

THE GREEK INTERPRETER by Arthur Conan Doyle

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Part 2 Mr. Melas tells his story

A few minutes later we were joined by a short, stout man whose olive face and coal black hair proclaimed his Southern origin, though his speech was that of an educated Englishman. He shook hands eagerly with Sherlock Holmes, and his dark eyes sparkled with pleasure when he understood that the specialist was anxious to hear his story.

“I do not believe that the police credit me on my word, I do not,” said he in a wailing voice. “Just because they have never heard of it before, they think that such a thing cannot be. But I know that I shall never be easy in my mind until I know what has become of my poor man with the sticking-plaster upon his face.”

“I am all attention,” said Sherlock Holmes.

“This is Wednesday evening,” said Mr. Melas. “Well, then, it was Monday night—only two days ago, you understand—that all this happened. I am an interpreter, as perhaps my neighbour there has told you. I interpret all languages—or nearly all—but as I am a Greek by birth and with a Grecian name, it is with that particular tongue that I am principally associated. For many years I have been the chief Greek interpreter in London, and my name is very well known in the hotels.

“It happens not unfrequently that I am sent for at strange hours by foreigners who get into difficulties, or by travellers who arrive late and wish my services. I was not surprised, therefore, on Monday night when a Mr. Latimer, a very fashionably dressed young man, came up to my rooms and asked me to accompany him in a cab which was waiting at the door. A Greek friend had come to see him upon business, he said, and as he could speak nothing but his own tongue, the services of an interpreter were indispensable. He gave me to

understand that his house was some little distance off, in Kensington, and he seemed to be in a great hurry, bustling me rapidly into the cab when we had descended to the street.

“I say into the cab, but I soon became doubtful as to whether it was not a carriage in which I found myself. It was certainly more roomy than the ordinary four-wheeled disgrace to London, and the fittings, though frayed, were of rich quality. Mr. Latimer seated himself opposite to me and we started off through Charing Cross and up the Shaftesbury Avenue. We had come out upon Oxford Street and I had ventured some remark as to this being a roundabout way to Kensington, when my words were arrested by the extraordinary conduct of my companion.



“He began by drawing a most formidable looking bludgeon loaded with lead from his pocket, and switching it backward and forward several times, as if to test its weight and strength. Then he placed it without a word upon the seat beside him. Having done this, he drew up the windows on each side, and I found to my astonishment that they were covered with paper so as to prevent my seeing through them.

“I am sorry to cut off your view, Mr. Melas,” said he. “The fact is that I have no intention that you should see what the place is to which we are driving. It might possibly be inconvenient to me if you could find your way there again.”

“As you can imagine, I was utterly taken aback by such an address. My companion was a powerful, broadshouldered young fellow, and, apart from the weapon, I should not have had the slightest chance in a struggle with him.

“This is very extraordinary conduct, Mr. Latimer,” I stammered. “You must be aware that what you are doing is quite illegal.”

“It is somewhat of a liberty, no doubt,” said he, “but we’ll make it up to you. I must warn you, however, Mr. Melas, that if at any time to-night you attempt to raise an alarm or do anything which is against my interest, you will find it a very serious thing. I beg you to remember that no one knows where you are,

and that, whether you are in this carriage or in my house, you are equally in my power.”

“His words were quiet, but he had a rasping way of saying them, which was very menacing. I sat in silence wondering what on earth could be his reason for kidnapping me in this extraordinary fashion. Whatever it might be, it was perfectly clear that there was no possible use in my resisting, and that I could only wait to see what might befall.

“For nearly two hours we drove without my having the least clue as to where we were going. Sometimes the rattle of the stones told of a paved causeway, and at others our smooth, silent course suggested asphalt; but, save by this variation in sound, there was nothing at all which could in the remotest way help me to form a guess as to where we were. The paper over each window was impenetrable to light, and a blue curtain was drawn across the glasswork in front. It was a quarter-past seven when we left Pall Mall, and my watch showed me that it was ten minutes to nine when we at last came to a standstill. My companion let down the window, and I caught a glimpse of a low, arched doorway with a lamp burning above it. As I was hurried from the carriage it swung open, and I found myself inside the house, with a vague impression of a lawn and trees on each side of me as I entered. Whether these were private grounds, however, or *bonafide* country was more than I could possibly venture to say.

“There was a coloured gas-lamp inside which was turned so low that I could see little save that the hall was of some size and hung with pictures. In the dim light I could make out that the person who had opened the door was a small, meanlooking, middle-aged man with rounded shoulders. As he turned towards us the glint of the light showed me that he was wearing glasses.

“Is this Mr. Melas, Harold?” said he.

“Yes.”

