



Morianty

A. Wendeborg

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Moriarty

by

Annelie Wendeberg

Moriarty

Annelie Wendeberg

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This is a work of fiction. Yet, I tried to write it as close to the truth as possible. Any resemblance to anyone alive is pure coincidence. Mr Sherlock Holmes, Dr John Watson, and Mrs Hudson are characters by Sir A. C. Doyle and are now in the public domain. All other names, characters, places and incidents are products of my imagination, or lived/happened/occurred a very long time ago. I herewith apologise to all the (now dead) people I used in my novel. I also apologise to all Sherlock Holmes fans should they feel I abused Holmes. No part of this book may be reproduced in any form by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or by any information storage and retrieval system, without the written permission of the copyright owner.

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Book One

THE DEVIL'S GRIN

Preface

I never considered writing anything but science papers. Not until my family and I moved into a house with a history dating back to 1529. While ripping off all modern improvements to restore some of the building's historic charm, we found a treasure. Hidden underneath the attic's floorboards, among thick layers of clay, sand, and larch needles, were a dozen slender books bound in dark leather. These were the journals of an extraordinary woman.

Reading her story left me shocked, awed, and wishing I could ever be as courageous as she. Her wish to not reveal her identity will be respected. Instead, I mixed the names of a friend, a German beer (sorry about that), and the last part of my family name to end up with 'Anna Kronberg.'

People close to Anna, such as her lover and her father, bear false names as well, while others kept their true identities.



This little horse — which makes an appearance in the 2nd book — is one of the things we found underneath our attic's floorboards. (1)

— one —

History is indeed little more than the register of the crimes, follies, and misfortunes of mankind.

E. Gibbon

I finally found the peace to write down what must be revealed. At the age of twenty-seven, I witnessed a crime so outrageous that no one dared to tell the public. In fact, it has never been put in ink on paper — not by police, journalists, or historians. The general reflex was to forget what had happened.

I will hide these journals in my old school and beg the finder to make public what they contain. Not only must the crime be revealed, but I also wish to paint a different picture of a man who came to be known as the world's greatest detective.

Summer, 1889

One of the first things I learned as an adult was that knowledge and fact meant nothing to people who were subjected to an adequate dose of fear and prejudice.

This simple-mindedness was the most disturbing attribute of my fellow two-legged creatures. Yet, according to Alfred Russel Wallace's newest theories, I belonged to this same species — the only one among the great apes that had achieved bipedalism and an unusually large brain. As there was no other upright, big-headed ape, I must be human. But I had my doubts.

My place of work, the ward for infectious diseases at Guy's Hospital in London, was a prime example of the aforementioned human bias against facts. Visitors showed delight when entering through the elegant wrought-iron gate. Once on the hospital grounds, they were favourably impressed by the generous court with lawn, flowers, and bushes. The white-framed windows spanning from floor to ceiling of bright and well-ventilated wards gave the illusion of a pleasant haven for the sick.



Entrance Gates, Guy's Hospital, London, late 19th century (2)

Yet, even the untrained eye should not have failed to notice a dense overpopulation: each of the forty cots in my ward was occupied by two or three patients, bonded together by their bodily fluids, oozing either from infected wounds or raw orifices. Due to the chronic limitation of space, doctors and nurses had learned to disregard what they knew about transmission of disease under crowded conditions: death spread like fire in a dry pine forest.

However, everyone considered the situation acceptable simply through habit. The slightest change would have required the investment of energy and consideration; neither willingly spent for anyone but oneself. Therefore, nothing changed.

If I had an even more irascible temperament than I already possessed, I would have openly held hospital staff responsible for the deaths of countless patients who had lacked proper care and hygiene. But then, the ones who entrusted us with their health and well-being should share the guilt. It was common knowledge that the mortality of patients in hospitals was at least twice that of those who remained at home.

Sometimes I wondered how people could have possibly got the idea that medical doctors could help. Although circumstance occasionally permitted me to cure disease, this sunny Saturday held no such prospect.

The wire a nurse handed me complicated matters further: *To Dr Kronberg: Your assistance is required. Possible cholera case at Hampton Waterworks. Come at once. Inspector Gibson, Scotland Yard.*

I was a bacteriologist and epidemiologist, the best to be found in England. This fact could be attributed mostly to the lack of scientists working within this very young field of research. In all of London, we were but three — the other two had been my students. For the occasional cholera fatality or for any other victim who seemed to have been felled by an angry army of germs, I was invariably summoned.

