

I could not suppress my admiration. "Indeed she was. I think I may tell that that is precisely why your mother chose that name for you." Perhaps this was another uncalled-for familiarity but, again, I felt compelled to tell this young lady *something* of her past.

Miss Thomas' smile became wistful. "I had hoped so. Thank you."

By this time, we were both quite finished with our food and I was at a loss as to what should be said next. My days of spending time with young ladies had long since been relegated to the past and *this* particular young lady was quite able to throw me off my stride.

"Is there anything else I can do for you, Miss Thomas?"

"Regarding this matter? I think not," Frankly, I believed there was something she wanted to ask me, but for some reason, she held herself back. Feeling that I had already pried too far, I chose not to press the issue. Then, like a dog shaking off water, my companion discarded the encroaching signs of a melancholy mood. "But there *is* something you could do for me, if you could do a favor for a silly Yankee in a foreign country?" Once again, a catlike smile graced her features. How could I refuse her?

"Anything that is within my ability to do." I promised, to her obvious delight.

"I've never been to London before," she confessed. "And I know almost nothing about this city. Could you perhaps recommend a few places...?"

“Does *he* know?” she asked, finally, her voice low.

I considered my answer very carefully. I decided that prevarication would not be well received by this woman – and it would certainly be detected. “Does *he* know about your existence? Yes, he does.” I admitted. “As for my role in your upbringing...” I shrugged, helpless. “I have done my best to keep it from him, but that doesn’t mean I have succeeded.”

“Why would you keep your support of me a secret? I understand the funds come from the success of your writings?”

“That and some initial capital was provided by your mother. Although there were times...” I trailed off in thought.

“What?” she persisted, doggedly.

I smiled, feeling a little foolish. “There were times, rarely, that I suspected the monies I received for my tales was somewhat out of proportion for their quality. I always made a point of depositing that excess into your fund-”

“And you think *he* might have arranged for that overpayment?” my forthright companion concluded.

I nodded. “At the time I wondered if he was simply trying to ensure that I would have some kind of pension – doctors rarely become rich.” I admitted.

“So I have already discovered,” she agreed amiably.

Once again, I found myself charmed by her pretty demeanor. Aside from a slight sharpness to her features and the clear gray eyes that could be attributed to her father, Violet Thomas had otherwise taken after her mother in matters of appearance – much to her benefit, I think.

“With luck, I shall soon be awarded my medical degree.” She announced, not without some pride. “Much of my time in Vienna was spent in the internship now required before one can practice medicine in Europe or the Americas.”

I beamed with genuine good feeling. Obviously, here was a woman who intended great things for her future. “Congratulations, young lady,” I was a tad familiar, perhaps, but I couldn’t help sharing her obvious sense of accomplishment. “I’m sure many young women will follow in your footsteps,” I declared, a little grandiosely.

Miss Thomas laughed at that. “Not precisely, I don’t think. Not too many women would show the interest in criminal psychology that I have.” My companion’s gaze grew distant for a moment. “You know, I rather think that was *his* fault. My decision to emphasize the treatment of criminal minds, I mean.”

I sought to intervene the sudden downturn in her mood that I sensed coming on – my years with Holmes were keeping me in good stead. “Are you bringing up the environment versus inheritance argument again, Miss Thomas?” I inquired.

She began to answer me, and then paused as she saw through my attempt to divert the conversation. “Oh no, you’re not drawing me into that,” she cautioned. Her mien quickly became serious, but not dour. “There is something else I should tell you, I suppose,” she began, reluctantly. “Although whether or not you want to tell *him* is your decision.”

“Please go on,” I urged, quite curious. What was she going to reveal now, this creature of surprise?

“Once I attain my final degree, I will be changing my name.” She told me bluntly. “Particularly my surname. Thomas was appended to me as I was without a last name when left at the orphanage.” Violet shrugged. “It being St. Thomas’ orphanage, the sisters thought it a perfectly fitting name. But...” Miss Thomas’ voice faded as she was overcome by some reluctance.

