

THE MURDER OF THE WORLD'S MOST FAMOUS DETECTIVE

I. A Sensational Crime

It was 7 p.m. in Brooklyn, New York. There was an avalanche of newspaper boys along the street; newspaper sellers shouted at the top of their lungs, hawking the latest edition of *The Daily Mail*. Brooklyn is to New York what the Grand Boulevards and the Avenue de l'Opéra are to Paris. Everywhere in the street there was an enormous brouhaha of repeated shouts which rose above the crowd: DEATH OF SHERLOCK HOLMES! MURDER OF THE WORLD'S MOST FAMOUS DETECTIVE! A MYSTERIOUS TRAGEDY ON THE RALEIGH EXPRESS!!!

Just as one of the news boys turned into Osborn Street, a young woman, slim, elegant, who seemed to be enjoying casual window shopping along the couturier and jewelry stores, stopped the seller, gave him a penny and took a newspaper. The young woman took several steps away from the crowd and by a bar's flashing lights unfolded the newspaper just to see the article which announced in huge letters the death of the most famous detective who ever lived, the illustrious and famous Sherlock Holmes. Just as she was about to fold up her newspaper, someone greeted her and said:

"Newspapers at this hour in the street, Miss Boston?"

"Ah! It's you, Mr. Clampton! How are you?"

"Marvelous! What do you think of this business?"

"Nothing."

"How's that?"

"But I really think it could be something."

"Something?"

"Or everything. But at your office, Clampton, what do they say about it?"

"At our office, Miss Boston, we're up to our eyeballs in work, that's all."

"Who's handling the case? Is it Toby, Sanfield, or Sokes?"

"None of the three. It's Morton."

"He's the one, really?"

"Yes, him, really."

While talking, the two had continued down Osborn Street. Around them shocked people were unfolding newspapers, excitedly discussing the extraordinary event. The man who had greeted Miss Boston was one of the ablest policemen of the New York Police Administration, Harris Clampton. He had known Miss Boston from the time when she was the aide of William Hopkins, the most famous amateur detective in the United States. But what was not known about her was that Miss Boston, all by herself, solved most of the terrible and tragic problems that had been submitted to him. At the death of William Hopkins, felled by the Green Tie Gang, she said to herself:

"Why not work alone? Why not, in my turn, become famous? Should Hopkins be the only one to achieve celebrity?"

These were her thoughts when Clampton met Miss Boston in Brooklyn Street. The police's point of view about the murder of Sherlock Holmes could be seen from their conversation.

"Then," said Clampton, "does the case interest you?"

"How could I not be interested in it? Wasn't Sherlock Holmes the master of all of us? For William Hopkins as well as for Nick Carter?"

"That's true."

"So there's a double reason for a detective to be interested in this shady business."

"And what's that, Miss Boston?"

"Wasn't Sherlock Holmes the most subtle, the strongest among us, and if he was brought down, it was because he was dealing with terrible criminals, stronger than he was, stronger than we are. Now what's more glorious than, in this case, catching Sherlock Holmes' killer?"

"You're smiling, Clampton. I'm a woman, that's true, but I have courage. Do you remember the case of Prick Salmon? I held my own against three men."

"And the three men were caught."

"That's right. Then you see I can go after Sherlock Holmes' murderers."

"Really. And that's what's called telling it like it is. And when do you begin, Miss Boston?"

"I've begun."

"You have?"

"Yes."

"Decidedly you're better than our detectives."

"Let's understand each other, Harris. I've begun because I know which of the Central Bureau detectives has charge of the case, because I know how they feel about the case, and because I know they have no suspects."

"Who told you that?"

"You did."

"Me? Really, Miss Boston! You're mistaken. It seems to me I didn't say anything of the sort."

"You think so?"

"I'm certain of it."

"Because you didn't tell me anyone was suspected; therefore you have no suspects. Right?"

Clampton gave Miss Boston a sincerely astonished look, where there was at the same time mute admiration as well as bewilderment.

When they came to the corner of Osborn Street and 138th Avenue, Miss Boston said:

"Clampton, I really must leave you. I'll see you later."

"Until then, and good luck."

"Thank you. And by the way, do you know if Dr. Watson is in New York?"

"Yes, since this morning."

"He wasn't here at all yesterday?"

"No, he was in Raleigh."

"Ah! Good. Goodbye, Clampton."