As this call came with some frequency, I had the pleasure of working with Metropolitan Police inspectors once in a while. They were a well-mixed bunch of men whose mental sharpness ranged from that of a butter knife to an overripe plum.

Inspector Gibson belonged to the plum category. The butter knives, fifteen in total, had been assigned to the murder division — a restructuring effort within the Yard in response to the recent Whitechapel murders and the hunt for the culprit commonly known as Jack the Ripper.

I slipped the wire into my pocket and asked the nurse to summon a hansom. Then I made my way down to my basement laboratory and the hole in the wall that I could call my office. I threw a few belongings into my doctor's bag and rushed to the waiting cab.

The bumpy one-hour ride to Hampton Water Treatment Works was pleasant; it offered views London had long lost: greenery, fresh air, and once in a while, a glimpse of the river that still had the ability to reflect sunlight. Once the Thames entered the city, it turned into the dirtiest stretch of moving water in the whole of England. Crawling through London, it became saturated with cadavers from each of the many species populating the city, including their excrements. The river washed them out onto the sea, where they sank into the deep to be forgotten. London had an endless supply of filth, enough to defile the Thames for centuries to come. At times, this tired me so much that I felt compelled to pack my few belongings and move to a remote village. Perhaps to start a practice or breed sheep, or do both and be happy. Unfortunately, I was a scientist and my brain needed exercise. Country life would soon become dull, I was certain.

The hansom came to a halt at a wrought-iron gate with a prominent forged iron sign arching above it, its two sides connecting pillars of stone. Behind it stretched a massive brick complex adorned by three tall towers.

Hampton Water Treatment Works were built in response to the 1852 Water Act, after the progressive engineer Thomas Telford had annoyed the government for more than twenty years. He had argued that Londoners were drinking their own filth whenever they took water from the Thames, which resulted in recurring cholera outbreaks and other gruesome diseases. The inertness of official forces whenever money and consideration were to be invested amazed me rather often.

Roughly half a mile east from where I stood, an enormous reservoir was framed by crooked willows and a variety of tall grasses. My somewhat elevated position allowed me to look upon the water's dark blue surface decorated with hundreds of white splotches. The whooping, shrieking, and bustling about identified them as water

birds.

I stepped away from the cab. Low humming seeped through the open doors of the pumping station; apparently, water was still being transported to London. A rather unsettling thought, considering the risk of cholera transmission.

I walked past three police officers — two blue-uniformed constables and one in plain clothes, being Gibson. The bobbies answered my courteous nod with a smile, while Gibson looked puzzled.

The man I was aiming for was, I hoped, a waterworks employee. He was a bulky yet healthy-looking man of approximately seventy years of age. His face was framed by bushy white whiskers and mutton chops topped up with eyebrows of equal consistency. He gave the impression of someone who would retire only when already dead. And he was looking strained, as though his shoulders bore a heavy weight.

‘I am Dr Anton Kronberg. Scotland Yard called me because of a potential cholera fatality in the waterworks. I assume you are the chief engineer?’

‘Yes, I am. William Hathorne, pleased to make your acquaintance, Dr Kronberg. It was me who found the dead man.’

I noticed Gibson huffing irritably. Probably I undermined his authority yet again. Although it would require a certain degree of learning ability on his part, I was still surprised that he obviously hadn’t yet become accustomed to my impertinence.

‘Was it you who claimed the man to be a cholera victim?’ I enquired.

‘Yes.’

‘But the pumps are still running.’

‘Open cycle. Nothing is pumped to London at the moment,’ Mr Hathorne supplied.

‘How did you know he had cholera?’

He harrumphed, his gaze falling down to his shoes. ‘I lived on Broad Street.’

‘Oh. I’m sorry,’ I said quietly, wondering whether the loss of his wife or even a child had burned the haggard and bluish look of a cholera death into his memory. Thirty-five years ago, the public pump on Broad Street had infected and killed more than six hundred people, marking the end of London’s last cholera epidemic. People had dug their cesspit too close to the public pump. As soon as both pump and cesspit were shut down, the epidemic ceased.

