



I HAD SAT down to breakfast with Herlock Sholmes, in our rooms at Shaker Street, when the telephone bell suddenly rang.

Sholmes glanced up from his kipper.

"Take the call, Jotson," he said.

I willingly complied. I was not without hope that it might prove to be a call for my professional services. My medical practice was not so lucrative as I could have wished, owing to the difficulty I often found in collecting my fees from executors.

I put the receiver to my ear, and a voice, which sounded as if it proceeded slowly through a long nose, came over the wires.

"Say, big boy, I guess we got the joint all hunky for Old Man Guggerhunk. You sure want to tote that guy along to Number Five Limehouse Alley. You get me?"

"I am afraid that I do not quite follow," I answered, somewhat perplexed. "Possibly you have been given the wrong number."

"Aw! Shucks! Carry me home to die!" came a startled ejaculation. "If that ain't the elephant's hind leg, and then some!"

"This is Dr. Jotson speaking," I said, "if you are requiring my services as a medical man—?"

There was no rejoinder. My unknown interlocutor had wrung off.

I returned to the breakfast-table, and sat down. To my astonishment, my kipper had vanished from my plate.

"Dear me!" I ejaculated.

"What is the matter, Jotson?" asked Herlock Sholmes.

"My kipper has disappeared!" I answered, in amazement. "During the few minutes I was at the telephone, it has completely vanished."

"Extraordinary!" said Sholmes.

"It is somewhat disconcerting, as well as extraordinary," I replied. "I have not breakfasted, Sholmes. In the present state of the money market, I cannot call upon Mrs. Spudson to produce another kipper. This is an opportunity for you, Sholmes, to exercise your amazing gifts. Oblige me by solving the mystery of the missing kipper."

Herlock Sholmes shook his head.

"I hardly think, Jotson, that even I could detect the present whereabouts of that kipper, without the aid of an X-ray outfit," he said.

"You do yourself injustice, Sholmes," I replied, warmly. "Such a problem would be child's play to you. Did you not solve the mystery of the disappearance of Lord Stoney de Broke's watch after a visit to his uncle? I really beg of you, Sholmes, to set your vast intellect to work on this problem."

Again Herlock Sholmes shook his head.

"There are some problems, my dear Jotson, better left unsolved," he said, enigmatically, "but you have not yet told me what was said on the telephone."

I repeated to Herlock Sholmes the strange words that had been spoken over the wires. He listened attentively: seeming, for some reason, desirous of dropping the subject of the kipper.

"No doubt a wrong number was given at the exchange," he said. "The message was intended for someone else—doubtless an American, as it was spoken in that language. But—"

"But the kipper—!" I said.

"Never mind the kipper, Jotson," said Herlock Sholmes, with a touch of asperity. "I am fed up with that kipper."

He rose from the table.

"The American language," he remarked, "is an abstruse but interesting study. I have been thinking—"

"Of my kipper?" I asked. I found it somewhat difficult to dismiss the mystery of the missing kipper from my mind. Though lost to sight, it was to memory dear.

"Certainly not!" said Sholmes. "I have been thinking of taking up the study of American, Jotson. In many respects it bears a resemblance to our own tongue. Take for example the verbs "to have" and "to do". These are certainly English in origin: but in American they have a much deeper significance, and are carried, in practice, to much greater lengths. The conjugation is, I believe, something like this—"I have, thou art had!" and "I do, thou art done!" With regard to nouns, such things as cash, dollars, dimes, spondulics, dough, and so on, are always in the possessive case. Americans speak always in the active voice, generally very active—a passive voice seems unknown among them. Further—"

Herlock Sholmes was interrupted by a knock at the door.

It was Inspector Pinkeye, our old acquaintance at Scotland Yard, who entered.

"Sholmes!" he exclaimed.

Herlock Sholmes smiled.

"Scotland Yard bunkered again?" he said. "You have come to me, as usual, for first aid. Proceed, my dear fellow. You may speak quite freely before my friend Dr. Jotson."

"The fact is, Mr. Sholmes, that we need your help," confessed the inspector. "The American millionaire Guggerhunk—the celebrated Phineas K. Guggerhunk—has been kidnapped."

I could not help giving a start. The name had a familiar ring.