And the two separated. Clampton, walking slowly, went back up 138th Avenue toward Circus Place, and Miss Boston went back down Osborn Street. When she got there, about the middle of the street, she hailed a cab which was driving about aimlessly looking for fares. She gave her address: 38 Savannah City, and told him to hurry.

II. Miss Boston Picks Up the Trail

While letting herself be lulled by the fast pace of the horse, what was Miss Boston thinking about if not the big question of that evening, the affair of the murder of Sherlock Holmes? The details in *The Daily Mail*, which might be exciting for the public at large, was hardly that for the detective accustomed to never looking for dramatic and exciting stories but for facts in their tragic and simple truths. Now these facts, how could they be learned?

That was the object of Miss Boston's thoughts, while the cab carried her across the dark East Side streets toward Savannah City. The carriage soon stopped. Miss Boston was home. The house where she had chosen to live looked both peaceful and middle-class. Like most New York apartment buildings it had 10 floors. The apartment the detective occupied on the ninth of these floors was simple and comfortable, furnished without luxury but with convenience. Doors to a little sitting room and dining room opened off a spacious and bright entry hall. Beyond was situated the detective's bedroom, adjoining her study. This study was carefully organized, holding thousands of cards about most of the New York criminals in neatly arranged files. That was the room the detective entered as soon as she reached her apartment. One file gave her a small notebook that she consulted, address by address.

"In 1902," she said softly, "Sherlock Holmes stayed at the American Hotel. In 1904, at the Continental; in 1904, on his second trip; in 1905, this time he must have stayed at the Circus. There was certainly order in his choice of residences." And after having returned the notebook to its usual place, she added:

"And now, what case was he working on?"

Another notebook was taken from the files and leafed through rapidly. But after some moments the female detective, leaning back in her chair, began to reflect.

“It’s one of two things: either Sherlock Holmes was looking for London criminals in America, and if so, the case had its origins in England, or he was called to New York by a case which originated in New York itself. There was no middle ground. Therefore, if that’s so, let’s see the important cases worth the trouble that can be found in this situation.”

Each leaf of the notebook Miss Boston had consulted carried at the top the name of a criminal case, of whatever seriousness. It was like a directory of all the crimes of New York, of all of America. It was a sinister list where robberies, murders, swindles, assassinations, offered a terrible field from which to observe human perversity.

“The case of 12th Avenue...No, it can’t be that,” murmured the young woman while looking through the file; the case of staked plain, of Nebraska, no, not that; the theft of the Princess d’Oldenbourg’s diamonds, no; the disappearance of Miss Stanton...Ah! Ah! Could that be it? Let’s see.”

She immediately took a file bearing in big letters *STANTON CASE* from the same drawer and consulted the leaves pinned together in a huge packet. While she was searching, a smile of satisfaction played over her face and she exclaimed:

“That’s the case! I’m on the trail!”

She put her hat back on in haste, picked up her coat and went downstairs. The escalator deposited her in a few seconds in the vestibule, from where she rapidly reached the street. She had to go back up as far as Coal Street to find a cab which carried her at a gallop to the Continental Hotel.

“Is Doctor Watson in?” she asked the porter standing at the entry.

“I don’t know,” the man said, “but the clerks at the office can tell you.”

“Very well.”

Miss Boston went to the glassed-in office where the clerks seemed to be excitedly talking to each other. She even heard the name Sherlock Holmes pronounced, which led her to believe that all the hotel employees were already talking about the assassination of the famous detective. At some distance from the office, hardly a few meters, a gentleman smoking his cigar was reading his newspaper, standing near the light from the vestibule. Miss Boston noticed him, as she noticed everything by habitual professional caution. But nothing about the facial appearance or the general aspect of the reader struck her.

“Is Dr. Watson in his apartment?” she asked one of the clerks.

“Quite so, Miss. He just returned a few minutes ago.”

“The number and the floor?”

“Apartment 138, on the fifth floor. It’s the eighth door to the left.”

“Good.”

And Miss Boston walked toward the elevator which would quickly let her off on the fifth floor of the Continental Hotel. At that moment, the reader standing near the office threw away his cigar and like a man in no particular hurry, walked toward the hotel exit, as if going for a walk. But if Miss Boston had followed him, she would have been surprised to see that man, who had seemed to have time to waste, get in a hurry as soon as he had left the Continental. He then ran to find a cab, threw an address at the coachman and added:

“A dollar for the ride.” The driver, happy for the tip, whipped up his horse, and the cab went down Central Avenue at full speed toward Brooklyn Bridge.