With a tightening chest, I wondered how many people would have to die when a cholera victim floated in the drinking water supply of half the Londoners.

‘Did you move the body, Mr Hathorne?’

‘Well, I had to. I couldn’t let him float in that trench, could I?’

‘You used your hands, I presume.’

‘What else would I use? My teeth?’

Naturally, Mr Hathorne looked puzzled. While explaining that I must disinfect his hands, I bent down and extracted the bottle of creosote and a large handkerchief from my bag. A little stunned, he let me proceed without protest.

‘You kept your eyes open. I could see that when I came in. Can you tell me who else touched the man?’

With shoulders squared and moustache bristled, he replied, ‘All the police officers, and that other man over there.’ His furry chin pointed towards the ditch.

Surprised, I turned around and spotted the man Hathorne had indicated. He was tall and unusually lean, and for a short moment I almost expected him to be bent by

the wind and sway back and forth in synchrony with the high grass surrounding him. He was making his way up to the river and soon disappeared among the thick vegetation.

Gibson approached, hands in his trouser pockets, face balled to a fist. ‘Dr Kronberg, finally!’

‘I took a hansom; I can’t fly,’ I retorted and turned back to the engineer.

‘Mr Hathorne, am I correct in assuming that the pumps — when not running in open cycle — take water from the reservoir and not directly from the trench?’

‘Yes, that is correct.’

‘So the contaminated trench water would be greatly diluted?’

‘Of course. But who knows how long the dead fella was floating in there.’

‘Is it possible to reverse the direction of the water flow and flush it from the trench back into the Thames?’

He considered my question, pulled his whiskers, then nodded.

‘Can you exchange the entire volume three times?’

‘I certainly can. But it would take the whole day...’ He looked as though he hoped I would change my opinion.

‘Then it will take the whole day,’ I said. ‘Thank you for your help, Mr Hathorne.’ We shook hands, then I turned to Gibson. ‘Inspector, I will examine the body now. If you please?’

Gibson squinted at me, tipped his head a fraction, then lead the way up the path.

‘I will take a quick look at the man. If he is indeed a cholera victim, I need you to get me every man who touched his body.’ After a moment of consideration, I added, ‘Forget what I said. I want to disinfect the hands of every single man who entered the waterworks today.’

I knew Gibson didn’t like to talk too much in my presence. He disliked me and my harsh replies. And I had issues with him, too. After having met him a few times, it was quite obvious that he was a liar. He pretended to be hard-working, intelligent, and dependable, while his constables backed him up constantly. Yet he was still an inspector at the Yard, and I was certain that being the son of someone important had put him there.

We followed a narrow path alongside the broad trench connecting the river to the reservoir. I wondered about its purpose — why store water when great quantities of it flowed past every day? Perhaps because moving water was turbid and the reservoir allowed the dirt to settle and the water to clear? I should have asked Hathorne about it.

Gibson and I walked through the tall grass; if I strayed off the path — and I felt compelled to do so — its tips would tickle my chin. Large dragonflies whizzed past me, one almost colliding with my forehead. They did not seem to be accustomed to human invasion. The chaotic concert of water birds carried over from the nearby reservoir. The nervous screeching of small sandpipers mingling with the trumpeting of swans and melancholic cries of a brace of cranes brought back memories of my life many years ago.

The pretty thoughts were wiped away instantly by a whiff of sickly sweet decomposition. The flies had noticed it, too, and all of us were approaching a small and discarded-looking pile of clothes containing a man’s bluish face. A first glance told me that the corpse had spent a considerable time floating face down. Fish had

already nibbled off the soft and protruding flesh — fingertips, lips, nose, and eyelids.

The wind turned a little, and the smell hit me directly now. It invaded my nostrils and plastered itself all over my body, clothes, and hair.

‘Three police men are present. Why is that?’ I asked Gibson. ‘And who is the tall man who just darted off to the Thames? Is this a suspected crime?’

The inspector dropped his chin to reply as someone behind me cut across in a polite yet slightly bored tone, ‘A dead man could not have climbed a fence, so Inspector Gibson here made the brilliant conclusion that someone must have shoved the body into the waterworks.’

