages are too slow in this snow, so I ran from the Underground station. I feel better now, and I will tell you the facts as clearly as I can.

'Yesterday morning I was sitting in my office in the bank, when a card was brought in to me. I was surprised when I saw the name. It was one of the most famous names in England. I saw him immediately.

"'Mr Holder,'" he said, "I have been told that you lend money;"

"'The company does lend money if we believe that the money will be repaid,'" I answered.

"'I need fifty thousand pounds immediately,'" he said, "I

could, of course, borrow such a small sum from my friends, but I prefer to make it a matter of business."

"Can I ask you how long you want this sum for?"

"Next Monday I shall receive a large amount of money. I shall certainly repay you then. But it is very important to me that the money is paid now."

"I would be happy to lend you the money myself," I said, "but this amount is too large. If it comes from the company, I must ask you to leave something with us of the same value."

"I would prefer that," he said, lifting up his square black leather case. "I am sure you have heard of the crown of diamonds."

"It is one of the most valuable pieces of public property in this country," I said.

"Exactly?" He opened the case, and there, lying on soft pink cloth, was the beautiful piece of jewellery. "There are thirty-nine very large diamonds," he said, "and even the price of the gold is enormous. I will leave this crown with you." I took the case into my hands and looked doubtfully at the man. "You don't think it is right for me to leave it?" he asked. "I am certain that I will be able to take it back in four days. But please keep this matter secret, and take great care of the crown. I shall come for it on Monday morning."

'He was anxious to leave, so I arranged for the payment to him of fifty thousand pounds in notes. When I was alone again, I began to feel sorry that I had agreed to keep the valuable crown. It belonged to the nation, so there would be a terrible problem if anything happened to it. However, it was too late to change things now, so I locked it up in a special box in my room, and went back to my work.

24 When evening came, I decided to take the crown home with me. Bankers' offices have been broken into before now. So I called a carriage and drove to my house in Streatham, carrying the crown with me. I did not breathe easily until I had taken it

upstairs and locked it safely away in a cupboard in my dressing-room.

'I have two male servants, Mr Holmes, but they sleep out of the house, so we need not worry about them. I also have three excellent female servants who have been with me for a number of years.

'There is another servant, Lucy Parr, who has only been with me for a few months. However, she seems to be of good character, and she has always done her work well. She is a very pretty girl, and a number of young men have called on her. That is not a great problem, and we believe that she is a very good girl in every way.

'My family is small. My wife died some years ago, and I have only one son, called Arthur. He has caused me quite a lot of trouble. I blame myself completely. When my wife died, he was all that I loved. I gave him everything he wanted, and perhaps this was not good for him.

'I wanted Arthur to come and work with me in the bank, but he did not like business. When he was young, he became a member of a club and met a number of rich men with expensive habits. He began to lose money at cards and at the horse races, and he came to me again and again for more money. He tried many times to leave these new friends, but each time one man, Sir\* George Burnwell, pulled him back again.

'Sir George came frequently to the house at Streatham. I am not surprised that Arthur liked him, because he has been everywhere and done everything. He is a good talker, and very handsome, but I have never really liked him. My little Mary thinks the same way.

'Mary is my niece, but she is like my daughter. She came to live with us when my brother died five years ago. She is sweet,

\*Sir: the title of a man from an important family.

loving and beautiful, and she takes care of the house. I do not know what I would do without her.

'She has only acted against my wishes in one thing. Twice my boy has asked her to marry him, because he loves her very much, and each time she has refused him. I thought that marriage to her might change his life, but now it is too late!

'Now, Mr Holmes, you know the people who live under my roof. I shall continue with my sad story.

28 / 'When we were having coffee after dinner that night, I told Arthur and Mary about the valuable crown that was now in the house. I did not tell them who had given it to me. Lucy Parr had brought in the coffee, and had left the room, but I cannot be sure that the door was closed. Mary and Arthur were very interested, and wanted to see the famous crown, but I did not show it to them.

'Where have you put it?' Arthur asked.

'In my dressing-room cupboard.'

'I hope nobody breaks into the house during the night,' he said.

'The cupboard is locked,' I answered.

'Oh, other keys will fit that cupboard. When I was a child I opened it with the key of the sitting-room cupboard.'

'That night Arthur followed me to my room.

'Dad,' he said, with his eyes looking down, 'can you let me have two hundred pounds?'

'No, I cannot,' I answered. 'I have been too generous with you already.'

'You have been very kind,' said Arthur, 'but I must have the money, or I will not be able to enter the club again.'

'That would be a very good thing.'

'Yes, but you would not want me to leave it in shame,' he said. 'I could not live with that. I must get the money. If you will not give it to me, I must try something else.'