"No doubt you have heard of Mr. Guggerhunk," continued Inspector Pinkeye. "He made an immense fortune as a pork packer in Chicago. Owing to the number of employees who became mixed up with the machinery, and were unavoidably packed with the pork, his products achieved an enormous popularity in the South Sea Islands, which laid the foundation of a fortune running into a dozen figures. Mr. Guggerhunk then became the object of the special attention of the kidnapping industry in his native country. After many narrow escapes, he finally decided to live in Europe. But—"

"But—?" asked Herlock Sholmes.

"But that has not saved him, after all," said the inspector, shaking his head. "Only this morning, Mr. Sholmes, he was kidnapped."

"Kindly give me a few details," drawled Sholmes.

"Mr. Guggerhunk occupied a mansion in Park Lane. At an early hour this morning the constable on the beat was passing the mansion, when his suspicions were aroused by the sight of three masked men climbing into a bedroom window by means of a ladder—"

"An observant man!" remarked Sholmes, with a nod.

"The officer did not, at the time, attach any particular importance to the incident," continued Inspector Pinkeye, "but he remembered it, and when Mr. Guggerhunk was stated to be missing, he reported it to his superiors. The matter was immediately placed in the hands of the most capable inspector at Scotland Yard, and I proceeded to the spot. But—" He shrugged his shoulders.

"No clue?" asked Herlock Sholmes.

"None: except that some words, spoken by one of the kidnapers in the hearing of the butler, seem to indicate that the gang came from Mr. Guggerhunk's own country. I have taken down the words, as repeated to me: and with your well-known linguistic skill, Mr. Sholmes, you may be able to state definitely in what language they were spoken."

"No doubt," assented Sholmes.

Inspector Pinkeye opened his note-book, and Herlock Sholmes read aloud the curious phrase used by the kidnapper.

"Guess we done cinched dis guy."

"You can identify the language, Sholmes?" asked the inspector, eagerly.

"American," answered my amazing friend, without a moment's hesitation.

"Good!" exclaimed the inspector. "Then there can be no doubt that the Chicago gangsters have followed Mr. Guggerhunk over here, and are seeking to carry on a purely American profession in this country. You will help us track them down, Mr. Sholmes—on the usual terms—"

"Cash!" said Herlock Sholmes, tersely.

"But the credit to us," said the inspector.

Herlock Sholmes smiled.

"A poet, my dear Pinkeye, has said 'Ah! take the cash, and let the credit go!' I am of his opinion, and I am entirely at your service."

I thought it time to speak.

"Sholmes," I began. "That telephone call—"

"My dear Jotson, it is time you went to see your patients," said Herlock Sholmes, interrupting me somewhat sharply.

"You do not need my assistance in this case?" I asked, a little disappointed.

"On this occasion, no, Jotson. Scotland Yard may be baffled, as usual, by this problem: but I shall very soon be able to put our friend Pinkeye on the track of the missing millionaire."

"You think so, Sholmes?" exclaimed the inspector, eagerly.

"I do not think," answered Herlock Sholmes, coldly, "I know."

"You have a theory—?"

"I do not deal in theories, but in facts, Pinkeye. Jotson, my dear fellow, it is time you were off."

"I was about to mention the peculiar telephone call we received this morning, Sholmes—owing to a wrong number having been given to our interlocutor. It appears to me—"

"If you have one fault, my dear Jotson, it is that you talk too much," interrupted Herlock Sholmes. "Say no more."

"But I think, Sholmes—"

"Nonsense, Jotson. You over-estimate your mental processes. Thinking is not in your line. Indeed, as a medical man, it would amount, in your case, to unprofessional conduct," said Sholmes, severely. "Pray go."

"But—"

"Remember your patients, Jotson—waiting for you to put them out of their pain! Lose no more time."

I departed accordingly. I could not help thinking that the mysterious telephone call at breakfast might have some bearing on the case of the kidnapped millionaire. But in these matters, of course, I had to yield to the judgment of my amazing friend.

Deeply as I was interested in my colleague's work, and in the mystery Inspector Pinkeye had brought to him to solve, I dismissed these matters from my mind, while engaged upon a round of visits to my patients. I have never been one to take professional duties lightly, and all my medical work has been done in deadly earnest.