Surprised, I turned around and had to crane my neck to face the man who had spoken. He was a head taller than I and wore a sharp and determined expression. He seemed to consider himself superior, judging from the snide remark about Gibson and the amount of self-confidence he exuded that bordered on arrogance. His attire and demeanour spoke of a man who had most likely enjoyed a spoiled upper-class childhood.

Keen, light grey eyes pierced mine for a moment, but his curiosity faded quickly. Apparently, nothing of interest had presented itself. I was greatly relieved. For a moment, I had feared he would see through my disguise. But as usual, I was surrounded by blindness.

The sharp contrast between the two men in front of me was almost ridiculous. Gibson was lacking facial muscles and possessed a lower lip that seemed to serve more the purpose of a rain gutter than a communication tool. Almost constantly, he worked his jaws, picked and chewed his nails, and perspired on the very top of his skull.

‘Mr Holmes, this is Dr Anton Kronberg, epidemiologist from Guy’s,’ said Gibson. I reached out my hand, which was taken, squeezed firmly, and quickly dropped as though it was infected. ‘Dr Kronberg, this is Mr Sherlock Holmes,’ finished the inspector, making it sound as though I should know who Sherlock Holmes was.

‘Has the victim been pushed into the trench, Mr Holmes?’ Gibson enquired.

‘Unlikely,’ Mr Holmes answered.

‘How can you tell?’ I asked.

‘There are no marks on either side of the Thames’s water edge, the body shows no signs of being transported with a hook, rope, a boat, or similar, and...’

The man trailed off and I made a mental note to go and check the Thames’s flow to ascertain that a body could indeed float into the trench without help.

Mr Holmes had begun staring at me with narrowed eyes. His gaze flew from my slender hands to my small feet, swept over my slim figure and my not-very-masculine face. Then his attention got stuck on my flat chest for a second. A last look to my throat, the nonexistent Adam’s apple hidden by a high collar and cravat, and his eyes lit up in surprise. A slight smile flickered across his face while his head produced an almost imperceptible nod.

Suddenly, my clothes felt too small, my hands too clammy, my neck too tense, and the rest of my body too hot. I was itching all over and forced myself to keep breathing. The man had discovered my best-kept secret within minutes, while others had been fooled for years. I was standing among a bunch of policemen and my fate

seemed sealed. I would lose my occupation, my degree, and my residency to spend a few years in jail. When finally released, I would do what? Embroider doilies?

Pushing past the two men, I made for the Thames to get away before doing something reckless and stupid. I would have to deal with Holmes when he was alone. The notion of throwing him into the river appeared very attractive, but I flicked the silly thought away and forced myself to focus on the business at hand.

First I needed to know how the body could have possibly got into that trench. The grass was intact; no blades were bent except for where I had seen Mr Holmes walk along. I looked around on the ground, Mr Holmes observing my movements.

Only one set of footprints was visible, which must have been Mr Holmes's. I picked up a few rotten branches and dry twigs, broke them into pieces of roughly arm's length, and cast them into the Thames. Most of them made it into the trench and drifted towards me. A sand bank was producing vortexes just at the mouth, causing my floats to enter the trench instead of being carried away by the much greater force of the river. The chance was high that it was only the water that had pushed the body in here.

'It seems you were correct, Mr Holmes,' I noted while passing him. He didn't appear bored anymore. When I walked back to the corpse, my stomach felt as if I had eaten a brick.

I extracted a pair of India rubber gloves from my bag and put them on. Mr Holmes squatted down next to me, too close to the corpse for my taste.

'Don't touch it, please,' I cautioned.

He didn't hear me, or else simply ignored my remark; his gaze was already sweeping over the dead man.

The exposed face and hands of the corpse told me he had been in the water for approximately thirty-six hours.

Thinking that attack is always better than premature retreat, I turned to Mr Holmes. 'Do you happen to know how fast the Thames flows here?'

He did not even look up, only muttered, 'Thirty miles from here at the most.'

'Considering which duration of exposure?'

'Twenty-four to thirty-six hours.'

'Interesting.' I was surprised at his apparent medical background; he had correctly assessed the time the man had spent in the water. He had also calculated the maximum distance the corpse could have travelled downstream.

I cast a sideways glance at the man and got the impression that he vibrated with intellectual energy wanting to be utilised.

'You are an odd version of a private detective. One the police call in? I never heard of their doing so before,' I wondered aloud.

