

## THE GREEK INTERPRETER

### by Arthur Conan Doyle

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*Contents:*

[Part 4: Things come to a head](#)

[Exercises to the text](#)

[Answers to the exercises](#)

[Philosophical explorations](#)

### Part 4 Things come to a head

Our hope was that, by taking train, we might get to Beckenham as soon as or sooner than the carriage. On reaching Scotland Yard, however, it was more than an hour before we could get Inspector Gregson and comply with the legal formalities which would enable us to enter the house. It was a quarter to ten before we reached London Bridge, and half past before the four of us alighted on the Beckenham platform. A drive of half a mile brought us to The Myrtles—a large, dark house standing back from the road in its own grounds. Here we dismissed our cab and made our way up the drive together.

“The windows are all dark,” remarked the inspector. “The house seems deserted.” “Our birds are flown and the nest empty,” said Holmes.

“Why do you say so?”

“A carriage heavily loaded with luggage has passed out during the last hour.” The inspector laughed. “I saw the wheel-tracks in the light of the gate-lamp, but where does the luggage come in?”

“You may have observed the same wheel-tracks going the other way. But the outward-bound ones were very much deeper—so much so that we can say for a certainty that there was a very considerable weight on the carriage.”

“You get a trifle beyond me there,” said the inspector, shrugging his shoulders. “It will not be an easy door to force, but we will try if we cannot make someone hear us.”

He hammered loudly at the knocker and pulled at the bell, but without any success. Holmes had slipped away, but he came back in a few minutes. “I have a window open,” said he.

“It is a mercy that you are on the side of the force, and not against it, Mr. Holmes,” remarked the inspector as he noted the clever way in which my friend had forced back the catch. “Well, I think that under the circumstances we may enter without an invitation.”

One after the other we made our way into a large apartment, which was evidently that in which Mr. Melas had found himself. The inspector had lit his lantern, and by its light we could see the two doors, the curtain, the lamp, and the suit of Japanese mail as he had described them. On the table lay two glasses, an empty brandy-bottle, and the remains of a meal. “What is that?” asked Holmes suddenly.

We all stood still and listened. A low moaning sound was coming from somewhere over our heads. Holmes rushed to the door and out into the hall. The dismal noise came from upstairs. He dashed up, the inspector and I at his heels, while his brother Mycroft followed as quickly as his great bulk would permit.

Three doors faced us upon the second floor, and it was from the central of these that the sinister sounds were issuing, sinking sometimes into a dull mumble and rising again into a shrill whine. It was locked, but the key had been left on the outside. Holmes flung open the door and rushed in, but he was out again in an instant, with his hand to his throat. “It’s charcoal,” he cried. “Give it time. It will clear.”

Peering in, we could see that the only light in the room came from a dull blue flame which flickered from a small brass tripod in the centre. It threw a livid, unnatural circle upon the floor, while in the shadows beyond we saw the vague loom of two figures which crouched against the wall. From the open door there reeked a horrible poisonous exhalation which set us gasping and coughing. Holmes rushed to the top of the stairs to draw in the fresh air, and then, dashing into the room, he threw up the window and hurled the brazen tripod out into the garden. “We



can enter in a minute," he gasped, darting out again. "Where is a candle? I doubt if we could strike a match in that atmosphere. Hold the light at the door and we shall get them out, Mycroft, now!"

With a rush we got to the poisoned men and dragged them out into the well-lit hall. Both of them were blue-lipped and insensible, with swollen, congested faces and protruding eyes. Indeed, so distorted were their features that, save for his black beard and stout figure, we might have failed to recognize in one of them the Greek interpreter who had parted from us only a few hours before at the Diogenes Club. His hands and feet were securely strapped together, and he bore over one eye the marks of a violent blow. The other, who was secured in a similar fashion, was a tall man in the last stage of emaciation, with several strips of sticking-plaster arranged in a grotesque pattern over his face. He had ceased to moan as we laid him down, and a glance showed me that for him at least our aid had come too late. Mr. Melas, however, still lived, and in less than an hour, with the aid of ammonia and brandy, I had the satisfaction of seeing him open his eyes, and of knowing that my hand had drawn him back from that dark valley in which all paths meet.

