

# The Case of Euphemia Raphash

By M. P. Shiel

“Man’s goings are of God: how can a man, then,  
understand his own way?”—Proverbs

Mr. Parker, he is coming at last, sir!” the housekeeper said; and I: “God! the doctor?”

“The Doctor, sir,” she said—“saw him myself—he is on foot—must have passed through the north-park gates, and is at this moment coming up the drive!”

I ran to the lawn; saw him slowly coming in the old frock-coat of flimsy stuff, his gaze on the ground.

“Ah, Parker,”—he glanced up and held out a limp hand—“Well, I hope.”

“I am well enough, thanks, Doctor.”

“But why the accented *I*? My sister, Parker?”

I was astounded! “You have not, then, heard?” I asked.

“I have heard nothing.”

“In heaven’s name! In what land have you, then, been?”

“Parker, in a land fairly far away.”

I said nothing more, nor he. He felt fear—fear to ask the question which I felt fear too answer; and we moved together into the gloomy home, an ancient place in ruins, the home of a race most ancient; till in the room we called “study” he seated himself on our sofa, and with complete composure said: “Now, Parker—my sister.”

“Miss Euphemia, Doctor, is no more.”

His face was stone; after a minute I distinctly heard him murmur: “I thought as much. So it happened once before.”

What had? Heaven knew! I only added: “Three weeks ago, Doctor.”

“Of what?”

“She was—”

“Say it.”

“Doctor, she was—”

“Oh, say it, man—she was murdered.”

“Doctor; she was murdered.”

I see him again now—spare and pigmy, grand in forehead, which at the top bristled with a scrub of iron-grey; yellow shaven face; and those eyes, grey, so unquiet, never an instant still, a name high in the eye of the world among the hierophants of learning. During the fifteen years of my secretaryship, we had produced ten books, every one monumental in its way. His energies, in fact, might be called vast—though I don’t say steady, or at least not steady so far as I was concerned: for anon, perhaps in the midst of some work, he would suddenly vanish from Raphash, without warning, nor at such times did I ever know whether it was some Old Dynasty “find” that had enticed him overseas, or excavations at Mycenae, or at Khorsabad, or at Balbec: I knew only that he was gone, and that in due course he would as quietly be back again at his labours.

An old ‘lady-housekeeper’ and myself, besides the Doctor and Miss Euphemia, were the only inmates of the old place, for we occupied only an insignificant nook of the ground-floor of one of the wings. Never a visitor broke in upon our solitude, except one man, whose calls always

corresponded with the Doctor's absences. The lengthy *tête-à-têtes* of this gentleman with Miss Euphemia led me to suspect an ancient flame, to which the Doctor had had objections.

Miss Euphemia was a lady of forty-five years, taller than her brother, but remarkably like him. She, too, had become learned by dint of reading the Doctor's books. I cannot now say how it was, for they hardly ever exchanged a word, but I had arrived at the certainty that each of these lives was as necessary to the other as the air it breathed.

Yet for three weeks the newspapers had been discussing her disappearance, and he knew nothing of the matter! He looked at me through half-closed lids, and said, with that dryness of tone which was his: "Tell me the circumstances."

I answered: "I was away in London on business connected with your Shropshire seat, and can only repeat the depositions of Mrs. Grant. Miss Raphash had, strange to say, been persuaded to attend the funeral of a lady, known to her in youth, at Ringlethorpe; and, staying afterwards with the mourning friends, did not return till midnight. She wore, it seems, some of the old jewels. By one o'clock, however, the house was in darkness; and it was an hour later that a shriek reached Mrs. Grant's ears. She managed to light a candle, and had opened her door, when she saw a man rushing towards her with some singular weapon in his hand which flashed in the half-dark—a little man, she thinks. She had but time to slam her door, when he dashed himself frantically against it, whereupon she fancies she heard the angry remonstrance of another man. Here, however, her evidence is vague; some hours later when she woke to consciousness, she rushed to Miss Raphash's room, and found it empty."

"Of the jewels?"

"Of Miss Raphash herself."