“But?” I persisted, sensing that she only needed drawing out. In some respects, she was still a young woman, even if her usual manner didn’t suggest it.

“But I feel the need to acknowledge my mother, somehow,” she admitted. “So I’ll be changing my last name to Adler,” she finished in a rush.

I nodded in sympathy. For a girl to grow up not knowing her parents and then to learn their identities by sheer determination... It was an understandable urge. I saw no harm in it myself, Adler being a relatively common name, particularly in the vast United States.

A suggestion of Violet’s feline smile returned. “And I know my father has already been acknowledged. After all, Violet Sherrinford was *his* mother, was she not?”

had ruled it down to one of two men and when I saw you...well..." she shrugged, as if that was all that needed to be said.

In a desperate attempt to maintain some pretext of secrecy – for my friends' sake if naught else – I tried to bluster. I should have known better. "Really, Miss Thomas, if you think that *I* am your father, I must say that you're quite mistaken."

Miss Thomas smiled again, shaking her head slightly. "Doctor Watson, I wouldn't dare suggest you have been anything less than faithful to your wives," Wives? So she knew of that too? How long had this woman been harboring her suspicion? Of course, it didn't occur to me that any regular reader of my stories is fully informed about my marital history.

She continued, "I'm referring to..." at this point, a belated sense of discretion seemed to catch up with her as she glanced about the crowded dining room. "A mutual acquaintance," she concluded carefully. "Although he's far more your friend than mine," she added without a trace of bitterness.

I didn't know what to say to that. It was obvious that Miss Thomas was convinced that Holmes was the father that she had never known. I was torn between loyalty to a friend and loyalty to the truth that Miss Thomas seemed determined to discover.

After some moments' thought, I realized I should learn how my companion had reached this conclusion, and I asked her so. Therein, Violet told me a tale of childhood curiosity, compounded with a talent for tenacity that would do a Ghurka proud. Apparently it had not been difficult for Miss Thomas to view her birth certificate, which had been placed in the care of the Billingsham School. That document revealed the name of her mother – Irene Adler – and then it had merely been a matter of time and research to determine probable candidates for the paternal side of her history.

"Miss Adler traveled extensively," Violet admitted, somewhat ruefully. "And I had awful trouble untangling her time here in Europe, particularly that sham marriage of hers to Godfrey Norton in '87."

Now *that* gave me a start. As I understood it, only four people on this earth knew of the truth of the marriage between Irene Adler and Godfrey Norton – the circumstances of which I had partially documented some time after it's occurrence – and now Miss Taylor was telling me she was the fifth.

"It took some digging, but I found the annulment papers filed with a church diocese in Connecticut a few years ago." Miss Taylor told me easily. "After all, once my mother knew she had nothing to fear from the King of Bohemia, the need for the marriage to Norton was meaningless." Violet's smile became almost conspiring at that mention of my work. I wondered if perhaps she had determined *his* true identity also, but discretion forbade my asking.

After that, she told me, it was a matter of further research upon Adler's travels and, more tellingly, when she took time off from her stage career, which continued to flourish on the Eastern seaboard. Such time taken away from the stage – particularly if it was taken during the opening season – would suggest an extended illness, or the careful steps taken to hide a birth and recovery.

"As I told you," Violet concluded. "I had narrowed the likely candidates to two men. One was this King of Bohemia of yours – for I have found evidence that the King's willpower wasn't perhaps quite as solid as it could have been and the other, well..." her conspiratorial smile returned. "I learned a long time ago to listen to my hunches. And," she added with a note of finality, "I know you're no longer acquainted with that straying monarch, so why would you be administering a fund for his offspring?" With that, Violet turned her attention to the entrée that had been placed before her.

Faced by such frank determination, there was little I could do but concede defeat. "I am surprised," I admitted, "although I realize that perhaps I should not be. After all, I should expect a daughter of *his*," there seemed to be an unspoken agreement that my friend should remain nameless, "would show signs of the same intelligence and talents."

