The society world of London was astonished by the disappearance of one of its more illustrious visitors of the summer, and the government was equally embarrassed by the same event, for it was the newly married Baroness Radelescu, wife of the Baron who was the inheritor to the throne of a small, yet important and friendly central European kingdom. I read the sketchy details in the evening paper, having had an early dinner with my wife and her cousin who was having her annual visit to London for a week. They were chatting away, planning their excursion for the next day, when there was a knock on the front door of the surgery. I was hoping it was not another patient as my surgery was very busy all afternoon. It was a small and grimy boy, whom I recognized immediately as one of Holmes’s Baker Street Irregulars, a group employed at times by Holmes to help him in his detection. They were extremely valuable as they fit into the daily scene of the street life and could trail a suspect without arousing attention.

“If you please, Doctor, the guv’nor would like you to come around to his digs for a meeting at nine o’clock this evening. He says it is very important.”

I had not seen Holmes for some time so I told my wife of the summons and set off with the boy, whom I remembered as Barnaby. We reached 221B Baker Street with some minutes to spare, and Holmes greeted me warmly.

“It is good to see you again, Watson, and I hope your wife and her cousin are well.”

I said, somewhat astonished, “They are quite well indeed, they were planning their shopping trips, and I am quite sure they did not miss my leaving. But how did you know her cousin was here?”

“Watson, if I told you, you would say that it was obvious, but I will tell you anyway. Your new wife likes to show you off like a trophy to her cousins so she makes certain that you do not continue in your slovenly bachelor ways, hence your military habit of stuffing your handkerchief in your sleeve is supplanted by an elegant folded one in your lapel pocket, your scruffy shoes you wear in surgery were exchanged for your polished Sunday best, and the comfortable tweed jacket was exchanged for the nicely tailored suit coat you received as a wedding gift. But, as you will say, it is obvious, but I did not ask you here for a simple lesson in reasoning, but for a more sinister and complicated problem. You have likely read of the abduction of Baroness Radelescu from her hotel. This is, of course, very embarrassing to the government as they had a special interest in forging friendly relationships with her husband, who should ascend to the throne. They have asked Scotland Yard to assist them and Inspector Gregson has been put in charge. Shortly, at 9 PM, he and the Baron are to meet me here and fill in the details of the abduction. Good, I hear Mrs. Hudson greeting them at the door.”

Mrs. Hudson showed in the very familiar figure of Inspector Gregson and a tall, powerfully built man who was introduced as Baron Radelescu. Handshakes were exchanged, and Holmes got right to the point and asked the Baron to relate the details of the abduction.

The Baron started with an apology. “Mr. Holmes, please excuse my English, I am fluent in several languages, but English is not one of them.”

Holmes waved the explanation aside. “I am certain that it is adequate for the occasion, pray continue.”

The Baron went on. “My wife and I had dressed for dinner and we were waiting in our hotel for our host to come. There was a knock on the door, which I answered, and three men in masks rushed into the room; one had a pistol. One man held my wife, and another tied her wrists and put a gag in her mouth. I then struggled with the man who had the pistol, but one of the others hit me on the head with something and I passed out.”

Gregson added, “His host came at seven, received no answer, alerted the hotel manager who opened the door and found the Baron. He was just recovering, his wife was missing, and they called the police. The Foreign Office was notified, and they contacted the Yard, and I was put on the case.”
Holmes pondered a few moments, and said, “Was anything said by the three men, anything at all?”

“Only one thing, one of them shouted, ‘Grab the lady, Slippy,’ and that is the only thing I remember before the blow,” said the Baron.

Holmes asked, “You are certain that he called him Slippy?”

“As you know, Mr. Holmes, my English is not too good, but that is what I thought he said,” replied the Baron.

Holmes continued, “Baron, can you tell me anything about the three men?”

The Baron shook his head and said, “Only that the one with the pistol seemed to be the leader, and the one called Slippy had red hair.”

Holmes turned to Gregson. “Were there clues of any kind that you found, anything at all?”

Gregson reached in his pocket, pulled out an envelope, and in it was a torn piece of paper. He explained, “The Baron struggled with the man with the pistol and he remembers grabbing one of the pockets in the coat. We found this torn piece of paper with a queer figure that could be some kind of secret code or sign of some nature. Holmes, what do you make of it? It looks like a child’s drawing.”

Holmes took the proffered piece of paper, turned it around so he could see it from every angle, and said, “Could I borrow it a few days? Watson, take a look at this.”