"And the jewels?"

"They lay on the dressing-table where they had been placed, untouched."

"Clearly the murderer was not a burglar."

"Clearly he *was*. He, or they, took other things, valuables from your room and mine to the amount of four hundred pounds."

"But some of these have been traced?"

"Not one. Some have been found—none 'traced.' "

"Where found?"

"In a clump of bushes immediately beneath the balcony of the south wing."

"They were singular burglars. And my sister's body was found—"

"Nowhere."

"It was buried in the park."

"Quite certainly not. The park has been subjected to too minute a scrutiny for that."

"It was burned."

"Not in the house, and again not in the grounds. It was for some ghastly reason conveyed away."

"It is not now in the house, for instance?"

"No—if the most recondite search in the darkest recesses of the mansion are of any value."

"There were blood-stains?"

"A few on the bed."

"No clue?"

"One. It would seem that the assassin, or one of them, before gaining entrance, drew off his boots, and, on running away, left them, for some undreamable reason, behind him."

"It is very simple. He went in a pair of yours or mine."

“No. Had his foot, as measured by his boot, been one-third as small, it could never have been forced into a boot of yours or mine.”

“Yet Mrs. Grant says he was a small man; it is peculiar he should have so huge a foot.”

“It seems clear that there were more than one.”

“Yet I incline to the one-man theory: for through some failure of courage or memory, one might have left the jewels but hardly two. Mrs. Grant, being distracted, may have mistaken his stature; and in the course of my anthropological experience, I have even come across that very discrepancy between man and foot—the survival of a simian trait.”

“There is another point,” I said, “the boots were found to be odd.”

“But that is a due!” he said. “I have the man in my grasp. Have you now told me everything?”

“Except that a gentleman had called to see Miss Raphash that afternoon.”

“Ah—what sort of man?”

“Tall, black-dressed, middle-aged, with side-whiskers. I have seen him here when you have been away. Mrs. Grant says that Miss Raphash spoke to him with some show of anger, though no phrases could be made out.”

“Ah!” said the Doctor, and resumed a restless walk.

“It is not impossible,” he remarked after a while, “that deeps, dark to the eye of a policeman, may become visible to the eye of a thinker. Let us go over the house.”

Science had habituated the Doctor to labour without the stimulus of expectancy, and in this search we spent hours in the vastnesses of the house, the stillness of wings which perhaps no step had set barking with echoes for centuries, down in the vaults. We came at length to a room on the second floor of the south wing overlooking a patch of shrubbery—a room very damp and gloomy, its arras rotted to grey shreds. The Doctor had used it as a depository of bones, embryos in formalin, fossils, implements of stone, and bronze. Along one side was a chest, which, as well as a recess behind a panel in the wall, contained piles of bones, all labelled.

The lock of the door was of special construction, and the Doctor had the key ever about him. I could not therefore but smile, when on entering, I said to him: “Here, at least, our search is fantastic.”

He glanced at me, and passed in doggedly to a gloaming where the light that struggled through the grime of the window-glass hardly lit bits of armour, or grave-stones of Etruria showing in the gloom grey freckles of fungus, a dank dust covering everything.

“Someone has been here,” said the Doctor.

“Doctor!”

“The catch of the window seems awry; notice the dust on the floor.”

“But it is impossible, it is impossible,” I answered.

He opened the window. Below was the balcony of the first floor of that wing, from which a rain-spout ran up; and it was among the bushes of the shrubbery just under the balcony that the stolen valuables had been discovered.

“He climbed up, you see, by the spout,” said the Doctor, “the feat seems superhuman: but there is the spout, and here the turned window-catch. We must confront phenomena as we find them.”

“But at least, Doctor, he did not climb up with a dead body in his arms?”

“No; you are right.”

“And he did not enter by the door.”

“No.”

“Then our search here is absurd.”

“Doubtless. You might look behind the panelling.”

I looked, and saw only the bones of old bodies.

“She is not *in here* now?” he said, and tapped the oaken chest with his knuckles.

I smiled. “No, Doctor, not in there. The man does not live who could open with a key that lid.”