'I was very angry, because this was the third demand in one month. "You will not have a penny from me," I shouted, and he turned and left the room.

'When he was gone I opened my cupboard, checked the crown, and locked it again. Then I went round the house, checking the locks on the doors and windows. I usually let Mary do this. As I came downstairs, I saw Mary at the side window of the hall. She closed and locked it when I came near.

'Tell me, uncle,' she said, looking a little anxious, 'did you give Lucy permission to go out tonight?'

'Certainly not.'

'She has just come in by the back door. She has probably only been to the side gate to see someone, but I think that it is not safe. We should stop it.'

'You or I must speak to her in the morning. Are you sure that everything is locked?'

'Yes.'

'Then, good night.' I kissed her, and went to my bedroom. Mr Holmes, I am not a very heavy sleeper, and I was worried about the crown. At about two in the morning, I was woken by a sound in the house.

'I had the idea that a window had gently closed somewhere. I listened and then suddenly heard, to my horror, the sound of soft footsteps in the next room. I got out of bed, very frightened, and looked round the door.

'Arthur,' I screamed, 'you thief! What are you doing with that crown?'

29 / 'My son was standing beside the gaslight, holding the crown in his hands. He appeared to be bending it with all his strength. When I shouted, he dropped it and went as pale as death. I picked it up and examined it. One of the gold points, with three of the diamonds in it, had gone.

'You horrible boy!' I shouted angrily. 'You have destroyed

it! You have brought shame on me for ever! Where are the jewels you have stolen?"

"Stolen!" he cried.

"Yes, you thief!" I shouted, shaking him by the shoulder.

"They are all there. They must all be there," he said.

"Three have gone. And you know where they are. I saw you trying to pull off another piece."

"You have insulted me enough," he said. "I will not listen. I will leave your house in the morning, and make my own way in the world."

"You will leave in the hands of the police!" I cried, half mad with sadness and anger.

"They will learn nothing from me," he said, and I have never seen him so angry. "If you decide to call the police, let them find what they can."

'By this time the whole house was awake, and Mary rushed into the room. At the sight of the crown and Arthur's face, she understood the whole story and fell to the floor. I sent for the police, and they arrived quickly. Arthur asked if I intended to let them take him away. I answered that it had become a public matter, since the crown belonged to the country.

"It would," he said, "be to your advantage and mine if I could leave the house for five minutes first."

"Then you could run away or perhaps hide what you have stolen," I said. "You have to face facts. You have been caught in the act, and nothing could make things worse for you. But tell me where the diamonds are. Then I shall forgive and forget everything."

"I have not asked for your forgiveness," he answered, turning away from me. I called the police into the room and let them take him. A search was made, of Arthur, his room, and the house, but the stones were not found.

'This morning Arthur was taken to the police station, and I

have hurried here to ask for your help. You can ask for as much money as you like. I have already offered a reward of a thousand pounds. My God, what shall I do? I have lost my good name, my diamonds and my son in one night. Oh, what shall I do!'

Sherlock Holmes sat silently for some minutes, staring into the fire.

30/ 'Do you have many guests in your house?' he asked.

'None, except for my business partner and his family, and sometimes Arthur's friends. Sir George Burnwell has been several times recently. No one else, I think.'

'Do you go out much?'

'Arthur does. Mary and I stay at home.'

'That is unusual for a young girl.'

'She is quiet. And she is not very young. She is twenty-four.'

'This business was a shock to her too.'

'A terrible shock!'

'And you both believe that your son is guilty?'

'I saw him with my own eyes with the crown in his hands.'

'That does not really prove anything. Was the rest of the crown damaged?'

'Yes, it was bent out of shape.'

'Do you not think that perhaps he was trying to straighten it again?'

'Mr Holmes, thank you! You are doing what you can for him and for me. But what was he doing there? If he had a good reason, why did he not say so?'

'Exactly. And if he was guilty, why didn't he invent a lie? Why did he keep silent? There are several puzzling points about this case. What did the police think about the noise that woke you from your sleep?'

'They thought it might be the sound of Arthur's bedroom door.'

'That is not likely. He would not make a noise if he was a

thief. What did they say about the disappearance of the diamonds?'

'They are still checking under the floors and in the furniture.'

'Have they looked outside?'

'Yes, they have examined the whole garden.'

'This matter, my dear sir,' said Holmes, 'is much more complicated than you or the police believe.'

'You think that your son came from his bedroom to your dressing-room, opened your cupboard, took out your crown, broke off a small piece of it, went off to another place, hid three of the thirty-nine diamonds, and then returned to the dressing-room with the other thirty-six?'