During this time, Miss Boston reached Dr. Watson’s apartment and after announcing her name, entered. She found herself in the presence of a man about 50-years-old, dressed very formally in a black frockcoat. His swollen eyes testified that he must have wept a long time. He rose at the entry of his visitor. His silence, preceded by a formal greeting, clearly indicated that he was waiting for Miss Boston to explain her unexpected visit.

“Dr. Watson, I believe.”

“Himself, actually, Miss.”

“Sherlock Holmes’ friend?”

“Alas!”

Dr. Watson fell back into the chair from which he had just risen.

"Forgive me, Miss, but the burden of my sorrow is really too great. For 20 years I was the friend of that illustrious man, the only friend I might say; 20 years in which I shared his dangers, his troubles, his successes and his triumphs. And now he is dead, dead in a terrible way, puzzling and atrocious. Ah, and really, why did we leave London to get involved in that damned case!"

"The Stanton case?"

"What! You know about it, Miss?"

"Yes."

"But...who...are you then?"

"I'm the former colleague of Mr. William Hopkins."

"The famous detective, my friend Sherlock Holmes' rival?"

"Yes."

"Ah! Miss, you're welcome. How can I be of service to you?"

"To arrest the murderers of your friend, in one word, to avenge Sherlock Holmes!"

"Oh! That with all my heart! I'll help you in that task with all my strength. And how is that to be done?"

"First of all, sir, answer the questions I'm going to ask you about your friend and his last investigations."

"Go ahead. I'm ready to give you precise answers, Miss Boston."

"It really was the Miss Stanton case that Sherlock Holmes was working on?"

"Yes. Two months ago, in London, he received a letter from Mr. Stanton, the father of the young girl, telling him of her disappearance."

"And that letter asked Sherlock Holmes to come to New York?"

"It even begged him to take the first transatlantic ship departing."

"When he arrived in New York, what did he do, Mr. Watson?"

"As soon as he got off the boat, he took the case actively in hand."

"Did he go to see Mr. Stanton?"

"Immediately."

"What was the result of that visit?"

"My poor friend was given every latitude to work as he saw fit in that sad and mysterious business."

"Good. And to your knowledge, had he achieved any result?"

"I don't know, unfortunately, and Mr. Stanton, whom I saw this morning, doesn't know either. He saw Sherlock Holmes the evening before his departure..."

III. The Prologue to the Crime

Come to that point in her interrogation, Miss Boston took a moment to collect her thoughts. Dr. Watson's precise answers were going to place her definitely in the presence of the mysterious preparations for the drama in which Sherlock Holmes had so tragically lost his life. She then asked the dead man's friend:

"So he left?"

"Yes. Last Monday for Raleigh, in North Carolina."

"On what train?"

"On the 7:08."

"Good. Please continue your explanations, Doctor."

"Sherlock Holmes saw Mr. Stanton the day before his departure and here's what he said: 'Sir, I'm on the trail. In three days you'll see your daughter again.'"

"And that's all?"

"Yes, that's all. Going to catch the train at Presidio Bridge, he scarcely told me more. All I can deduce from these few words was that the denouement of this mystery was to take place near Raleigh, or in Raleigh itself. Alas! My unfortunate friend was murdered on the trip. On the eve of a new triumph!"

"Forgive me for stirring up your sad memories, Doctor, but please tell me if you noticed anything unusual when you took your friend to the Presidio Bridge station?"

Dr. Watson seemed to think deeply for several minutes, then, having collected his thoughts, he answered:

“Yes, now that I think about it, there were certain details that particularly struck me in that departure.”

“What were they?”

“I don’t know how to explain it, but I’m going to tell you, Miss Boston, exactly how things happened. You understand that there isn’t always a big crowd at Presidio Bridge, from which the lines for Iowa, Pennsylvania, Kentucky, Illinois, Virginia, and North Carolina depart. We arrived at exactly 7 o’clock. Sherlock Holmes was carrying a little traveling valise. He bought his ticket with paper money and slipped the ticket into the palm of his hand through the opening of his leather glove. At loading platform number 12 he went to find his compartment in the Express train.”

“What time was it then?”

“7:03.”

“Good. Please go on.”