“Come, then, Parker. Come—we shall find her.”

We moved out, and he locked its old solitude within the room once more.

Men of great intellects undertake tasks which, from their very largeness, seem simply pig-headed or silly to men of smaller gauge. The region of the impossible, indeed, is the real sphere-of-action of genius. But, on the other hand, the crowd may be excused if, in such cases, they become incredulous, resentful, nay, cachinatory.

And, I confess, it was not without resentment that I listened to Doctor Raphash when he said to me: “Let us find *him*, Parker, the murderer of my sister, the secreter of her body. This is a task which we must not relegate to the intellects of the recognised authorities. Let us hunt *him* down—and, *after* that, we shall resume our studies.”

But his method, at least, was singular. To acquire personal intimacy with a whole class of individuals is an undertaking which, if possible, is the tallest order! But this was his notion; and in a few months we had learned a new language, become denizens of a new world—the language and the world of the East of London. Our dress was the dress of the navy; our habits those of the ne'er-do-well.

And now were revealed to me the deeps in Doctor Raphash's character. The intensity of his hatred of an unknown man! “Let us hunt him down,” he said, and his life became the incarnation of that sentence—a fury bordering on lunacy behind the scientist calm; the avenging angel *without* the flaming sword.

Days and nights we spent in public-houses, gambling-hells, cells of pawnbrokers, with roughs at slum-corners, crowds at music-hall doors. We were pals of rascals who related to each other without secrecy or shame their achievements in every species of felony. In the mornings we parted; to compare late at night notes of the day's haps. Then far into the morning I would hear the slow cheetah-step of that divine patience stealing to and fro in his chamber near mine. This, and a heightened glare in his eyes, were all the indication he gave of the mania flaming in his heart.

One day I heard something. It was in a gin-palace where two women, dissolute pigs, gossiped upon their pots.

“And how about your old man, then?” I heard.

“Oh, he must fish for hisself, he must. I took his boots to the pawn this morning, and they wouldn't take them.”

“Ain't they no good?”

“They're good enough, but they're odd.”

“Go on!”

“I near tore his eyes out over them same boots. I buys my lord a seven-and-eleven pair in the summer and sends him hop-picking in them; lo and behold! two months ago he turns up with his own boot on the right foot and somebody else's on the other.”

“And what account did he give of hisself?”

“There's where the provoking part of it comes in. Every time I asks him, it's ‘Drop it, mate.’ He was on the job, you may bet, got into some scrape, and now dursn't say nothink about it.”

I need not mention the steps by which, in half an hour, I had become the bosom friend of these two women. The time, place, and circumstances of the boots profoundly impressed me, and

when I separated from them I doubted not that the name and address I had obtained were those of the man we wanted. When Doctor Raphash got back haggard to our garret that night, I pressed his hand.

“You have news for me, Parker.”

I told him the incident. “Let us go,” he said.

“You look tired to-night; to-morrow perhaps—”

“Not at all! To-night, man—*now*—is the time to find what we seek”—and he stamped on the floor.

I glanced, startled, at him, for the action was like a sign of the break-up of that serenity which characterised him.

We passed out, I with a revolver. When, by way of a labyrinth of streets, we reached the address, the Doctor at last spoke, saying: “There is no light, you see: he is, probably, still out. Suppose you wait till he comes; then speak; take him under the lamp there, see the boots, and ask him to drink with you. I, waiting at yonder corner, will then join you.”

Flakes of snow were floating downwards, while I strolled sentry-wise, and the Doctor crouched at his post. From a Swedish church near I heard the strokes of twelve, and at the same moment a working-man approached me.

“Cold to-night, mate,” I said carelessly.

“Ah, that it is,” he answered.

His teeth chattered—his cheeks wore a blue hue. Turned-up coat collar, and pocketed paws, and forward pose, spoke of his Polar unreprieve.

“You look frozen. Come and have a drink along wi’ me.”

“I could do with one, mate. Not tasted grub this blessed day.”

“What—broke?”

“Dead broke!”

“Come along then—the Brown Bear.”