'I prefer the term *consulting detective*.'

'Ah...' I replied absent-mindedly while my attention was pulled back to the body. He was extremely emaciated; the skin with the typical blue tinge looked paper thin — most definitely cholera in the final stage. I was about to examine his clothes for signs of violence when Mr Holmes barked, 'Stop!'

Before I could protest, he pushed me aside, pulled a magnifying glass from his waistcoat pocket, and hovered over the corpse. The fact that his nose almost touched the man's coat was rather unsettling.

'What is it?'

‘He has been dressed by someone else,’ he noted.

‘Show me!’

Looking a little irritated, he handed me his magnifying glass and I took it after pulling my gloves off. The thick rubber hindered my work and made me feel like a butcher. I could disinfect my hands later.

Mr Holmes started to talk rather fast then. ‘The man was obviously right-handed — that hand having more calluses on the palms. Yet you will observe greasy thumbprints pushing in from the left-hand side of his coat buttons.’

I spotted the prints, put my nose as close as possible, and sniffed — corpse smell, Thames water, and possibly the faintest hint of petroleum.

‘I smell petroleum; perhaps from an oil lamp,’ I remarked quietly.

Upon examining his hands, I found superficial scratches, swelling and bruises on the knuckles of the right hand. Probably from a fist fight only a day or two before his death — odd, given his weakness. His hands seemed to have been strong and rough once, but he had not been doing hard work with them for a while now, for the calluses had started to peel off. His fingernails had multiple discolourations, showing that he had been undernourished and sick for weeks before contracting cholera. He must have been very poor during his last few months, and I wondered where he had come from. His clothes looked worn and too big now, and a lot of debris from the river had collected in them. I examined his sleeves, turned his hands around, and found a pale red banding pattern around his wrists.

‘Restraint marks,’ said Mr Holmes. ‘The man used to be a farm worker but lost his occupation three to four months ago.’

‘Could be correct,’ I answered. He had obviously based his judgement on the man’s clothes, boots, and hands.

‘But the man could have had any other physically demanding occupation, Mr Holmes. He could as well have been a coal mine worker. The clothes are not necessarily his.’

Mr Holmes sat erect, pulling one eyebrow up. ‘We can safely assume that he had owned these boots for about ten years,’ said he while extracting a bare foot and holding its shoe next to it. The sole, worn down to a thin layer of rubber, contained a major hole where the man’s heel used to be and showed a perfect imprint of the shape of the man’s foot and toes.

‘I figured that you must have taken a closer look at him before I arrived, for you spoke about the lack of signs of transport by a boat, a hook, or rope. Now it appears you’ve touched and even undressed the corpse?’

‘Unfortunately it was but a superficial examination, for I found it more pressing to investigate how he had entered the trench.’

I nodded, not at all relieved. ‘Mr Holmes, you have put your hands to your face at least twice, even scratched your chin very close to your lips. That is rather reckless considering that you have touched a cholera victim.’

Now the other eyebrow went up, too. I passed him a handkerchief soaked in creosote and he wiped himself off with care. Then, without touching the corpse, he bent down low over it and pointed. ‘What is this?’ The genuine interest in his voice was bare of indignation, as if he had not taken offence. I was surprised and wondered whether he did not mind being corrected by a woman or whether he was so focused on

the examination that he had no time to spend on feeling resentful.

I picked at the smudge he had indicated. It was a small green feather that was tucked into a small tear just underneath the coat's topmost buttonhole. I smoothed it and rubbed off the muck.

'An oriole female. How unusual! I haven't heard their call for many years.'

'A rare bird?' asked Mr Holmes.

'Yes, but I can't tell where this feather would have come from. I have never heard the bird's call in the London area. The man may have found the feather anywhere and could have been carrying it around for quite a while...' I trailed off, gazing at the small quill and the light grey down.

'The quill is still somewhat soft,' I murmured, 'and the down is not worn. This feather wasn't plucked by a bird of prey or a fox or the like; it was moulted. He had it for a few weeks at the most, that means he must have found it just before he became ill, or someone gave it to him while he was sick.'