I looked at it, and mumbled, “I agree with Gregson, it looks like a child’s scrawlings to me.”

“Keep it, Holmes, and please keep us informed of any thoughts you have.” He and the Baron took their leave.

Holmes looked grave, and said, “I think it a most significant and sinister clue if I am correct. Watson, old friend, I need your help. Could you spare me a few days as I have deep concerns about the well-being of the Baroness? We could send a message back to your home for I see one of my assistants, Barnaby, is still lurking in the street.”

I thought about it, and it was a good time as my wife was occupied with her cousin and I had no urgent cases in my care, so I assented. Holmes was delighted, and we reminisced over a glass of good port before sleep in my old bed.

After a full breakfast of kippers, Holmes turned to me and said, “First, Watson, I am meeting my brother Mycroft at the Diogenes Club to ferret out some information. You may take the opportunity of dropping home and packing some clothing in a valise, and, if you would, bring your old service revolver.”

We met after lunch after both accomplishing our missions. I asked, “I hope your brother Mycroft is well, and you garnered the information.”

Holmes said, “Mycroft is very well and thrives in that club with most singular and brilliant and reclusive companions. He introduced me to his friend William Simon, who is one of the most brilliant mathematicians at Cambridge. I showed him the note, and he confirmed my suspicions and added to my apprehensions. He indicated that it is a crude map, the blue line is the Pregel River, the green surrounded by the river is Kniephof Island, the seven black lines are bridges, and the whole is a map of the central part of Konigsberg in East Prussia.”

I sputtered, “But, Holmes, what can that mean and what bearing does it have on this situation?”

Holmes explained, “This is the setting of a famous problem solved by Euler, the Swiss mathematician. It is the puzzle of the Seven Bridges of Konigsberg. The problem was whether or not a man could stroll around the city back to his own home and cross all seven bridges one time only. Euler gave an ingenious mathematical proof that it could not be done.”

Holmes continued, “However, he confirmed my suspicion when he told me that, at their recent meeting of the mathematical society, there was a heated discussion about the problem led by a professor of mathematics, James Moriarty. So, you see, Watson, we are in dark waters.”

I objected, “But Holmes, this does not necessarily mean that Moriarty is behind this abduction.”

Holmes replied, “The coincidence is too great, and the whole affair is conducted in the Moriarty mode. No, Watson, we must assume the worst.”

After returning to Baker Street, Holmes outlined his course of action. “Watson, we have only one other lead and that is the name of one of the culprits. I will make inquiries from my many acquaintances in the criminal world to see if they can help me. I will try East London first as that is a favorite haunt of Moriarty. It also contains a rabbit warren of abandoned buildings and old warehouses where a prisoner might be kept. I will commence my inquiries, and you wait here until I return.”

I had my dinner on a tray and was busy reading the *Lancet*, when Mrs. Hudson announced a visitor.
and ushered in a disreputable looking man with a slouched cap and dirty clothing. I was somewhat concerned with his appearance and reluctantly rose to meet him.

The new arrival spoke. “Well, Watson, are you going to offer me a brandy and soda? I have been quaffing cheap beer all day with half the inhabitants of East London trying to ferret out some information.”

I gasped. “Holmes, you never fail to amaze me with your disguises. I hope your public house time was profitable.”

Holmes explained, “It was, but only at the end of the day. No one seemed to know this Slippy with red hair, but I struck gold in a run-down tavern near the docks. After my description and drinks all around, one of them said, ‘Guv’nor, I know your man but you got the handle wrong, it is Sleepy, not Slippy, and some calls him Red Nolan from his flaming red locks. You can find him most days at the Admiralty Arms down by the wharves. He is easy to spot, for he falls asleep when he talks to you or when he’s eating his soup or anytime. It’s a natural wonder.’ So he is likely our man, Watson, and the Baron’s imperfect command of the language temporarily led us astray. I set the Baker Street Irregulars on a task to find and follow him to see if he reveals the hiding place. They are the best of detectives and their presence in East London passes without notice.”

I spent the next day at Baker Street as Holmes had gone off to take lunch again with his brother Mycroft. After Holmes returned, Barnaby, one of the Irregulars, came around and gave information about Sleepy Nolan’s activities for the day and his visits to an abandoned warehouse. He was duly rewarded and Holmes said to me, “Get your service revolver, Watson, for we are hot on the chase.”