My round, however, did not occupy me very long. My patients were fewer in number than at the time I had bought the practice. It is well said that the work of a good and conscientious doctor tends to diminish his own practice, and this was undoubtedly the case with me. Indeed, the more assiduously I attended my patients, the more they diminished in number. This went to such a length at times, that I had little income, beyond the dividends on my investments in Fashionable Funerals, Ltd., and the Monumental Masons' Company. Luckily, by some happy coincidence, these dividends increased as fast as my patients diminished.

I was back in Shaker Street early: and, as I entered, my thoughts reverted to the case of the missing millionaire, and I wondered whether Inspector Pinkeye had yet succeeded in tracing Phineas K. Guggerhunk with the help of my amazing friend.

This matter was of some serious interest, for owing to the mysterious disappearance of my kipper, I had breakfasted very lightly: I was ready for lunch, and there was some doubt whether lunch would be ready for me.

Herlock Sholmes was seated in the armchair in our sitting-room, in his usual graceful attitude with his feet on the mantelpiece, when I came in. He glanced round at me with a smile.

"Success, Sholmes?" I asked.

"Need you ask, Jotson?" said Sholmes, reprovingly.

"True!" I exclaimed. "You have, then, solved the mystery, and put your finger—or at least Inspector Pinkeye's finger—on the kidnapped millionaire?"

"I have been of some little assistance to the official police in the matter," drawled Herlock Sholmes. "By a process of reasoning which is so far above your intellect, my dear fellow, that I will not attempt to explain it to you, I have been able to tell Pinkeye exactly where to look for Mr. Guggerhunk."

"Wonderful!" I exclaimed.

"Elementary, my dear Jotson," said Sholmes, with a yawn. "I am expecting a telephone call from the inspector every moment now, and I have no doubt that he will report that he has rescued Mr. Guggerhunk, and arrested the gangsters. All the credit, as usual, will go to Scotland Yard: but I shall draw my fee, Jotson, and I think I can guarantee that it will run to fish and chips for lunch."

"Splendid!" I exclaimed, heartily.

A few minutes later the telephone bell rang. I took off the receiver, and recognized the voice of Inspector Pinkeye. The exchange had apparently given him the right number: from what cause I cannot say.

"Is that you, Sholmes—?"

"Dr. Jotson speaking," I answered.

"We've got him," said Inspector Pinkeye. "We went direct to Number Five Limehouse Alley—"

I started.

"Number Five Limehouse Alley!" I repeated.

"Yes—and there we found Mr. Guggerhunk and the gangsters. Tell Mr.

Sholmes that by putting us on the track so quickly, he has saved the kidnapped man from terrible usage. They were feeding him on his own pork, packed in Chicago."

"Horrible!" I exclaimed, with a shudder.

"They're a tough gang," said the inspector. "I'm not sure whether this may not enable us to bring a charge of attempted manslaughter, as well as kidnapping. The usual fee is waiting for Mr. Sholmes to collect, and he need bring no change for the ten-shilling note. Mr. Guggershunk is so overcome with gratitude that he has added a sixpenny cigar at his own expense. Good-bye."

I put up the receiver, and repeated the inspector's message to Herlock Sholmes. He nodded nonchalantly.

"Exactly as I expected—with the exception of the sixpenny cigar," he said. "That, I confess, I did not foresee." He disconnected his feet from the mantelpiece, and rose from the armchair. "Come, Jotson, my dear fellow. The sooner we collect the fee, and invest it in fish and chips, the better—and I should like to get hold of that cigar before Mr. Guggershunk changes his mind."

"But, Sholmes," I could not help saying. "It appears to me that that curious telephone call at breakfast had some bearing—"

"Indeed!" said Sholmes, coldly.

"It was a curious chance—"

"Chances, Jotson, have nothing to do with my methods! You should know me better than that."

"True! But—"

"My deductions," said Herlock Sholmes, "proceed with mathematical precision from one aberration to another. You should know that, Jotson."

"True! Nevertheless—"

"Come, come," said Sholmes, impatiently. "Although I had an unusually ample breakfast, I am ready for lunch. Come!"

And I said no more, as I followed my amazing friend from the room. With the reticence he sometimes displayed when I was most curious, he declined to explain the masterly process of reasoning by which he had deduced that Phineas K. Guggershunk was imprisoned at Number Five Limehouse Alley, and I had to be content to wonder.