Mr Holmes looked surprised, and I felt the need to explain myself. 'In my childhood I spent rather too much time in treetops and learned a lot about birds. The quill tip shows that the feather has been pushed out by a newly emerging one; birds start moulting in spring. The farther north they live, the later they start. The bird shed this feather in late spring or midsummer this year. Wherever this man had spent his last days is close to a nesting place of an oriole pair. A female is never alone at this time of year.'

'Where do these birds live?' he enquired.

'Large and old forests with dense foliage and water, such as a lake or a stream. An adjacent wetland would do, too.'

'The Thames?'

'Possibly,' I mused.

The brick in my stomach had become unbearable. 'Mr Holmes, are you planning to give me away?'

He looked surprised, then waved his hand at me. 'Pshaw!' he exclaimed, almost amused now. 'Although I gather it is quite a complicated issue. You don't fancy going to India, I presume.' The latter wasn't so much a question as a statement.

'Obviously I don't.'

He probably did not know that obtaining a medical degree in Germany was still forbidden for women. If my true identity were revealed, I would lose my occupation and my British residency, be deported, and end up in a German jail. My alternative, although I did not consider it one, would be to go to India. The few British women who had recently managed to get a medical degree had eventually given in to the mounting social pressure and left for India, out of the way of the exclusively male medical establishment. To the best of my knowledge, I was the only exception.

'I had hoped it would not be as evident,' I said quietly.

'It is evident only to me. I fancy myself as rather observant.'

'So I've noticed. Yet you are still here, despite the fact that this case appears to bore you. I wonder why that is.'

'I haven't formed an opinion yet. But it does indeed seem to be a rather dull case. I wonder...' Thoughtfully, he gazed at me and I realised that he had stayed to analyse me — I represented a curiosity.

‘What made you change your identity?’ he enquired as his face lit up with interest.

‘That’s none of your business, Mr Holmes.’

Suddenly, his expression changed as his *modus operandi* switched to analysis, and, after a minute, he seemed to have reached a conclusion. ‘I dare say that guilt was the culprit.’

‘What?’

‘As women weren’t allowed a higher education a few years ago, you had to cut your hair and disguise yourself as a man to be able to study medicine. But the intriguing question remains: *Why* did you accept such drastic measures for a degree? Your accent is evident; you are a German who has learned English in the Boston area. Harvard Medical School?’

I nodded; my odd mix of American and British English and the German linguistic baggage were rather obvious.

‘At first I thought you lived in the East End, but I was wrong. You live in or very near St Giles.’ He pointed a long finger to the splashes on my shoes and trousers. I wiped them every day before entering Guy’s, but some bits always remained.

‘The brown stains on your right index finger and thumb appear to be from harvesting parts of a medical plant. The milk thistle, I presume?’

I cleared my throat; this was getting too far for my taste. ‘Correct,’ I said, preparing for battle.

‘You treat the poor free of charge, considering the herb, which certainly is not used in hospitals. And there is the location in which you choose to live — London’s worst rookery! You seem to have a tendency towards exaggerated philanthropy!’ He tipped an eyebrow, his mouth lightly compressed. I could see a mix of amusement and dismissal in his face.

‘You don’t care much about the appearance of your clothes,’ he went on, ignoring my cold stare. ‘They are a bit tattered on the sleeves and the collar, but surely not for lack of money. You have too little time! You probably have no tailor blind enough to not discover the details of your anatomy.’

Here I shot a nervous glance over his shoulder, assessing the distance to Gibson or any of his men. Mr Holmes waved at me impatiently, as though my anxiety to be discovered by yet another man meant nothing to him.

He continued without pause. ‘You have no one you could trust at your home, no housekeeper or maid who could keep your secret. That forces you to do everything for yourself. In addition will be your nightly excursions into the slums to treat your neighbours. You probably don’t fancy sleep very much?’ His voice was taunting now.

‘I sleep four hours on average.’ I wondered whether he had noticed that I analysed him, too.

He continued in a dry, machine-like *rat-tat-tat*. ‘You are very compassionate, even with the dead.’ He pointed to the corpse between us. ‘One of the few, typical female attitudes you exhibit; although in your case it’s not merely learned — there is weight behind it. I must conclude that you have felt guilty because someone you loved died. And now you want to help prevent that from happening to others. But you must fail, because death and disease are natural. Considering your peculiar circumstances and your unconventional behaviour, I propose that you come from a poor home. Your