Holmes picked out his favorite Penang Lawyer, we took a hansom cab, and we got out down the street from the address given us by Barnaby. I immediately had the eerie feeling we were being watched, and, suddenly, we were surrounded by a gang of ruffians, our hands were bound in front of us and we were gagged, and taken into an underground room in an old warehouse. It must have been a storage place for pottery, for old jugs and plates were piled high on tables and shelves. There was a beautiful and stately woman, also bound and gagged, who, I assume, was the Baroness Radelescu. There, also, were Professor Moriarty with a pistol and two others, one with flaming red hair. The band of ruffians, who had accosted us, were paid off by Moriarty and left.

Moriarty passed the pistol to Nolan and said, “Stand up, Sleepy, this is no time to doze off. I want to speak with my worthy opponent. I will remove his gag for his shouting will draw no alarm from his underground prison.”

As Moriarty removed the gag, Holmes suddenly kicked the leg of a flimsy table holding pottery of every sort. The sound reverberated in the small space, and Nolan dropped the pistol and melted to the floor like a rag doll.

Holmes shouted, “Watson, grab the pistol!”

I did with my bound hands as Nolan seemed unable to move. I immediately leveled the gun at Moriarty and his henchmen. Holmes had worked his hands free and removed my gag and bonds and those of the Baroness. Holmes took the gun and I went up the dark stairways to the street where I soon encountered a constable, and, shortly, Gregson and his squad from Scotland Yard were taking the prisoners out, Moriarty cursing out Nolan and shaking his fist at Holmes.

The Baron was with the police, and after a tearful embrace with the Baroness, he thanked Holmes most warmly, and invited him to his embassy in a few days to receive the highest decoration of his country and a substantial reward. The decoration, I assume, will end up in the same cigar box in which Holmes carelessly tosses all his various medals.

When we were back at Baker Street, Holmes turned to me. “Watson, I am deeply sorry that I put you at such a risk, I should have set out with a squad of police. It was my vanity to outdo Moriarty on my own, it was selfish of me, and I am grateful to you for all you did.”

“Holmes, I was pleased to play a role in the apprehension of that fiend and in the recovery of the Baroness. But how did you know the reaction of Nolan? I have never seen anything like it. You were taking a great risk.”

Holmes smiled. “Watson, it was a calculated risk. As you know, I had lunch with my brother Mycroft and told him of our suspicions about Sleepy Nolan with such an unusual affliction. Mycroft said he had a clerk in his office with a similar problem and Mycroft arranged to have him seen by his friend Gowers. Gowers diagnosed it as narcolepsy and prescribed great quantities of coffee, which seems to help. Gower’s Manual of Diseases of the Nervous System is in the club library. I read the description and spoke briefly to Gowers who was dining at the club. He directed me to the work of a Dr. Gélineau in the Gazette des Hopitaux of July 8, 1880; the original is in French, but let me read to you my rough translation into English. The doctor is describing the illness of a 38-year-old man, who had suffered two head injuries. I will read the pertinent information from volume 53, page 627.”

Holmes extracted a piece of paper from his vest pocket, and read, “For a considerable time afterwards,
there had been no ill effects from this injury. It was only two years later that he felt, when he smiled at some surprise or saw something pleasant at work, weakness in his legs, which would give way underneath him. Later, when playing cards, if he saw a good play, he would become limp and could not move his arms; his head would droop and he would fall asleep. . . . If he had any deep emotion, pleasurable or painful, the desire to sleep would be particularly forceful and sudden. Also, if he made a good deal in his business, if he saw a friend, if he spoke to a stranger for the first time, if he had good luck at cards, he would weaken and sleep immediately. If he went to the Jardin des Plantes, to the place of the swans, saw something curious, a pretty child, soldiers with guns, he would sleep and see the world around him laughing. The horse that carried him, a carriage that let him pass, a strangely dressed person who made him smile—all these things struck him.

Holmes folded the piece of paper, and put it back in his pocket. He said, “Yes, Watson, it is a condition called cataplexy, often part of the affliction of narcolepsy, the overpowering urge to sleep. I believe the term cataplexy was first used to describe the ruse employed by certain animals of appearing dead to prevent attacks by other animals. I thought that the loud noise might precipitate such an attack.”

“Well, Holmes, the noise you raised with that clatter of pottery breaking almost scared me to death.”

Holmes chuckled. “Well, Watson, it fortunately led to a favorable, and, may I say, startling conclusion.”

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