“On the loading platform there was a bad-looking fellow seated on the corner of a trunk he seemed to be guarding. The man was looking in front of him at nothing in particular. Sherlock Holmes had been seated for several moments. I was with him, chatting about things in London, when he suddenly said to me:

‘Watson, look there at the porter...’

“Where’s that?” I asked.

“‘There on the loading platform,’ he told me.”

“I looked and I saw the porter counting on his fingers in a low voice: ‘one...two...three...four...five...six...’”

“Just then a man wearing a green four-collared frock coat, who seemed to be looking for a compartment, got into the compartment next to the one in which Sherlock Holmes was sitting. Holmes rubbed his hands together.

“Why do you seem pleased?” I asked him.

“I am, in fact. The fellow I was looking for is there, right next to me.”

“The fellow in the frock coat?”

“Yes, Parker.”

Here Miss Boston interrupted Dr. Watson’s story.

“Parker, did you say?”

“Yes, that was the name of the man in the frock coat. I’ll continue. Sherlock Holmes was smiling.

‘This Parker,’ he said ‘is an unmitigated scoundrel. I know he’s capable of every ruse and every daring. A man who’s forewarned is a match for the one he’s warned against. I’ll know how to deal with him.’

“Sherlock Holmes had taken from his pockets a pair of good quality bull dogs, continuing:

‘If Parker is on the train, it’s because he has some bad design against me. In that case, he’ll know what’s speaking.’

“Having just then heard the departure whistle, I left my friend, advising him to be careful. Alas! My advice that day wasn’t worth anything!”

“And then?”

“And then the porter, as soon as the train began its departure, left, his hands in his pockets, leaving the trunk there. I then saw he was not at all charged with guarding it and that time, saying that he was being followed, Sherlock Holmes had again spoken accurately.”

“I have only a few more questions to ask you, Doctor. The newspapers said that on arrival in Raleigh, Sherlock Holmes was found dead in his compartment. His two bull dogs were beside him, still loaded. He seemed to be asleep. No trace of violence was found on him. It was believed to be a natural death.”

“That was exactly it. Since they found my name and the address of the hotel on him, they telegraphed me. I left immediately and I only this morning returned from that sad trip.”

“And what did you find out?”

“That Sherlock Homes did not die a natural death, but that he was murdered.”

“By Parker?”

“Yes, and I told the police so, but they said Parker had been in Sing Sing prison for two years and that in no way could it be a question of him.”

“And in your opinion, how was Sherlock Holmes murdered?”

“He was chloroformed!”

“That seems most impossible.”

“It’s certain, Miss Boston. I smelled the odor. That explains the absence of any trace of violence on him.”

“Then this famous detective let himself be approached by Parker, by that Parker he knew to be his enemy?”

“I don’t know. I limit myself just to reporting, and I say that my friend most assuredly was killed with chloroform.”

“There’s the mystery,” Miss Boston said. “That’s what has to be explained. And I give you my word, Doctor, that I’ll explain it to you. And now I’m going to sum up the situation in a few words. Criminals kidnapped Miss Stanton, hoping to get her father to pay a large ransom. Sherlock Homes came, picked up the trail of the criminals, who, feeling they were about to be caught, murdered him. How? That’s what has to be discovered, and where my role begins. Is that correct?”

“That’s exactly it, Miss Boston.”

“Doctor, you’ve brought a valuable element to my investigation. I appreciate it. I will likely bring you good news this evening. Good-bye.”

“Miss Boston,” said the Doctor, “if Sherlock Holmes’ murderers must be caught at the cost of my fortune, well, I’m ready to give it!”

“Oh! I don’t ask so much,” the young woman said, smiling.

Having thus taken leave of Sherlock Holmes’ friend, Miss Boston went down to the hotel lobby. Just at that moment, a man with a blond mustache, speaking to the clerk’s office, asked casually:

“Have you a free apartment?”

“On what floor, sir?”

“On the fifth.”

“Yes, certainly. We have apartments 132, 134, 136. Apartment 138 is occupied. 140 will be free this evening.”

“Comfortable?”

“Oh! We have only very comfortable apartments here, sir.”

“In that case, give me 136.”

The number 136, adjacent to 138 occupied by Dr. Watson, caught Miss Boston’s attention. She had a sudden movement of astonishment and excitement; the man asking for the room next to that of Dr. Watson was wearing a green four-collared frock coat! The man, however, preceded by the bellboy, was in the elevator going up to the fifth floor. The proximity of that strange coincidence of Parker in a green four-collared frock coat accompanying Sherlock Holmes in the Raleigh Express, and the traveler in the green four-collared frock coat asking for the apartment next to that of the friend of the dead man, strangely impressed her.

