

## The Adventure of the On the Rag

by Arthur "Conehead" Doyle

"I see, Doctor Watson, that we shall soon have a visitor," remarked Shylock Holmes. Immediately the doorbell rang, and I realized that my colleague and lifelong friend had once again struck the bulls-eye before the target appeared. I opened the door on a well-dressed but obviously distraught young man.

"Won't you come in, Mister...?", I offered.

"**PUPPY**," he replied, entering the antechamber, "Scum Puppy," as he extended his trembling hand.

"Pleased to meet you, Mr. Puppy," said Holmes, "You needn't be alarmed, we shall have you back on somebody else's feet in no time. But, tell me, how did you like the toes in Algeria?"

Stunned at my friend's preternatural appreciation of the situation, Puppy stammered, "Why... thy, how did you know that?"

"It's plain as the beard on your face, Mr. Puppy. The shade of toenail polish staining your beard, 'Fuck-me Fuschia', is the most popular, if not the only popular, shade on sale in Algeria. But, time is precious. Shall we proceed to the matter you came to discuss?"

"Yes, yes," replied the young man distractedly. "The trouble is.. well, it's just that...well, my girlfriend, at a certain time of the month, she, uh, she acts peculiar. Last night, I overheard her talking to one of her girlfriends, and several times I distinctly heard her say the words, 'On the Rag.' What can it mean?"

I spoke up. "Perhaps a little medical advice might clear up your anxieties. You see, my boy, every few weeks a woman of child-bearing age experiences a kind of rehearsal for motherhood. At this time, she may act anxious or irritable. This is quite normal and it's nothing to worry about, she'll be herself again in four or five days."

He looked at me intently. "You mean, old enough to breed, old enough to bleed? Hell, I learned about that in elementary school. No, Doc, other women just get jumpy. This one disappears for a night with every ounce of flour in the house. Then she comes back all sweaty, suffering from a hangover, and with flour on her shoes, and won't talk about it. She says I wouldn't understand. I just want to know what the hell's going on."

"Flour on her shoes--a hangover...mysterious overnight disappearances," mused Holmes.

"There's more," said the visitor. "In her sleep she says things

like 'back check' and 'on-on.' She talks about a 'blow job' and 'dead hare.'" (A case for Dr. Freud, I began to think.)

"And, that's not all, Mr. Holmes. I've talked to six other guys who say their women do the same thing--at practically the same time each month! They do it in sync."

"They do it in the sink?" I asked. "Distastefully unsanitary."

"No, Doc, they all do it at the same time," said the youth. "I've got a hunch..."

"You have a hunch? I know a good orthopedist," I told him.

"No, Doc, I have a suspicion."

"A suspicion? I'm sorry, I don't know much about those Japanese sports cars."

"No, Doc, I have an idea."

"Just what is your idea, Mr. Puppy?" asked Holmes.

"Figure out what they do with the flour, and we'll know what they're up to."

"Capital, Puppy. When do you expect her next excursion?", Holmes queried.

"It's nearly always on the 28th of the month, Mr. Holmes. That's tonight. Yesterday, she came home with ten pounds of flour and not a bit of yeast or baking powder, -so I know something's up. Will you take the case?"

"Of course, my boy. Go home and put your mind at rest. I expect to have all the answers you require within a fortnight."

Puppy left, much relieved. Holmes turned to me, "Watson, we're off to the kennel club!"

Though the name suggested some of the topless bars I've visited as I have chronicled Holmes's detective adventures, the place he meant was an actual kennel with bloodhounds for rent. Its proprietor, a grizzled old prospector named Lambert, once rented ore dogs in the Klondike until convicted of contributing to the delinquency of miners. The dogs raised an uproar as we walked in.

"Hush, puppies!," bellowed Lambert. "What can I do for you gents?"

"We want to rent a bloodhound," Holmes answered him.

"Why don't you try this red beagle here? It belonged to a little

old lady who only used it to run trails on Sundays.\*'

"Can it sniff out flour?"

"Sniff out flour? Why, it could find flour in a cesspool! Believe me, gents, this is the one for you. I really shouldn't be doing this, but I like you, so I can let you have it for only seventy-five dollars a day."

"Seventy-five a day?"

"Plus expenses."

"Expenses?\*"'

"And the usual dealer preparation charge."

'\*Preparation charge?"

"Yup. That's all you pay, except for tax, title, and dog license.'\*

"That's all?"

"Sure, except for the customary delivery charge, paperwork preparation fee, facilities rental, loan origination fee, title insurance, fee structure explanation charge, vaccinations, flea dip, flea collar, and a nominal fee for an itemized statement."

"Is all that really necessary to rent a dog?"

Lambert frowned. "Don't you like dogs, \*Mister? If you believe in cruelty to animals, get out of my shop I can't stand a man who abuses a poor, helpless dog! People like you ought to be reported to the UCLA!"

"You mean the SPCA?"

"Whatever. Do you want the dog or don't you?"

"We'll take it," said Holmes. "By the way, have you ever met my brother, Inspector Microsoft Holmes of Scotland Yard?"