It was a simple story which he had to tell, and one which did but confirm our own deductions. His visitor, on entering his rooms, had drawn a life-preserver from his sleeve, and had so impressed him with the fear of instant and inevitable death that he had kidnapped him for the second time. Indeed, it was almost mesmeric, the effect which this giggling ruffian had produced upon the unfortunate linguist, for he could not speak of him save with trembling hands and a blanched cheek. He had been taken swiftly to Beckenham, and had acted as interpreter in a second interview, even more dramatic than the first, in which the two Englishmen had menaced their prisoner with instant death if he did not comply with their demands. Finally, finding him proof against every threat, they had hurled him back into his prison, and after reproaching Melas with his treachery, which appeared from the newspaper advertisement, they had stunned him with a blow from a stick, and he remembered nothing more until he found us bending over him.

And this was the singular case of the Grecian Interpreter, the explanation of which is still involved in some mystery. We were able to find out, by communicating with the gentleman who had answered the advertisement, that the unfortunate young lady came of a wealthy Grecian family, and that she had been on a visit to some friends in England. While there she had met a young man named Harold Latimer, who had acquired an ascendancy over her and had eventually persuaded her to fly with him. Her friends, shocked at the event, had contented themselves with informing her brother at Athens, and had then washed their hands of the matter. The brother, on his arrival in

England, had imprudently placed himself in the power of Latimer and of his associate, whose name was Wilson Kemp--a man of the foulest antecedents. These two, finding that through his ignorance of the language he was helpless in their hands, had kept him a prisoner, and had endeavoured by cruelty and starvation to make him sign away his own and his sister's property. They had kept him in the house without the girl's knowledge, and the plaster over the face had been for the purpose of making recognition difficult in case she should ever catch a glimpse of him. Her feminine perceptions, however, had instantly seen through the disguise when, on the occasion of the interpreter's visit, she had seen him for the first time. The poor girl, however, was herself a prisoner, for there was no one about the house except the man who acted as coachman, and his wife, both of whom were tools of the conspirators. Finding that their secret was out, and that their prisoner was not to be coerced, the two villains with the girl had fled away at a few hours' notice from the furnished house which they had hired, having first, as they thought, taken vengeance both upon the man who had defied and the one who had betrayed them.

Months afterwards a curious newspaper cutting reached us from BudaPesth. It told how two Englishmen who had been travelling with a woman had met with a tragic end. They had each been stabbed, it seems, and the Hungarian police were of opinion that they had quarrelled and had inflicted mortal injuries upon each other. Holmes, however, is, I fancy, of a different way of thinking, and he holds to this day that, if one could find the Grecian girl, one might learn how the wrongs of herself and her brother came to be avenged.

## Dictionary

<i>alight</i>	her: sette sin fot på (eg. stige ned fra hest : fugl som stiger ned fra luften)
<i>antecedents</i>	aner, forgjengere, forfedre
<i>ascendancy</i>	det å ha makt over noe(n)
<i>avenge</i>	å hevne noe/noen
<i>blanched</i>	forbleket, gjort blekt og farveløst
<i>blow</i>	slag
<i>brass tripod</i>	messingstativ på tre føtter
<i>bulk</i>	stort volum, stor tyngde eller masse
<i>catch</i>	her: vinduslås
<i>cease</i>	stoppe, stanse
<i>charcoal</i>	trekull
<i>comply with</i>	rette seg etter noe(n), stemme overens med
<i>confirm</i>	bekreft
<i>congested</i>	blodsprengt (eg. overfylt, fullstappet)
<i>considerable</i>	betydelig, betraktelig

<i>crouch</i>	krøke seg
<i>deduction</i>	utledning, slutning
<i>defy</i>	motsette seg, trosse
<i>demands</i>	krav, forlangende
<i>dismal</i>	trist, leit, trøstesløst
<i>dismiss</i>	avskjedige, sende avgårde
<i>emaciation</i>	utmagring
<i>exhale</i>	avgi gass eller damp (eg. puste ut)
<i>force</i>	her: politistyrke (eg. kraft, styrke)
<i>foul</i>	skitten, ond, avskyelig
<i>gasp</i>	gispe etter luft med korte og raske åndedrag
<i>hurl</i>	kaste eller slenge noe med voldsom kraft
<i>imprudent</i>	planløst, ugjennomtenkt
<i>inevitable</i>	uunngåelig
<i>instant</i>	øyeblikk
<i>issuing</i>	her: komme fra (eg. utstede)
<i>legal formalities</i>	juridiske formaliteter
<i>life-preserver</i>	lite slagvåpen, batong (eg. redningsvest!)
<i>livid</i>	her: som har samme blågrå farve som bly
<i>mail</i>	her: middelalderrustning ( <i>mail</i> har ellers med post og postvesen å gjøre)
<i>menace</i>	trusel, her brukt som verb: true
<i>mesmeric</i>	hypnotisk
<i>moan</i>	stønn
<i>pattern</i>	mønster
<i>peer in</i>	kikke inn
<i>persuade</i>	overbevise, overtale
<i>poisonous</i>	giftig
<i>proof</i>	her: upåvirkelig
<i>protruded</i>	fremstikkende, utstående
<i>reek</i>	sterk og ubehagelig lukt
<i>remains of, the</i>	restene av, det gjenværende av
<i>reproach</i>	anklage, bebreide/bebreidelse
<i>ruffian</i>	voldelig og ondsinnet menneske
<i>shrill whine</i>	skarp, gjennomtrengende hvin
<i>shrug</i>	løfte på skuldrene, skuldertrekk
<i>sinister</i>	illevarselende, uvennlig
<i>sleeve</i>	jakkeerme
<i>stun</i>	slå noen bevisstløs
<i>treachery</i>	bedrag
<i>trifle beyond me, a</i>	over min forstand
<i>vague loom</i>	noe som trer frem utydelig og skremmende
<i>washed their hands of the matter</i>	toe sine hender (fraskrive seg ansvar for saken)

