

The Adventure of the Engineer's Thumb



Now let's see if I've got this straight... you take the 11:15 train from Paddington to the non-existent village of Eyford, then drive about seven or maybe twelve miles to a weird, dark house that is just around the corner from the station you just left.

Confused?

So was Victor Hatherley, but who can blame him?

Lured to a strange house, nearly crushed into the shape of a half-crown, and maimed by a cleaver, the poor thumbless hydraulic engineer had a strange and disjointed tale to tell.

Next up: the call for the Hounds to get going like a house afire to explain what happened to the engineer's thumb.

The German people: Dr. Becher wasn't German, though he had a German name.

He had two supposedly German friends, Fritz and Elise, but were they really German?

They left a couple of German books around the place, and they apparently spoke some German, at least in front of their "guest" Victor Hatherley.

Elise spoke broken English, and Fritz spoke English with a German accent.

But in the excitement over Hatherley's escape, they lapsed into English.

Don't people tend to gravitate to their native language in moments of stress?

The man we later know as Fritz initially introduced himself to Victor Hatherley as "Colonel Lysander Stark."

This sounds strangely like another phony name in a later story, doesn't it?

Good old Doctor Lysander Starr, the revered mayor of Topeka, who was the invention of Killer Evans.

And with what kind of criminal activity do we associate Killer Evans?

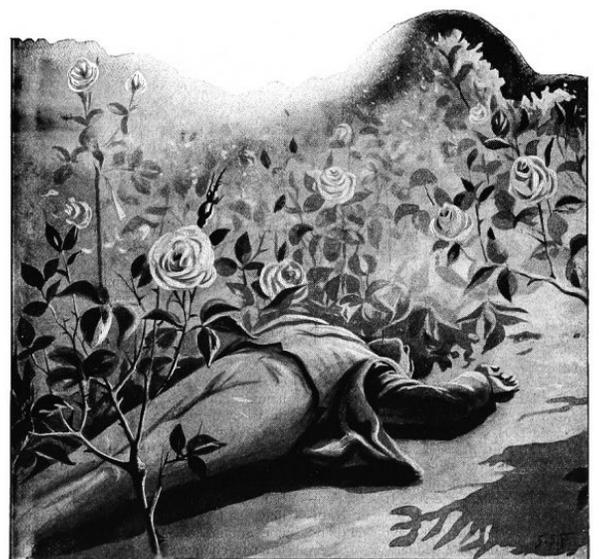
That's right: counterfeiting!

Coincidence?

Or is there some connection here?

Elise is a nice German-sounding name, but it has the same letters as "Elsie."

Remember Elsie Patrick, later Elsie Cubitt, of "The Dancing Men?"



She had some criminal associations from her past, but she had done “nothing that she need be personally ashamed of.”

That description certainly applied to “Elise,” who saved Hatherley’s life and clearly had no taste for crime or violence herself.

We generally assume that all of Elsie’s Patrick’s criminal past centered around Chicago, but is that necessarily true?

Is it possible that Elsie was Elise?

Victor in Victoria Street: Watson says that Victor Hatherley was not more than five-and-twenty, but he had been in business (so to speak) on his own for two years after serving an apprenticeship of seven years with another firm.

Was he really apprenticed at age sixteen?

Didn’t he have to go to school somewhere for at least part of that time?

Victor Hatherley has to be one of the dimmer bulbs ever to consult Sherlock Holmes for advice.

He kept himself in an office for two years without doing much work, but he couldn’t resist the lure of fifty guineas for one night’s work even though he was suspicious of “Lysander Stark” from the very beginning.

Would you have gone on the trip to Eyford if you had been in Hatherley’s shoes?

What precautions might Hatherley have taken to minimize his risks?

Do you believe any of this story?

Was Hatherley lying, or was he just so upset that he couldn’t get the facts straight?

Do you think that any of Sherlock Holmes’s comments might lead us to believe that he doubted at least some parts of the story?