Lambert turned white. "Scotland Yard? Well, why didn't you say so! Any friend of Inspector Holmes is a friend of mine. You just take this dog and bring it back when ever you like. No charge. It's on the house. And, if you see Microsoft, tell him that you didn't see any animal prostitution going on here, no sir. Never has been, never will be. We don't allow it. Be sure and tell Microsoft."

We took the dog on a leash and started to leave. "Her name's Wallbanger," Lambert said. "Especially good in the mud. Give my best to Microsoft."

As we left the kennel club with Wallbanger, Holmes asked me, "Now, tell me what you make of it, Watson. Several young women disappear on the same night each month, returning a day later as mysteriously as they left, and our only clue the flour on their shoes. Tell me, what sort of person normally has flour on his shoes?"

"A baker. But, where shall we find him?"

"Elementary, Doctor Watson."

Thus it was we repaired to Baker Street, finding ourselves looking at a peculiar sign of flour in front of Number 21B, with Wallbanger sniffing curiously at the cruciform mark in front of us.

"A cross, Holmes! If it's some sort of religious symbol, we could be dealing with a strange cult."

Before he could answer, a pack of wild-eyed women in running shorts and singlets came running straight at us down Baker Street, shrieking and blowing whistles. AUGNILRET read the first one's green and yellow tank top. "Check!" she shouted at us, and the pack scattered, breathing heavily. In a moment, a loud whistle was heard from an alley, attracting all the runners to it and quickly out of sight. Wallbanger strained at the leash.

"It appears that we're on the trail, Watson. Wallbanger knows what she's about. Give her her head and let's see where she leads us."

Obediently, I gave the dog some head,\* and Wallbanger tracked the strange herd down the alley. Suddenly we found them walking back toward us dejectedly. "What's all this, then?", I asked. "Hash," replied one. "Back check", answered another glumly. The rest passed us without a further word. As we reached a cross surrounded by a circle, the runners picked up speed again toward the first cross. From down the block came the soprano call, "On on! That seemed to electrify them, and they flew down a side street toward the sound like a flock of birds.

"Most extraordinary! What do you conclude from that AUGNILRET"?

"Watson, this is worse than I had first surmised. The sinister Augnilret cult, thought to have been stamped out long ago in its desert fastness of Augnilret, Texas, has made its first appearance in thirty years. We'd better find out what they're up to, or all may be lost! Quick, Watson, the game's afoot! "

Seizing Wallbanger's leash, Holmes broke into a run. \*'After them, Holmes! There's not a moment to lose! "

Soon I was panting from the exertion. Every thirty yards, we

found dots of white flour, sometimes stretched into arrows, **sometimes** with the peculiar cruciform marks, **sometimes** with running shoe footprints. Wallbanger kept up a merry bark, exhilarated with the chase. At last, to **my** great relief, Holmes drew up suddenly **at** the edge of **a small park**.

"Hist, Watson! Hear that singing?"

Chest still heaving from the run, I tried to still **my** heavy breathing enough to catch the faint voices on the wind. Sure enough, a chorus of high-pitched voices **came** through the air, but with one voice oddly lower than the rest.

Holmes tied Wallbanger's leash to a signpost and crept slowly, silently through the foliage. "Look," he whispered. He pointed to a circle of women in running shoes, laughing and singing around a beer keg in a tub of ice. "This isn't the Augnilret cult; they don't use kegs. It's something far more sinister. I think the solo tenor in a chorus of sopranos and altos is our clue. This singing is dichotic-- with the accent on the dyke."

We crept silently forward through the bushes on our hands and knees. A closer look showed us where the deeper voice was coming from. A plump, shirtless, grey-headed woman with the worst figure I've ever seen outside a pathology lab was gesticulating next to the keg. Holmes smiled grimly. "Does that one look familiar, Watson?"

"You know I don't go on blind dates, Holmes. Why should she be familiar to **me**?"

"Because that woman is a man--a man **w**e've seen before. It's Professor January!"

I stared in awe. January! I thought he had died in that Toyota crash in 1989. I looked again. True, the wig and brassiere did much to change his appearance, and he did have the largest breasts in the group, but when he reached down into his shorts and scratched his bum, I realized Holmes knew his man.

Sadly, Holmes shook his head. "Watson, **I'm** afraid our young friend Puppy is dog-shit out of luck. No woman who consorts with January is fit for decent company again. We'll have to tell the poor fellow--by George, look now!"

To **my** amazement, our client, Scum Puppy, had made his appearance and was kneeling in a circle of the depraved women, who were extending their naked feet toward him. Hungrily, the pervert went from toe to toe, foot to foot, giving oral pedicures. He had released Wallbanger, and drawn her, too, into the circle. **Scum** Puppy was now nipping at the beagle's toes with his canine teeth, a case of dog eat dog.

"It **seems** our client has solved the case to his own satisfaction,

Watson." Holmes stood up--there was no need for cover now. "The mystery of the white flour is solved and this case is closed as hopeless. They are all caught fast in Professor January's trap of corruption. When Mr. Puppy came to us, I thought this On-the-Rag mystery was going to be a Study in Scarlet; now I know it's merely the Sign of Flour."

by Silent Dick