Miss Thomas brightened noticeably at my remark. "Now, Doctor Watson, the subject of environment versus inherited tendencies is a very interesting one in my field," she began quickly. Almost as quickly, she stopped herself. "I'm sorry," she apologized. "I tend to forget that not everyone is as interested as I am when it comes to the study of the mind."

I assured her that she was quite forgiven, and wondered if perhaps this was a cue to change the subject, but that was not the case. Within a matter of moments, Miss Thomas' expression had faded from happy interest to deep thought – another behavior that reminded me of our 'mutual acquaintance'.

fateful trip to the Continent pursuing the dastardly Moriarty – were unable to enlighten me. Two years passed uneventfully and I breathed easier.

A month ago, a letter was sent by Violet to my bank manager, who acts as an intermediary in matters pertaining to the fund. With the growing popularity of my little stories of Holmes' career, I had decided that my name was perhaps a trifle too well known to be connected to Miss Thomas – again, my attempt to shield her from the truth – and so my patient bank manager had become quite used to occasionally receiving these letters. Violet's missives were usually brief and businesslike – asking for extra money for academic supplies, or a short holiday – but this most recent missive was quite different from the usual.

Miss Thomas wanted to meet the trustees of her fund, she declared. Knowing that her money came from benefactors in London, and unsure of when she would again have the opportunity, she rather forcefully made a case for coming to London. She wished to present herself to those 'to whom I owe my entire life' and she honestly admitted to a burning curiosity about her circumstances also.

I must admit, the doubt that plagued my mind made me wish for my dear, departed Mary's advice. Miss Thomas was an adult woman by now – in her twenties – and thus quite justified in making her request. But would it be wise to meet her? After all, the trust had made no such condition of a personal meeting – but nor had it been forbidden.

In the end, my own curiosity won over. I, too, was more than slightly curious to see what time had wrought of a woman who had begun her life facing challenges that most would find it difficult to overcome – an abandoned child with a trust fund is going to bear a certain amount of social censure and speculation, no matter how well-mannered an environment she inhabits – and had not only overcome those challenges, but gone out of her way to find others to overcome. Why, I didn't even know what she looked like!

So arrangements were made for us to meet for luncheon at the Regency Hotel. My banker took care of the correspondence admitting to Violet that her fund had but one trustee, etc. and suggesting the time and place for our meeting. Seemingly by the next mail, Violet assured me that such an arrangement would suit her 'down to the ground' and that she looked forward to our meeting – set for earlier today.

By the time the luncheon hour arrived, I would not be human if I didn't admit to having allowed myself a rather strong fortifying drink. In the course of the past fortnight, I wavered from anticipation to trepidation and everything in between. Indeed, I came perilously close to canceling our meeting, but – even in my nervous state – I recoiled at such a churlish notion.

Finally, a young woman was shown to my table in the Regency's sumptuous dining room. Perhaps it is immodest to say so, but the force of her personality immediately struck me, even before she had said a single word. Perhaps I have finally learned some of Holmes' way of observations, but it was clear to me that the pretty, smiling woman that sat down before me was a person of piercing intelligence and indomitable will. All this was conveyed to me merely by her strong posture and forthright carriage.

"Miss Violet Thomas, I presume?" it was unoriginal, but given my trepidation, I had decided that it was best to follow form.

I was prepared to introduce myself by a nom-de-plume that I had created, when Violet interrupted me quickly.

"Yes I am," she smiled. "And you would be Doctor John Watson." She seemed quite pleased by my thunderstruck expression. She even laughed slightly – although not unkindly. "I'm sorry to shock you, doctor, but your visage is probably better known than you realize, even in New York." Her accent betrayed its American origins, but it had been overlaid by a tone I couldn't quite place. Later in our conversation, I learned that it was the effect of speaking German and French almost exclusively for the past two years, but I was in no state to think of such things at the time.

"I must admit, I already had my suspicions," Violet confessed – thus confusing me even further. "And the moment I saw you here in the dining room, those suspicions were confirmed. I'm glad to solve a burgeoning mystery in my life."