'But what else is possible?' said the banker. 'If he is innocent, why doesn't he explain?'

'It is our job to solve that,' replied Holmes. 'So now, Mr Holder, we will go to Streatham together and spend an hour looking a little more closely at the details.'

My friend asked me to join them on the journey, which I very much wanted to do. It seemed to me that the son, Arthur, must be guilty, but Sherlock Holmes's judgement is almost always excellent.

34 Holmes spoke very little on the way to Streatham. He sat with his chin on his chest and his hat over his eyes, in deep thought. Mr Holder appeared happy with the fresh hope that Holmes had given him. He even talked to me about his business.

My friend only changed when we came in sight of Fairbank, the home of the great banker. He sat up and studied the house with great interest.

Fairbank was quite a large square house of white stone. A wide carriageway led down through the snow-covered garden to a large iron gate. On the right-hand side of this, there was a narrow path which led to the kitchen door. On the left a little road went to the back of the house, where the horses were kept. This was a



*He sat up and studied the house with great interest.*

public road, although it was not used much.

Holmes walked slowly all round the house, across the front, down the narrow path, across the garden and into the little road. Mr Holder and I went into the dining-room, and waited by the fire until he returned.

We were sitting there in silence when the door opened and a young lady came in. She was a little above middle-height, with light hair and blue eyes, though these were red with crying. Her face was very pale; even her lips were bloodless.

As she came into the room, she seemed even more unhappy than the banker had been that morning. She went straight to her uncle.

'You have given orders that Arthur should go free, haven't you?' she asked.

'No, no, my girl. The police must be satisfied that he is not guilty.'

'But I am sure he has done nothing.'

'Why is he silent, if he is innocent?'

'Who knows? Perhaps he was angry that you thought he did it.'

'How could I not think that, when he had the crown in his hand?'

'Oh, but he had only picked it up to look at it. Oh, believe me when I say that he is innocent. It is so terrible to think of our dear Arthur in prison!'

'I cannot free him until the diamonds are found, Mary! I have brought a gentleman from London to help me.'

'This gentleman?' she asked, looking at me.

'No. His friend. He wishes us to leave him alone. He is in the road at the side of the house now.'

'In the road? What can he hope to find there? Ah, this, I suppose, is him,' she said, as Holmes came into the room. 'I hope, sir, that you will prove my cousin Arthur's innocence.'

'I share your opinion, and agree that we must prove it,' Holmes said. 'I believe you are Miss Mary Holder. Can I ask you a question or two?'

'Please do, sir, if it will help to solve the puzzle.'

'You heard nothing yourself last night?'

'Nothing, until my uncle began to speak loudly.'

32 'You shut all the windows and doors the night before. Did you lock all the windows?'

'Yes.'

'Were they all locked this morning?'

'Yes.'

'You have a servant who has a male friend? I think you said to your uncle that she had been out to see him?'

'Yes, Lucy Parr. It is possible that she heard my uncle speak about the crown.'

'You are suggesting that she went out to tell her friend, and that the two of them planned to steal it.'

'But,' cried the banker, 'I have told you that I saw Arthur with the crown in his hands!'

'Wait, Mr Holder. We must come back to that. Miss Holder, did you see this girl return by the kitchen door?'

'Yes, I went to check the door, and I met her coming in. I saw the man, too, in the darkness.'

'Do you know him?'

'Oh yes, he is the man who brings our vegetables. His name is Francis Prosper.'

'He stood,' said Holmes, 'to the left of the door?'

'Yes, he did.'

'And he is a man with a wooden leg?'

Something like fear came into the young lady's eyes. 'How do you know that?' she asked. She smiled, but there was no answering smile in Holmes's thin face.

'I think I would like to go upstairs now,' he said. 'I shall

probably want to look at the outside of the house again. Perhaps I shall look at the lower windows before I go up.'

He walked quickly round from one to the other, pausing only at the large one which looked from the hall to the little road at the side of the house. He opened this and examined it very carefully. 'Now we shall go upstairs,' he said at last.

The banker's dressing-room was quite small and contained only a dressing-table, a long mirror and a grey carpet. There was also a cupboard in the wall. Holmes went to this first and looked hard at the lock.

'Which key was used to open it?' he asked.

'The one which my son spoke about — from the cupboard in the sitting-room.'

'Do you have it here?'

'That is it on the dressing-table.'

Sherlock Holmes picked it up and opened the cupboard.

'It is a quiet lock,' he said. 'I am not surprised that it did not wake you. This case, I suppose, contains the crown. We must have a look at it.'