*well-lit*

godt belyst

**Exercises****A. Answer these questions**

- 1. Why did they take a train instead of a carriage?**

- 2. How could Holmes know that “the birds had flown from their nest” before he entered the house at Beckenham?**

- 3. How did Holmes and his companions get into the house?**

- 4. What did they hear when they got into the house?**

- 5. Why did Holmes run out of the room after he opened the door?**

- 6. Who were in the room?**

- 7. What was Sherlock’s explanation of the death of the two villains in Budapest?**

**B. Verbs**

**Change the narrative into present tense by putting the verbs in brackets in the correct form**

Peering in, we (could) \_\_\_\_\_ see that the only light in the room (came) \_\_\_\_\_ from a dull blue flame which (flickered) \_\_\_\_\_ from a small brass tripod in the centre. It (threw) \_\_\_\_\_ a livid, unnatural circle upon the floor, while in the shadows beyond we (saw) \_\_\_\_\_ the vague loom of two figures which (crouched) \_\_\_\_\_ against the wall. From the open door there (reeked) \_\_\_\_\_ a horrible poisonous exhalation which (set) \_\_\_\_\_ us gasping and coughing. Holmes (rushed) \_\_\_\_\_ to the top of the stairs to draw in the fresh air, and then, dashing into the room, he (threw) \_\_\_\_\_ up the window and (hurled) \_\_\_\_\_ the brazen tripod out into the garden.

**C. Vocabulary**

**Find English synonyms to the words in bold face**

And this was the singular case of the Grecian Interpreter, the explanation of which is still involved in some mystery. We were able to find out, by **communicating** (\_\_\_\_\_) with the gentleman who had answered the **advertisement** (\_\_\_\_\_), that the unfortunate young lady came of a **wealthy** (\_\_\_\_\_) Grecian family, and that she had been on a visit to some friends in England. While there she had met a young man named Harold Latimer, who had **acquired** (\_\_\_\_\_) an ascendancy over her and had eventually **persuaded** (\_\_\_\_\_) her to fly with him. Her friends, shocked at the event, had contented themselves with **informing** (\_\_\_\_\_) her brother at Athens, and had then washed their hands of the matter.

**D. Fill in the gaps using the following words**

*horrible - window - rushed - shadows - gasping - crouched - flickered*

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Peering in, we could see that the only light in the room came from a dull blue flame which \_\_\_\_\_ from a small brass tripod in the centre. It threw a livid, unnatural circle upon the floor, while in the \_\_\_\_\_ beyond we saw the vague loom of two figures which \_\_\_\_\_ against the wall. From the open door there reeked a \_\_\_\_\_ poisonous exhalation which set us \_\_\_\_\_ and coughing. Holmes \_\_\_\_\_ to the top of the stairs to draw in the fresh air, and then, dashing into the room, he threw up the \_\_\_\_\_ and hurled the brazen tripod out into the garden.