He followed me. Under the lamp I stopped.

“Like the Brown Bear? If not—”

The light fell upon him, and a sense of contempt and disappointment overcame me at the sight of his weak face, sheepish eyes. But there at any rate, were the fellows of the two odd boots which I had handed over to the authorities. The Doctor had been slowly approaching us, and was now in the middle of the road when Hardy, glancing, saw him.

The change in the man’s face was sudden and wonderful: his eyes stared, he clung to a railing; then, suddenly taking to his heels, fled, as for life, down a side-street.

The Doctor followed, and then I. And now powers of physique, as unexpected as previously depths of soul in my old friend, stood revealed to me. He distanced me. His feet grew winged. Hardy, indeed, had an advantage in his knowledge of the intricate streets down which he dodged and sometimes for a moment disappeared; but the Doctor slowly won upon him, “*hunting him down*,” till suddenly, Hardy dashed into a cul-de-sac, of which the house at the end was empty, every window broken. If the fugitive, then, could gain an entrance there, his escape by the back was safe, and I guessed that this was the house for which he had all along been making. And, in fact, on reaching it, Hardy dashed down the area-steps to a basement below the street-level.

“Shoot!” cried the Doctor, looking back at me: “shoot with the revolver!”

This I was far from willing to do, but it was already too late: for Hardy had disappeared. A minute afterwards we, too, had darted down the steps, and through a door sped into a cellar of which the ground was powdery dust, covering our ankles. There seemed no other means of

egress, and I was looking about for Hardy, when the door banged suddenly behind us, and a bar clanged down into a staple outside.

That the man had entered the cellar was certain, also that he had had some means of leaving it other than the door. But here our knowledge ended. The blackness was Erebus itself; clouds of dust rose at our every step and choked us; and soon the intensity of the cold, after our race, made speech nearly impossible. I groped round the walls, shot off my revolver, but the flash revealed nothing but a portion of unhewn wall and low ceiling; I howled at the door; but the neighbouring houses were ruins—an echo answered me.

Towards morning I received, I confess, a thrilling experience of horror from Doctor Raphash. That he was not himself, that he suffered more than I, had become apparent. Once or twice only had he spoken through the night, seated in the dust in a corner, his knees bent up, his head buried in his arms. By palpation I knew him to be in this position.

Once I said in alarm: "Doctor, do not sleep! This cold—"

The Doctor laughed aloud. "No, no," he said bitterly; "no sleep; little fear of that to-night."

I walked for warmth to and fro, treading warily on the dust. Then a groan drew me to him, and my cold fingers touched his forehead with the sensation of contact with something hot.

"You are suffering terribly," I said.

"Leave me alone, Parker!"

An hour, and I knew that he was stalking fast up and down all the length of the cellar; swiftly! filling it with a continuous smoke of dust: and long I stood mute, noting his faint sounds on the ground as he came, losing them, following in fancy the growth of his cloudy progress, guessing that now he was here, now yonder. His mutterings guided me. He seemed to forget my presence.

When the air finally became unbreathable, I moved to go to him, and in this act my head came in contact with something, which on catching I found to be a rope hanging down. Unable to divine its purpose, I succeeded after many efforts in climbing it, my head struck the ceiling, and feeling round with my hand, I encountered what seemed the panels of a trap-door. The means of Hardy's escape now flashed upon me. I pushed with my knuckles, and some light entered. In another minute I was free on the other side—it was already day.

A strange, pale face peered up at me, rolling wild eyes. When I had drawn him up, together we passed out to the street.

Here he suddenly seized my hand.

"Parker!"—his pantings came in gasps—"be a gadfly in your tenacity, as you love me, man! Hunt him down! Goodbye. . . . Madman! do not follow!"

And before my brain could wake from its depth of stupor, he had dashed furiously down the road, and vanished into a passing cab.

After Dr. Raphash's mysterious desertion of our quest when success seemed near, I merely returned to the Towers, and waited. I know, in fact, considered my duty done when I had described to the authorities the fellow with the odd boots, who at this time was in hiding.