He opened the case and took out the piece of jewellery. It was a beautiful piece of work and the thirty-six stones were the finest I have ever seen. At one side of the crown there was a bent and broken edge. A point, with three diamonds, had been pulled off.

'Now, Mr Holder,' said Holmes, 'here is the opposite point to the one which has been lost. Can I ask you to break it off?'

The banker took a step back. 'I would not dream of trying,' he said.

'Then I will,' Holmes suddenly tried with all his strength to break the point off, but with no result. 'I can feel it move a little,' he said, 'and I have very strong fingers. An ordinary man could not do it.'

'Now, what do you think would happen if I did break it, Mr Holder? There would be a noise like a gunshot. Are you telling

me this happened a few feet from your bed, and that you heard nothing?'

'I don't know what to think.'

'Did your son have shoes on when you saw him?'

'He had nothing on except his trousers and shirt.'

'Thank you. Well, I think we have had a lot of luck. It will be our fault if we do not succeed in solving this case. With your permission, Mr Holder, I shall go outside again.'

He went alone, explaining that extra footprints might make his work more difficult. For an hour or more he was at work.

'I think I have now seen everything. Mr Holder,' he said, when he came back. 'I shall now return to my rooms.'

'But the diamonds, Mr Holmes. Where are they?'

'I do not know.'

'I shall never see them again,' the banker cried. 'And my son? Can you give me any hope?'

'My opinion has not changed.'

'Then what happened in this house last night?'

'If you can visit my Baker Street rooms tomorrow morning between nine and ten, I shall try to make it clearer. Can I do anything that is necessary to get the diamonds back? There must be no limit to the money I can spend.'

'I would give all my money to have them back,' the banker replied.

'Very good. Goodbye — though it is possible that I may come here again before evening.'

#### Part 2 *The Detective's Solution*

Several times during our journey home, I tried to make my friend tell me his thoughts about the case. But he always changed the subject, and at last I stopped asking.

It was before three when we found ourselves in our rooms again. Holmes hurried to his bedroom, but soon returned. He was dressed like a man who might be looking for work, in an old coat and older boots.

'I think that this will be all right,' he said, looking in the mirror above the fireplace. 'I am sorry that you cannot come with me, but I do not think it would be wise. I hope to be back in a few hours.' He cut some meat from the piece on the table, made himself a sandwich, put this into his pocket and left the room.

I had just finished my tea when he returned. He was looking very satisfied and holding an old boot in his hand. He threw this down into a corner and took a cup of tea.

'I am going out again,' he said.

'Where to?'

'Oh, the other side of London. Don't wait up for me.'

'How are you doing?'

'Quite well. I have been out to Streatham, but I did not visit the house. It is an interesting little problem and I am very glad that it came to me. However, I must not sit here talking. I must change my clothes and return to my normal appearance.'

His eyes were shining, and there was even a little colour in his normally pale face. He hurried upstairs, and a few minutes later I heard the hall door close.

I waited until midnight, but then I went to bed. I do not know when he came in, but he was there at breakfast with a cup of coffee in one hand and the newspaper in the other.

'Please excuse me, Watson,' he said. 'I started without you, because Mr Holder is coming quite early this morning.'

'Yes. It is after nine now,' I answered, 'and there is the sound of the bell.'

When the banker came in, I was shocked by the change in him. His face looked quite thin and his hair seemed to be whiter

than before. He walked in a slow, tired way that was even more painful than the violence of his entry the morning before. He fell heavily into the chair which I pushed forward for him.

'Only two days ago I was a very happy man,' he said. 'Now the last years of my life will be lonely and unhappy. One bad thing follows another – my niece Mary has left me.'

'Left you?'

'Yes. Her bed this morning had not been slept in. Her room was empty, and there was a note for me on the hall table. I said last night that I was sorry she didn't marry my boy. Perhaps I was wrong to say that. This is her note:

My dear uncle,

I feel that my actions are the cause of your trouble. I cannot ever be happy again under your roof, so I must leave you. Do not worry about my future, because that is arranged, and do not search for me. In life or in death, I am your loving

Mary

'What does she mean by that note, Mr Holmes? Do you think she might kill herself?'

'No, no, nothing like that. It is perhaps the best possible solution. You are, Mr Holder, coming to the end of your troubles.'

'Ha! You have heard something, Mr Holmes! You have learned something! Where are the diamonds?'

'A thousand pounds each would not be too much to pay for them?'

'I would pay ten.'

'That would be unnecessary. Three thousand will be enough. And there is a little reward, I think. Have you your cheque-book? Here is a pen.'

With a surprised look on his face, the banker wrote a cheque for four thousand pounds. Holmes walked to his desk, took out a