I assumed she was referring to the mystery of my identity. "Of course, Miss Thomas. After so many years of receiving support from an anonymous source, I must imagine that it's a relief to meet at last."

"Oh, that too." Violet nodded while perusing the menu. "But I was actually referring to the identity of my father." She stared directly at me with gray eyes I recognized as familiar – albeit in a different face. "I

*London - August, 1910*

It is with some trepidation that I set out to record the events of this past day but I suppose after so many years of recording my good friend's life, the journalistic habit has become ingrained. It is only logical that I should occasionally write of my own life. Although I'm sure that it will be no surprise to my unknown reader that this matter concerns Holmes as more – much more – than myself. I should explain that I refer to you as my 'unknown reader' as I am writing this to posterity, not for the adventure hungry crowds of today. Perhaps this will be sent to Miss. Thomas, some day, but I'm not sure if that would be wise, or even useful...

Look at this, wandering into obfuscation already! I must pay closer attention to the matter at hand, or else this will take an entire ream of paper.

Earlier today, I met with a young woman of whom I have known for many years - albeit from afar. I am the keeper of a trust fund for one Violet Thomas, a young woman born and raised in the city of New York – albeit raised by a private school, rather than by a loving family. Violet is not an orphan, but she was cursed by circumstances to be born to parents that would not – or could not – acknowledge her.

Once again, I feel the urge to rush ahead and divulge details out of the proper sequence. Suffice it to say that, upon learning of Violet's situation so many years ago, I heeded the advice of my beloved second wife, Mary, and – with the permission of Violet's estranged mother, who was an acquaintance of mine – I established a small fund on Violet's behalf. With such a fund, Violet could be assured an education and a much better future than that offered to wretched 'wards of the state'.

From across the ocean, I received quarterly reports of young Violet's progress and I was unsurprised to hear that she demonstrated herself to be a lively, intelligent creature from the start. I fear she rather wore on the nerves of the sisters of St. Thomas' orphanage, where Violet's life began and, following a rather plaintive suggestion from the Mother Superior of that institution, Violet was installed at the Billingsham School for Girls in Long Island, New York.

Unfortunately, it was at this time that Violet's mother – with whom I had kept some scanty correspondence – told me that she no longer wished to receive any word of her abandoned daughter. In her final letter to me, Violet's mother (who shall remain nameless for the time being) told me that it tore at her heart to hear of a child that she was forced to give up for want of a husband. The situation saddened me, but I had no choice but to heed her wishes.

The years passed quickly, as they seem to as one grows older, and Violet caused some small scandal by entering university shortly after her eighteenth birthday. The terms of the fund that I had established – these terms written by myself and Violet's mother – stated that she was to be supported unconditionally, and I was happy to allow the payment of school fees and books. My past experiences have convinced me that the fairer sex is far more competent than some men will give them credit for, and I was quite pleased for the opportunity to give this young lady a chance to justify my belief.

Several years' study at university led to a degree, as it usually does – in psychology of all things. Despite my medical background and career, I must confess that psychology is something in which I am woefully under-read. However, it has taken an increasingly prominent place on the medical stage and I understand it to be one of the most challenging aspects of science. Therefore I am not surprised that Violet tackled it with the same determined enthusiasm she apparently tackled everything that came her way.

And then she came to Austria, to study with the pre-eminent (if somewhat erratic) scientist, Doctor Hans Petroff. Doctor Petroff is one of several determined, derided, pioneers of the usage of psychology in the analysis of crime. Again, it is a matter I don't quite understand, although Holmes has occasionally declared that should the science of psychology prove itself at all reliable, then it will have nigh-limitless application in the identification and – it is to be hoped – cure of criminal minds.

I must admit, I suffered a glimmer of suspicion and doubt when I learned of Violet's area of study. I had taken all precautions to keep the circumstances of her birth a secret – again, at the request of her mother (her father was another matter, as will be explained later) but was it possible that Violet had chosen this course for a particular reason? My discreet inquiries of my sketchy contacts in Vienna – dating back to my