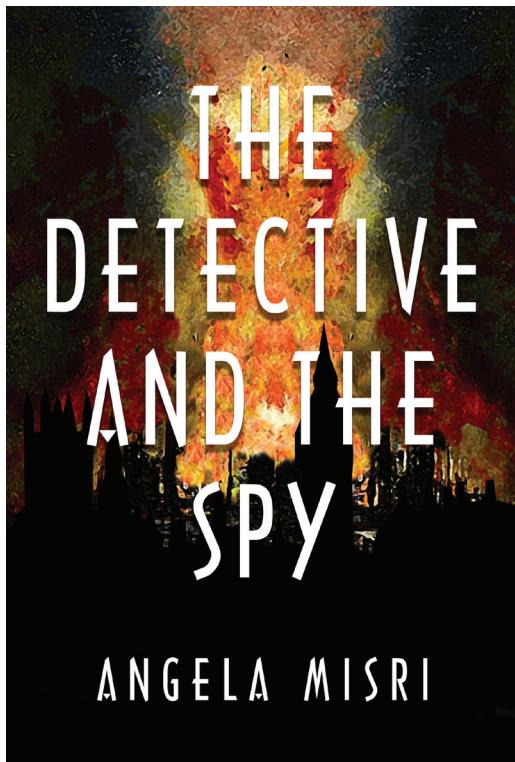


Excerpt from *The Detective and the Spy*
by Angela Misri



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CHAPTER 1

London, Spring 1935

The curse of a great city is in its circulatory system — those veins of traffic, those arteries of tube stops — all it takes is one blockage and the body shuts down.

The tracks behind the railway station were swarming with officers this morning. The area was being cordoned off, marking the recent troubles, and the irate public pressed against the bobbies assigned to keep them at bay, like ocean waves heaving against anchored buoys.

My dark felt hat pulled low over my brow, I manoeuvred my way through this crowd, targeting a member of the constabulary who would let me through the cordon. My chosen profession required that I move incognito amongst the general population. Witnesses and criminals had a way of making themselves scarce around detectives. There were several photos of me in local newspapers, but they didn't look anything like me, and that was quite on purpose. "P.C. Adams the detective" was an elaborate costume I wore to make an impression, regalia that consisted of high heels, artful makeup, and expensive clothing.

By comparison, Portia Adams, my true self, was totally forgettable. Today I wore my father's old threadbare coat and my lowest-heeled boots. My shoulder-length hair was pinned up in a bun under my hat. It would be hard to mistake me for the celebrity P.C. Adams. Unless you knew me.

"Ma'am, you'll have to step back," said the deep voice of Constable Perkins before he realized who he was talking to. "Blimey! Miss Adams, didn't recognize you there."

He extended his gloved hand my way to guide me through the cordon, ignoring the protests of the people around us.

“Sergeant Michaels called for you eh?” Perkins said, pointing to where the rotund officer could be seen puffing away at a cigar. “Figures. It’s an odd one.”

“My favourite,” I answered with a smile his way. I picked my way through the snow — unexpectedly deep at this time of year — and headed in the direction he had pointed, dodging the melee of police and firemen. My eyes were everywhere: the tracks, the rubbish strewn about, the snow, the disturbance of the snow, the myriad of footprints. All of it could be relevant. I pulled out my Christmas gift from my grandfather, a new Contax camera. It had been delivered a few days ago and had included a note of apology for his absence. Sherlock Holmes remained abroad, travelling the Indian subcontinent, and no doubt causing trouble wherever he went.

I grinned, thinking of my grandfather, covering my inappropriate facial expression with my camera as I snapped several landscape shots of the full scene, turning back to take a few of the police cordon, and then one of Sergeant Michaels.

“Make sure’n get that lazy drunk sobered up, Rourke,” Michaels barked at one of his constables, his open winter coat flapping in the wind like the wings of a large bat. The constable was escorting a scrawny man who seemed to be having trouble putting one foot in front of the other.

“Adams,” he said by way of greeting.

“Inspector,” I replied with a nod.

He froze at the mention of his new rank. His cigar threatened to fall out of his suddenly gaping mouth, but somehow managed to stay attached at the corner of his lip where it trembled precariously like a diver who couldn’t quite make up her mind to take the plunge.

“Your uniform shirt is brand new,” I answered before he could ask. “And it’s been tailored, which none of your other shirts have been. You’re hardly the type to visit a tailor for fashion reasons, but you would need their services in order to get the pips sewn onto your shirt. You’re wearing your jacket, but I’d wager that if you took it off, we’d see your Sergeant stripes very loosely stitched onto your new shirt — because they’re about to be replaced, no doubt.”

“It’s not official yet, Adams,” Michaels hissed at me, stepping close so no one would overhear. “Keep your Goddamned detecting down!”

