

Colin Henchley – The Mystery of the Newly Married Man

My Dear Mr Sherlock Holmes,

It is with mixed emotions that I find myself drafting this hastily written dispatch. Still, I must not (and will not) deviate from the onerous undertaking, for I have become convinced my wealth, my sanity, and mayhap even my life are in the hands of Machiavellian powers. SAVE ME, SIR, PLEASE SAVE ME!

Forgive a young man the hysterics of capital letters; I am tired and not a little anxious. Perhaps if I begin my baffling narrative at the very beginning...

My mother disappeared in mysterious circumstances when I was but a toddler (she popped out to admire a boomerang hanging from the belt of one of our colonial cousins - and she never came back). Obviously broken-hearted, my father quickly decided it would be best if I expended my childhood energies as a fulltime boarder at Greyfriar's boys-only school while he recuperated some of the associated expense by letting my room to a series of gentlemen friends who all seemed to share his interest in Oscar Wilde plays and lederhosen. Such an upbringing, I must confess, left me unfamiliar with the doings of the gentler sex. A deficiency not improved by my choice of a career in the wig and ermine-wearing, male-dominated law profession.

So when, eighteen months ago, I met a beautiful young girl named Emmeline Goulden at a meeting of the Fabian Society, I assumed the giddy countenance I always adopted in her presence was love and married her in haste.

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Alas, I suspect this assumption may have been erroneous. I now wonder if in fact I was (and continue to be) under the influence of hallucinogenic perfumes or the darkest of dark magic! That's right, sir, unless I myself am mad, I fear my beloved is either a master criminal or - I hesitate to write it - a witch!

What strange words or deeds have led me to this conclusion after only eight short months of an outwardly ideal marriage? What could have tempted me to elicit the services of the one man in England who has had first hand experience of both the schemes of malfeasant perpetrators and the spirits of malignant pooches? No one thing, Sir, no one thing, but a collection of perplexing observations that defy natural explanation. Allow me to elucidate.

Item. Whenever I ask my wife what she has done during my exhausting six and one half hours supporting counsel at (and beneath) the bar, she always relates an impossibly long list of accomplishments that includes cooking, cleaning, ironing, washing, washing up, washing down, shopping, decorating, gardening and dog walking. Sir, I have followed your directives on experimentation and have convinced myself that it is impossible for a grown man of Herculean aptitudes to perform these tasks in the time available, never mind a delicate and petite young woman! What do you suppose, sir: are her deeds being completed by an army of zombie slaves or by a secret team of housemaids blackmailed into servitude?

Item. It is not just the quantity of duties she professes to attain in a day but also the observed fact she can do an unfeasible number of tasks at the same time. While you or I, as normal men, might just be able to combine the two joyful acts of smoking and watching the spectacle of a rigger match; she can simultaneously sit, knit, read, talk, plan a dinner party, pump the

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harmonium and fuss the cat with her spare foot! You have met many felonious circus acts during the course of your investigations, Sir, what are your deductions? Have I wed such a specimen? Will I awake one night to discover my beloved strangling me with her bare feet in order to leave no incriminating fingerprints?

Item. The other day I visited my larder in search of a jar of 'gentlemen's relish' with which to liven up a rather ordinary cold mutton sandwich. But when I got there, the cupboard was bare! Granted a few assorted condiments littered the shelves, but there was nowhere the garishly labelled bottle could sit unobserved. I was admonishing my spouse for her lax housekeeping when she opened the selfsame larder door and instantly extracted the required product with a roll of her eyes and the single admonishment 'And yet **you** have the vote!'. Sir, such episodes of legerdemain materialisations are not uncommon. Often she pulls lost spectacles from my hair, missing pens from behind my ears, and mislaid books on the British Constitution from sewing baskets I swear I never touch! Is she a dark priestess or a simple prestigiator? I live in terror that, one day, I will be beside myself after becoming the unwitting assistant in a 'cutting a person in half' trick.

Item. Mr Smythe-Jones, the head of chambers, seems to have fallen under her mystic influence AND HE HAS NEVER MET HER! Since my wedding, he has consistently complimented HER on MY supposed improved appearance, MY supposed newfound punctuality, and MY supposed increasingly professional manner. Yet, Sir, apart from having gained a few pounds, I do not believe I have changed at all. I suspect he is a doppelganger and that a cunning courtroom escape may be to hand.

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Item. I will put aside the suspicious weekly miracle she performs with the meagre housekeeping money I give her (and modesty forbids me reporting her mesmeric effect in the bedroom) to recount her apparent ability towards telepathy. Last week, on the way home, I happened to meet an old bachelor friend of mine, Dorian Grey by name, who tempted me into consuming a little ale and playing a frame or two of snooker. Knowing my wife's opinion of such trifles, I covered my tracks most earnestly by sucking an extra strong humbug and resurrecting an old story about being forced to clear a late cheque for a traveller by the name of Fogg. Imagine my state of mind when, on disrobing for bed, I heard my Emmeline tell me how many games I had lost and how much beer I had drunk. "Mind reader!" I exclaimed. She chuckled. "Chalk dust on your shirt sleeves told me you played, your demeanour told me you lost, and a count of the coins in your pocket told me what you spent on drink." Sir, if you take my case your work will be most difficult for she uses your own methods!

Item. Last, sir, but by no means least, I now live in fear of being usurped from my own home! Yesterday I overheard Emmeline confiding to the greengrocer's sister that there might soon be another's feet 'pattering' about the house. 'Pattering', what sort of word is 'pattering'? I fully expect to open the wardrobe one morning only to find myself wrestling with one of those hairy-armed creatures that was dealt with by your French counterpart in the Rue Morgue the other day.

Mr Holmes, Sherlock, I pray you take my case. Though I love my wife dearly, surely, no other gentleman in Her Majesty's Empire can possess a woman with such unnerving powers. Surely, as you say, a game is afoot. Until I receive your reply I will reluctantly, for safety's sake, only partake meagrely of Emmeline's most excellent pastries.

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Yours in expectation,

Dr Richard Marsden Pankhurst Esquire.

PS.

Hurry, Sir, and bring Dr Watson. My wife is repeatedly being sick in the morning - I can only think she is building a resistance to some deadly poison!