“Well done, well done! No ill-will, Mr. Melas, I hope, but we could not get on without you. If you deal fair with us you'll not regret it, but if you try any tricks, God help you!” He spoke in a nervous, jerky fashion, and with little giggling laughs in between, but somehow he impressed me with fear more than the other.

“What do you want with me?” I asked.

“Only to ask a few questions of a Greek gentleman who is visiting us, and to let us have the answers. But say no more than you are told to say, or—“ here came the nervous giggle again—“you had better never have been born.”

“As he spoke he opened a door and showed the way into a room which appeared to be very richly furnished, but again the only light was afforded by a single lamp half-turned down. The chamber was certainly large, and the way in which my feet sank into the carpet as I stepped across it told me of its richness. I caught glimpses of velvet chairs, a high white marble mantelpiece, and what seemed to be a suit of Japanese armour at one side of it. There was a chair just under the lamp, and the elderly man motioned that I should sit in it. The younger had left us, but he



suddenly returned through another door, leading with him a gentleman clad in some sort of loose dressing-gown who moved slowly towards us. As he came into the circle of dim light which enabled me to see him more clearly I was thrilled with horror at his appearance. He was deadly pale and terribly emaciated, with the protruding, brilliant eyes of a man whose spirit was greater than his strength. But what shocked me more than any signs of physical weakness was that his face was grotesquely criss-crossed with sticking-plaster, and that one large pad of it was fastened over his mouth.

“Have you the slate, Harold?” cried the older man, as this strange being fell rather than sat down into a chair. “Are his hands loose? Now, then, give him the pencil. You are to ask the questions, Mr. Melas, and he will write the answers. Ask him first of all whether he is prepared to sign the papers?”

“The man’s eyes flashed fire. “Never!” he wrote in Greek upon the slate. “On no conditions?” I asked at the bidding of our tyrant. “Only if I see her married in my presence by a Greek priest whom I know.” The man giggled in his venomous way. “You know what awaits you, then?” “I care nothing for myself.”

“These are samples of the questions and answers which made up our strange half-spoken, half-written conversation. Again and again I had to ask him whether he would give in and sign the documents. Again and again I had the

same indignant reply. But soon a happy thought came to me. I took to adding on little sentences of my own to each question, innocent ones at first, to test whether either of our companions knew anything of the matter, and then, as I found that they showed no sign I played a more dangerous game. Our conversation ran something like this:

“You can do no good by this obstinacy. *Who are you?*”

“I care not. *I am a stranger in London.*”

“Your fate will be on your own head. *How long have you been here?*”

“Let it be so. *Three weeks.*”

“The property can never be yours. *What ails you?*”

“It shall not go to villains. *They are starving me.*”

“You shall go free if you sign. *What house is this?*”

“I will never sign. *I do not know.*”

“You are not doing her any service. *What is your name?*”

“Let me hear her say so. *Kratides.*”

“You shall see her if you sign. *Where are you from?*”

“Then I shall never see her. *Athens.*”

“Another five minutes, Mr. Holmes, and I should have wormed out the whole story under their very noses. My very next question might have cleared the matter up, but at that instant the door opened and a woman stepped into the



room. I could not see her clearly enough to know more than that she was tall and graceful, with black hair, and clad in some sort of loose white gown.

“Harold,” said she, speaking English with a broken accent. “I could not stay away longer. It is so lonely up there with only— Oh, my God, it is Paul!”

“These last words were in Greek, and at the same instant the man with a convulsive effort tore the plaster from his lips, and screaming out “Sophy! Sophy!” rushed into the woman’s arms. Their embrace was but for an

instant, however, for the younger man seized the woman and pushed her out of the room, while the elder easily overpowered his emaciated victim and dragged him away through the other door. For a moment I was left alone in

the room, and I sprang to my feet with some vague idea that I might in some way get a clue to what this house was in which I found myself. Fortunately, however, I took no steps, for looking up I saw that the older man was standing in the doorway, with his eyes fixed upon me.

“That will do, Mr. Melas,” said he. “You perceive that we have taken you into our confidence over some very private business. We should not have troubled you, only that our friend who speaks Greek and who began these negotiations has been forced to return to the East. It was quite necessary for us to find someone to take his place, and we were fortunate in hearing of your powers.”

“I bowed.

“There are five sovereigns here,” said he, walking up to me, “which will, I hope, be a sufficient fee. But remember,” he added, tapping me lightly on the chest and giggling, “if you speak to a human soul about this—one human soul, mind—well, may God have mercy upon your soul!”