It was a month afterwards that I remarked one evening, as I was walking about the grounds, that a man, hearing my approaching footsteps, had ducked his head from me in a clump of bushes—the very bushes, by the way, in which the stolen things had been discovered.

I was accompanied by a mastiff: so, on coming close to the spot, I said aloud: "Do not run, simply rise, and hold your hands over your head. I happen to be armed—and you see the dog."

The crack of a gun would have much less astonished me than the hang-dog air with which he rose before me. I recognised instantly the insipid face of Hardy.

"No offence, master," he said, touching his hat, trembling like aspen.

“We have met before, Hardy.”

He scrutinised my face, but shook his head.

“You know me better’n I know you, sir.”

“Well, Charles, you must come with me,” I said, and led him by the arm into a room of the house, instructing Mrs. Grant at the entrance to send for a couple of the rather distant local police. I then closed the door, and proceeded to examine my prisoner. The creature wept!

“Now, Hardy,” I said, “dry your tears, and tell me how you came to be in those bushes to-night.”

“I was looking for the rings and things. It was hunger drove me—they’ve been hunting me like an animal for the last month, and I give myself up.”

“What rings?”

“The rings I dropped in those bushes. I thought that, anyway, one of them might by chance be left there still.”

“You admit the burglary, then?”

“Yes, master, I admit it. It was my first, and it will be my last. I haven’t had a moment’s peace since. I even put up a rope in an old cellar to hang myself, only I’m a coward—”

“And you admit the murder?”

“Murder, master?” he cried with a sacred face. “Why, it wasn’t me as did the murder, it was one of the other two, and didn’t I nearly drop dead with fright when I see it done?”

“There were, then, two others?”

“Yes, sir, a working-man such as myself, and an old gent.”

“Tell me about it.”

“I and a mate of mine, sir, came down hop-picking—one of your wild chaps, and hops was too slow for *him*; so he says to me as how some of these country-houses was mere child’s play, with plenty to be got, and not much danger, so one night here we stood behind a shed, waiting till the old lady was well asleep, when all of a sudden, as if he’d sprung out of the ground, this old gent stood between us. I started running; he looked like a spirit to me; but Jim, he stands his ground, whistles to me, and when I come up, he ses, ‘Ere’s a lark, Charlie,’ ses he, ‘old chap’s on the job hisself!’ ‘Partnership’s a leaky ship, Jim,’ ses I; but he only ses, ‘Oh, bother, live and let live.’ Well, I and Jim get our boots off, we all get inside, and no sooner inside, than the old cove takes the lead, showing the way, telling us what to do, me and Jim doing everything he tells us, nat’ral like. He knew every crick of the place! and first he takes us into a room, and ses he, quite wild like, ‘Plunder now! raven and harry! to your souls’ content!’ Then he reaches down a case from a shelf, and takes out a strange, shiny knife, locks the case again—I believe he had keys to every lock in the place—and rushes out of the room into the one opposite. ‘Queer chap, that,’ ses Jim, looking queery hisself, ‘gives me the shivers,’ and before I could tell him I felt sure the dove was a devil or a ghost, we hear a struggle going on in the opposite room—someone gasping—then a great shriek which I ain’t ever going to forget. Immediately after, out he flies with his wild eyes, and dashes hisself on the other old woman’s door yonder. Jim, with the cold sweats on him, he plucks up courage to reason with him a bit, but no go, the old cove spurts back to the murdered lady, and dashes out again with her in his arms, a gash showing all across her chest, her grey hair trailing on the ground. And now he comes up to us, and, lofty like, ses he, ‘Marshal yourselves before me—march! march! and I will show you where treasures lie thick for yer ’arvesting!’ and he makes us walk before him across the building into the other wing and up two stairs, till we come to a room with a lot of bones—and, there, Great God! hide me! there—there he is! He’ll kill me, as he killed my mate—he’ll kill you, too—”

He stared wildly about, rushed behind my chair, and crouched down there, the man's shriek of panic horror thrilling me through, as the ponderous door swung slowly open on its hinges, and Dr. Raphash calmly walked into the room.