She asked the clerk, “Could you please tell me the name of Dr. Watson’s new neighbor?”

“I don’t think I have the right, Miss, and I don’t know if...”

But Miss Boston had taken out of her handbag the little silver badge that the American police administration gives to agents or to others like the amateur detectives who are capable of rendering them significant services. The sight of the badge overcame the employee’s hesitation.

“Oh! In that case, Miss, I’m at your service.”

“Not a word of this, right?”

“I guarantee my silence, Miss.”

“Good. What’s the man’s name?”

The clerk looked at the sign-in register and said:

“His name is Rekrap.”

“Rekrap?”

“Yes.”

“Thank you, and I’ll see you later.”

Miss Boston left and, walking slowly, thought about the sequence of events. Rekrap, the name didn’t tell her anything, and it was certainly a borrowed name, an assumed name. What if the man who

gave it had something to hide? What should be done? Alert Watson? That would perhaps be wise. She decided to do that and returned to the Continental Hotel. There was a man ahead of her who was asking the office for Mr. Rekrap's room. Miss Boston recognized that man as the one who, on her arrival at the Continental, was smoking a cigar, standing under the light reading his newspaper. Then that was for her an awakening (enlightenment). Wasn't that the porter who had been on the lookout for Sherlock Holmes on the loading platform at the Presidio Bridge station? And Rekrap, wasn't that Parker himself? And the name Rekrap...but that was it, it was the name Parker simply turned around. So marvelous chance was helping her. She had luck with her against the murderers of Sherlock Holmes, because it was certain that Parker was the guilty one. But how had he carried it out? That was, and she had already said so to Dr. Watson, the obscure point that remained to be cleared up in this agonizing mystery. Why had Parker and his accomplice come to check in at the Continental if not to do away with Dr. Watson himself? They knew he was Sherlock Holmes' confident, that he had seen Parker get on the train and that he was as a consequence a formidable and dangerous witness. Now it was Watson who was in danger and the criminals' plan was simple. Should they be arrested on the spot? Miss Boston considered this idea. But then wouldn't the chances of finding Miss Stanton at the place where the criminals had hidden her be lost? Therefore, it was first of all urgent to save Watson. After that she would see.

Miss Boston asked to see Mr. John Johnston, the owner of the Continental. After having spent an hour in consultation with him, she left and went up to Dr. Watson's apartment.

"Already, Miss Boston," he asked in a tone both trusting and sad.

But Miss Boston, with a rapid gesture, made him understand the danger he ran by speaking aloud in the room.

"Where is the valise with the wigs and the false beards that Sherlock Holmes had with him?" she asked briskly.

"There it is," Watson said.

"Let me get to work, Doctor," the young woman said.

She picked up a beard and a wig, fitting it to him perfectly. In five minutes Dr. Watson was marvelously disguised so that he resembled a modest employee. Only his friend Sherlock Holmes would have been able to recognize him in the transformation so quickly executed. That operation was hardly finished when Miss Boston raised her voice and said:

"It's agreed, my dear Dr. Watson. I'll take charge of that business of murder. I'll leave tomorrow evening for Raleigh, by the same 7:08 train. It's not necessary to go with me. I'll know how to handle the affair by myself."

Dr. Watson, not understanding anything about his sudden disguise and this unexpected statement, was startled.

"I'm going downstairs," Miss Boston said in a low voice. "You'll follow me in five minutes and go sit down at one of the clerk desks. That's been agreed to by the director of the Continental. You'll call the least possible attention to yourself. And when your neighbors come down, you'll look at them. I'm certain you'll recognize them immediately. I'll ask you by telephone the result of your observation. As for me, I'm going to leave and I won't come back now that you're out of danger. I'm going to enter the game in my turn, because I'll be followed until tomorrow."

"You want to go to Raleigh?"

"Yes, because during the trip I'm persuaded I can learn the way in which Sherlock Holmes was murdered. I'll go into Raleigh, because isn't it there that your friend said the denouement of the Stanton affair must take place?"

"Certainly, yes."

"In that case, do as I ask you, Doctor. I'm leaving. Don't follow me until after five minutes."