“I cannot tell you the loathing and horror with which this insignificant-looking man inspired me. I could see him better now as the lamp-light shone upon him. His features were peaky and sallow, and his little pointed beard was thready and ill-nourished. He pushed his face forward as he spoke and his lips and eyelids were continually twitching like a man with St. Vitus’s dance. I could not help thinking that his strange, catchy little laugh was also a symptom of some nervous malady. The terror of his face lay in his eyes, however, steel gray, and glistening coldly with a malignant, inexorable cruelty in their depths.

“We shall know if you speak of this,” said he. “We have our own means of information. Now you will find the carriage waiting, and my friend will see you on your way.”

“I was hurried through the hall and into the vehicle, again obtaining that momentary glimpse of trees and a garden. Mr. Latimer followed closely at my heels and took his place opposite to me without a word. In silence we again drove for an interminable distance with the windows raised, until at last, just after midnight, the carriage pulled up.

“You will get down here, Mr. Melas,” said my companion. “I am sorry to leave you so far from your house, but there is no alternative. Any attempt upon your part to follow the carriage can only end in injury to yourself.”

“He opened the door as he spoke, and I had hardly time to spring out when the coachman lashed the horse and the carriage rattled away. I looked around

me in astonishment. I was on some sort of a heathy common mottled over with dark dumps of furze-bushes. Far away stretched a line of houses, with a light here and there in the upper windows. On the other side I saw the red signal-lamps of a railway.

“The carriage which had brought me was already out of sight. I stood *gazing* round and wondering where on earth I might be, when I saw someone coming towards me in the darkness. As he came up to me I made out that he was a railway porter.



“Can you tell me what place this is?” I asked.

“Wandsworth Common,” said he.

“Can I get a train into town?”

“If you walk on a mile or so to Clapham Junction,” said he, “you’ll just be in time for the last to Victoria.”

Dictionary

<i>ail</i>	plage, smerte
<i>anxious</i>	engstelig
<i>arched</i>	buet
<i>astonishment</i>	forundring
<i>bludgeon</i>	kort og tykk kølle brukt som våpen
<i>bonafide</i>	her: offentlig eiendom (eg. ”i god tro”)
<i>bustle</i>	å bevege noe energisk og med hensikt
<i>coachman</i>	kusk
<i>convulsive</i>	krampeaktig
<i>descend</i>	gå ned, stige ned
<i>dressing-gown</i>	morgenkåpe
<i>dump</i>	stygt eller dårlig vedlikeholdt sted
<i>effort</i>	anstrengelse
<i>emaciated</i>	utmagret
<i>frayed</i>	frynsete og slitt
<i>furze</i>	ginst, en eviggrønn busk med skarpe torner og gule blomster som vokser på lyngheier (forekommer ikke i Norge)

<i>giggle</i>	å le på en nervøs måte
<i>glistening</i>	glitre, skinne
<i>heathy common</i>	friområder med heier (strekninger med gress- eller lyngvokst)
<i>impenetrable</i>	ugjennomtrengelig
<i>inconvenient</i>	upassende, ubeleilig
<i>indignant</i>	sint, harm (særlig brukt om rettferdig harme)
<i>indispensable</i>	uunnværlig
<i>inexorable</i>	ubendig, ufravikelig
<i>injury</i>	skade
<i>innocent</i>	uskyldig
<i>insignificant-looking</i>	med et ubetydelig, pregløst utseende
<i>interminable</i>	som ikke avsluttes, uendelig
<i>lash</i>	piske, slå på en voldsom måte
<i>lead</i>	bly
<i>loathing</i>	hat
<i>malady</i>	kronisk sykdom eller uorden
<i>malignant</i>	ondsinnet, ondartet
<i>marble mantelpiece</i>	peishylle i marmor
<i>meanlooking</i>	som ser ond ut
<i>means of information</i>	måter å skaffe seg informasjon på
<i>menace</i>	fare, trusel
<i>mottled</i>	som har områder med mange farver uten noe regelmessig mønster
<i>negotiation</i>	forhandling
<i>obstinacy</i>	stahet
<i>obtaining</i>	få tak i, sikre seg
<i>pale</i>	blek
<i>paved causeway</i>	småvei belagt med brosten e.l.
<i>peaky</i>	spiss, spisst
<i>prevent</i>	forhindre
<i>protruding</i>	fremstikkende, utstikkende
<i>rasp</i>	å tale med hes, raspete stemme
<i>sallow</i>	det å ha usunn, gulaktig hud
<i>slate</i>	skifer : gammeldags skifertavle til å skrive på
<i>sovereign</i>	gammel engelsk mynt (eg. suverén)
<i>stout</i>	kraftig, robust, tykkfallen
<i>St. Vitus's dance</i>	Nervesykdom som fører til raske og umotiverte kroppsbevegelser
<i>taken aback by such an address</i>	å bli forferdet av det man blir fortalt – Mr. Latimer dekket til vinduene i vognen så Mr. Melas ikke skulle kunne se hvor de kjørte hen, da Mr. Melas fikk høre dette (such an address), ble han redd og forferdet (taken