"Well, Parker," he said in the old cold tone, "here I am again, you see. But whom have we. . . the murderer caught!" and triumph lighted his eyes as they rested on Hardy, who, pallid and panting, at present lay propped upon the tapestry.

"Yes, the murderer!" gasped Hardy, "but that's not me!"

Oh, there's plenty of proofs, if it comes to that! That coat's the very one you had on—have you washed the blood off the sleeve yet?"

Dr. Raphash sat down, barely smiling, examining the face of Hardy. Presently he looked at his arm.

"Remarkable thing," he said, talking to himself: "I have noticed a stain on my sleeve; it cannot be blood; Parker, see."

But, as for me, a mist hung before me: I could see nothing.

"It is blood," continued Hardy, gaining courage from the Doctor's calm—"you know it is, or perhaps you were too mad that night to know anything. Who but a madman would have carried the lady's body all the way to that old chest; and didn't you chase Jim round and round the room and stab him like a dog, because you said one body wasn't enough to fill the chest? And if I hadn't slipped down to the balcony by the spout, wouldn't you have killed me, too? and didn't you look out of the window and tell me to prepare myself because you was coming, and didn't I have to jump from the balcony to the ground, rolling over, and dropping all the things I had? and didn't I just have time to draw on two of the boots, and they odd, when you ran down and started after me?"

I was looking at Dr. Raphash: during this categorical charge, no sound had issued from his lips; but gradually a pallor as of death had overspread his face, whose muscles became tense and fixed; his head tumbled forward, his leg's stretched rigidly from his body, the stony glare in his eyes giving to his face an aspect of rhadamanthine grimness ghastly to see.

I ran and grasped the clammy fingers in mine; but he did not recognise me. So he remained for several minutes, no breath breaking the stillness there.

Then, still rigid in all his limbs, he raised his head, and let it drop heavily back over the back of the chair; and, with this action, there burst from his blanched lips—higher and higher, peal on peal, in shrillest staccato—carillons of laughter.

With creeping flesh, I seized Hardy by the arm, rushed—faint—from the room, and locked the door upon the ruin within.

In this way Dr. Arnot Raphash hunted down the murderer of his sister; and so, with him, fell the Jewish House of Raphash in the county of Kent.

Some days later I received a letter, of which the following are extracts:—

". . . . When I tell you that I am the proprietor of the private asylum from which this letter is dated, and a cousin of Dr. Raphash, you will at once conjecture that his (to you) strange absences from home always corresponded with his voluntary sojourns in my establishment. He well knew the warning symptoms—head-pains, a high temperature, etc.—and he usually had two or three days grace before the definite onset of the malady. Sometimes, again, the attack was more sudden, especially when preceded by any excitement; thus, when he reached my establishment a month ago he was already mad, and I at once divined some violent agitation. . . . His first paroxysm occurred at the age of thirty when he destroyed a just-married wife by cyanide-vapour

poison . . . In the sane state he had no recollection of his insane acts, which were distinguished by a mania to kill, directed mainly against those for whom he most cared. He never knew any thing of his wife's doom, for he was at once placed under my care, and on returning to the Towers found her already interred. . . . When he was leaving me 'cured' after his sister's death, I deemed it prudent to tell him nothing of that death, preferring that the journey to the Towers should intervene before the shock of the news dropped upon his newly restored powers: hence his ignorance of this thing. . . . You have probably seen me on my visits to Miss Raphash when the Doctor was away from home, my object being to give her those minute reports of her brother's progress which alone could console her. On the very day of her tragedy I had a rather angry argument with her regarding the good of putting her idol into irons, she deprecating, I insisting. Unfortunately, I permitted her to influence me, and her death was the consequence, for it is now beyond all doubt that the Doctor escaped from my establishment that night, though how he contrived to pass out of the house and grounds and then into them again without detection is still unexplained; but then to his cunning there were no bounds . . . I need only add that I shall soon have the—pleasure of telling you of the death of Dr. Raphash; for the end cannot be delayed. . . .”