

## QUOTATION

ELEMENTARY, MY DEAR WATSON: A NOVEL CASE OF CONDITIONED TERROR

OLIVER WENDELL HOLMES, SR.

My cousin Laura, a girl of seventeen, lately returned from Europe, was considered eminently beautiful. It was in my second summer that she visited my father's house, where he was living with his servants and my old nurse, my mother having but recently left him a widower. Laura was full of vivacity, impulsive, quick in her movements, thoughtless occasionally, as it is not strange that a young girl of her age should be. It was a beautiful summer day when she saw me for the first time. My nurse had me in her arms, walking back and forward on a balcony with a low railing, upon which opened the windows of the second story of my father's house. While the nurse was thus carrying me, Laura came suddenly upon the balcony. She no sooner saw me than with all the delighted eagerness of her youthful nature she rushed toward me, and, catching me from the nurse's arms, began tossing me after the fashion of young girls who have been so lately playing with dolls that they feel as if babies were very much of the same nature. The abrupt seizure frightened me; I sprang from her arms in my terror, and fell over the railing of the balcony. I should probably enough have been killed on the spot but for the fact that a low thorn-bush grew just beneath the balcony, into which I fell and thus had the violence of the shock broken. But the thorns tore my tender flesh, and I bear to this day marks of the deep wounds they inflicted.

That dreadful experience is burned deep into my memory. The sudden apparition of the girl; the sense of being torn away from the protecting arms around me; the frantic effort to escape; the shriek that accompanied my fall through what must have seemed unmeasurable space; the cruel lacerations of the piercing and rending thorns—all these fearful impressions blended in one paralyzing terror.

When I was taken up I was thought to be dead. I was perfectly white and the physician who first saw me said that no pulse was perceptible. But after a time consciousness returned; the wounds, though painful, were none of them dangerous, and the most alarming effects of the accident passed away. My old nurse cared for me tenderly day and night, and my father, who had been almost distracted in the first hours which followed the injury, hoped and believed that no permanent evil results would be found to result from it. My cousin Laura was of course deeply distressed to feel that her thoughtlessness had been the cause of so grave an accident. As soon as I had somewhat recovered she came to see me, very penitent, very anxious to make me forget the alarm she had caused me, with all its consequences. I was in the nursery sitting up in my bed, bandaged, but not in any pain, as it seemed, for I was quiet and to all appearance in a perfectly natural state of feeling. As Laura came near me I shrieked and instantly changed color. I put my hand upon my heart as if I had been stabbed, and fell over, unconscious. It was very much the same state as that in which I was found immediately after my fall.

The cause of this violent and appalling seizure was but too obvious. The approach of the young girl and the dread that she was about to lay her hand upon me had called up the same train of effects which the moment of terror and pain had already occasioned. The old nurse saw this in a moment. "Go! Go!" she cried to Laura, "go, or the child will die!"

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*From:* Holmes, O. W. (1887). *A mortal antipathy: First opening of the new portfolio*. 8th ed., Boston, New York: Houghton Mifflin & Co., pp. 208–210. (First published 1885). Holmes anticipates not only John B. Watson on conditioned fear but also Mary Cover Jones on counterconditioning. If she is the mother of behavior therapy, Holmes is the grandfather. If Watson read Holmes (1809–1894), he was not inspired by loss of support as a stimulus for fear. He experimented with it (with J. J. B. Morgan, 1917, *American Journal of Psychology*, **28**, 163–174) but found it "fatigued" easily.

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