<i>tongue</i>	aback) fordi det innvarslet at her var det fare på ferde.
<i>vague</i>	tungemål, mål, språk (eg. tunge)
<i>vehicle</i>	vag, upresis
<i>velvet</i>	kjøretøy, fremkomstmiddel
<i>venomous</i>	fløyel
<i>venture</i>	giftig
<i>wailing</i>	våge, driste seg til
	høy, skrikende stemme

Exercises

A. Answer these questions

1. Describe Mr. Melas.

2. What did Mr. Melas do for a living?

3. What did the two men want Paul Kratides to do for them?

4. Where was Mr. Kratides from?

5. How did Mr. Melas try to get information from Mr. Kratides without the two men knowing it?

6. What orders did the two men give Mr. Melas when he left?

7. Where did Mr. Latimer leave Mr. Melas after his first visit?

B. Fill in the gaps using the following words

glimpses - towards - returned - richly - clad - lamp - sank - showed

"As he spoke he opened a door and _____ the way into a room which appeared to be very _____ furnished, but again the only light was afforded by a single lamp half-turned down. The chamber was certainly large,

and the way in which my feet _____ into the carpet as I stepped across it told me of its richness. I caught _____ of velvet chairs, a high white marble mantelpiece, and what seemed to be a suit of Japanese armour at one side of it. There was a chair just under the _____, and the elderly man motioned that I should sit in it. The younger had left us, but he suddenly _____ through another door, leading with him a gentleman _____ in some sort of loose dressing-gown who moved slowly _____ us.

Answers

A.

1. Describe Mr. Melas.

He was a short, stout man with an olive face and coal black hair. He spoke as an educated Englishman.

2. What did Mr. Melas do for a living?

He was an interpreter.

3. What did the two men want Paul Kratides to do for them?

Sign some papers.

4. Where was Mr. Kratides from?

From Athens, Greece.

5. How did Mr. Melas try to get information from Mr. Kratides without the two men knowing it?

By adding short easy questions to the questions of the others.

6. What orders did the two men give Mr. Melas when he left?

He must not speak to anybody of this.

7. Where did Mr. Latimer leave Mr. Melas after his first visit?

Wandsworth Common, near Clapham Junction.

B.

“As he spoke he opened a door and showed the way into a room which appeared to be very richly furnished, but again the only light was afforded by a single lamp half-turned down. The chamber was certainly large, and the way in which my feet sank into the carpet as I stepped across it told me of its richness. I caught glimpses of velvet chairs, a high white marble mantelpiece, and what seemed to be a suit of Japanese armour at one side of it. There was a chair just under the lamp, and the elderly man motioned that I should sit in it. The younger had left us, but he suddenly returned through another door, leading with him a gentleman clad in some sort of loose dressing-gown who moved slowly towards us.”

Philosophical explorations

1. *Mr. Melas is picked up by Mr. Latimer in a carriage and is then taken away to some unknown destination. He is neither allowed to jump off nor look out of the window of the carriage. Mr. Melas is not injured in any way, but his freedom of movement is blocked by Mr. Latimer.*

Has anyone got rights to limit other people's movements? Obviously the police has (in most societies), but what exactly gives the police that right? If Mr. Latimer was an undercover policeman, would he then automatically have a right to do what he did to Mr. Melas?

Pupils have little freedom of movement since they have to stay in the classroom, or at least within the school area, during the school day. What gives a teacher the right to restrict the movement of the pupils? Have parents got this right? Has children and youth also got a right to limit adults' movements? Is this right different from the right the adults have towards the children?

2. *Mr. Melas is threatened, both by Mr. Latimer and the older man in the house. There is no doubt about it, but what is a threat? Suppose I say: "If you don't give me the money, I will tell your parents that you stole that book!" Would that be a threat? What if I said: "If you don't leave me now, I will not have time to finish my homework!" Is that a threat? If not, what is the difference between the first and the last example? If yes, what am I threatening you with in the last example?*

Is it possible to threaten somebody without using the formula: "If....., then.....!" Are all threats on this form? Suppose you say to your parents: "I don't want this food." Can this be a threat to your parents, as if you were saying: "If I don't get some other food, I refuse to eat at all!"?

3. *Mr. Melas tries to ask the prisoner secret questions while he translates between Mr. Latimer and the Greek. To do so he goes behind the back of Mr. Latimer who trusts him to do a truthful translation. Is it wrong of Mr. Melas to do this? Do we never have to act right if someone is unfair to us first? If someone spit you in the face, are you then automatically entitled to spit him back?*