## Answers

### A. Answer these questions

**1. Why did they take a train instead of a carriage?**

*Because it was important to get to Beckenham as soon as possible and because the train was faster than the carriage.*

**2. How could Holmes know that “the birds had flown from their nest” before he entered the house at Beckenham?**

*He saw that the wheeltracks leading from the house were deeper than the wheeltracks leading to the house. From this observation he deduced that the carriage leaving the house must have been heavier than the carriage entering the house. Then he suggested that the weight might be caused by great amounts of luggage in the carriage leaving the house.*

**3. How did Holmes and his companions get into the house?**

*Holmes forced a window open.*

**4. What did they hear when they got into the house?**

*Low moaning sounds from upstairs.*

**5. Why did Holmes run out of the room after he opened the door?**

*Because the air inside was poisonous.*

**6. Who were in the room?**

*Mr. Melas and Paul Kratides, the Greek prisoner.*

**7. What was Sherlock’s explanation of the death of the two villains in Budapest?**

*The story wants us to believe that Holmes thought that the girl, Sophy Kratides, had killed both of them and thereby finally avenging her brother.*

### B. Verbs

*Peering in, we (could) can see that the only light in the room (came) comes from a dull blue flame which (flickered) flickers from a small brass tripod in the centre. It (threw) throws a livid, unnatural circle upon the floor, while in the shadows beyond we (saw) see the vague loom of two figures which (crouched) crouch against the wall. From the open door there (reeked) reeks a horrible poisonous exhalation which (set) sets us gasping and coughing. Holmes (rushed) rushes to*

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*the top of the stairs to draw in the fresh air, and then, dashing into the room, he (threw) throws up the window and (hurled) hurls the brazen tripod out into the garden.*

### C. Vocabulary

Here are some synonyms to the marked words, but beware: the list is far from complete! If you suggested some synonyms that are not on this list, look them up in a dictionary to see if they are valid.

- 1. talking to/with, conversing, speaking, exchanging words...*
- 2. ad, notice, public notice, announcement...*
- 3. rich, well-off, well-to-do, loaded, prosperous...*
- 4. got, obtained, gained, attained...*
- 5. influenced, won over, converted, swayed...*
- 6. telling, saying to, advising, letting know, shed some light on...*

### D. Fill in the gaps

Peering in, we could see that the only light in the room came from a dull blue flame which **flickered** from a small brass tripod in the centre. It threw a livid, unnatural circle upon the floor, while in the **shadows** beyond we saw the vague loom of two figures which **crouched** against the wall. From the open door there reeked a **horrible** poisonous exhalation which set us **gasping** and coughing. Holmes **rushed** to the top of the stairs to draw in the fresh air, and then, dashing into the room, he threw up the **window** and hurled the brazen tripod out into the garden.

## *Philosophical explorations*

1. *When they get to the house in Beckenham, Holmes notices wheel tracks from a carriage. There are two sets of tracks: one pair leading to and one pair leading from the house. He observes that the tracks leading from the house are much deeper than the tracks leading into the house. From this observation he deduces that the outward tracks are caused by a carriage that is heavier than the one making the inward tracks.*

*This makes sense, but is this the only possible explanation of the facts? Could it not be that when the carriage drove away from the house it drove over some ground that was softer and wetter than the other ground, thus explaining the deeper tracks? Or that, for some reason, the wheels on the carriage had been changed to a thinner type thus making the tracks deeper without increasing the weight of the carriage?*

*Anyway, having established that the deeper tracks are caused by a heavier carriage, Holmes then assumes that the weight is caused by lots of luggage. But again: is this the only possible explanation of the facts? Could it not be that there were more people in the outward carriage (typically Mr. Melas and the Greek), or that it was filled with gold, lead or some other heavy substance?*

*The last piece in Holmes' analysis is that since the two villains left fully loaded with luggage, now "the birds had flown from their nest". For the last time: is this the only possible explanation of the facts? Could it not be for example that they went to deposit the gold in order to come back to fetch more? Can you think of other possible explanations of these facts?*

2. *Try to figure out at least three possible explanations to each of these situations:*
  - *the teacher comes up to you and surprisingly slaps you in the face*
  - *you drop a coin, but as it hits the floor it doesn't make any sound at all*
  - *you are playing a game on your computer, your mother passes by and says: "The weather is very nice today"*
  - *at a distance above you you see a man flying in the air*
  - *a woman on the bus suddenly starts to sing opera*

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3. *This is a story about a Greek interpreter. Mr. Melas is the one who interprets between the Greek and English languages. But Sherlock Holmes is the real interpreter in the story: he is the one who observes the various signs and tokens of the world and by using his great intelligence he makes all these signs and tokens (languages) meaningful for the rest of us.*

*What do we mean when we say that we understand something? Can we have understanding without interpretation?*

*Can we say that Logic is a universal language while English and Greek are territorial languages, that Logic is the language of being while territorial languages are languages of specific countries or areas? What is the most important language to learn? We can learn tongues by talking to people who speak these tongues, but how do we learn Logic? By thinking, by talking to ourselves, by thinking about ourselves?*