“And yet it is my ‘Goddamned detecting’ you called me down here for.”

“Bollocks. This here is what you’d call an educational opportunity,” he replied, tapping his cigar with his ring finger so that the ashes fell in a neat grey pattern on the snow. Better that you learn what you can from official sources rather than the ones closer to you and less legal if you know what I mean.”

I did know what he meant. He was referring to my grandparents. But not Dr. and the first Mrs. Watson. Michaels was referring to my two living grandparents, Sherlock Holmes and Irene Adler. Neither of whom Michaels held in high regard. A yell from somewhere behind us gave me the excuse to move past it quickly. “I don’t know what to say ...”

“Well, that’s a flippin’ first,” he answered sarcastically, his eyes on the man being hauled away from the cordon. “But how about you start with ‘thank you Sergeant Michaels for considering my further education?’”

I grimaced at his condescending words until he gave up waiting for my gratitude. The man who had caused the opportune disturbance gripped his picket sign in both hands, using it to beat back against the constables, his words railing against the king of

England no less. That's a good way to arrange a cold evening in the basement of Scotland Yard. The problem was that the state of the pound and the resultant suffering of the British people meant that his words accurately reflected the current sentiment against the royal family. I scanned the crowd, picking out other signs, including a few for the Ship Builders Union and one for the Irish Feminist League.

"Go take a look at the scene, would you?" Michaels said, the cigar wagging back and forth at the corner of his mouth.

"The train jumped the tracks, that much is obvious," I replied, looking at the tracks, the position of the train, and up at the officers standing on the platform. "This morning, and quite early, before the rush hour of the morning commute."

"And how do you know that?" he prompted, hands in his coat pockets.

"The train had no rail cars and the snow has been falling steadily all morning, but hasn't covered the damaged train," I replied, pointing to the vehicle. "It was being moved into position to take on its cars."

I looked down the rail tracks in both directions — the ones leading to the platform and the ones leading back to the rail yard — and spied Annie trying to talk her way through the police cordon closely followed by an ancient photographer I recognized from *The Sunday Times*. The young blonde saw me looking and shook her head. I knew her well enough to recognize that her journalistic pride kept her from asking me to chaperone her around the crime scene, especially with a photographer in tow. I turned my attention back to Michaels. "But why did it leave the rail yard without its cars?"

"It was being moved into position to take on its cars when it accelerated in this direction," Michaels put in. "At least according to

the damp squib who was drivin' it."

"So, it started in the rail yard, left the yard without its rail cars, and ran into this platform?"

"Looks that way, don't it?" he replied, stepping up the stairs that led to the platform to speak to one of his officers, his coat flapping around him comically. If the winds got much gustier, he would be able to fly back to Scotland Yard.

"But why?" I said aloud, running my hand along the track and looking back towards the rail yard where other trains stood in neat rows.

"Ice or speed?" Michaels called from where he stood.

"Irrelevant." I replied, though not loudly enough for him to hear. I had now walked away from the platform and was making my way along the east side of the tracks slowly, collecting and dismissing clues one by one.

I was halfway to the rail yard when Constable Bonhomme caught up to me, slightly out of breath and presented me with a brake cable. "The sergeant said to show you this, Miss Adams. He said you can tell that the train was going too fast by the way this cable broke."

I examined the stripped cable. "Yes, I see, Bonhomme. Thank you. But it doesn't explain why the train was speeding, or even how he got up to that speed in time to jump the tracks and hit the platform."

"The driver — Harold Digby's his name — is in no condition to tell us how he did it," Bonhomme answered, backing up as I continued my careful examination of the rails at our feet. "Sergeant Michaels says between the drink and the crash, it'll be hours before he's of any use to us."

"He was drunk when the accident happened?" I asked, looking up from the ground for a moment and noticing the talc on

Bonhomme's sleeve. Another new baby in the family, I confirmed, looking at his shoulder to where evidence of dried spit-up could be discerned if you were looking for it.

Bonhomme nodded. "If that'll be all, I should get this evidence back to the lorry."

My eyes flicked from the man at my side to where I could see Constable Brian Dawes speaking to Michaels on the platform. The tall man was too disciplined to wave, but he flashed me a quick grin when Michaels looked down at his notes for a second.

I grinned back like an idiot. There were a lot of ways in which my brain differed from those around me — especially when it came to my rigid focus on details — but when it came to attraction, I was a fool, just like every human before me.

Bonhomme ran between the tracks towards the platform, distracting me for a moment from Brian, and something about his large boot prints in the snow captured my attention — a wire had been revealed by his footsteps.

"What?" I whispered, recognizing the danger. "NO!" I yelled as loudly as I could, my eyes on the constable still running away from my position. "Bonhomme, get off the tracks!"

And then I was flying through the air, caught by the absolution of darkness.