

Sherlock Holmes

Never Dies

Six New Adventures of the World's Greatest
Detective



By Craig Stephen Copland

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The Singular Tragedy of the Atkinson Brothers at Trincomalee

From time to time I heard some vague account of his doings: of his summons to Odessa in the case of the Trepoff murder, of his clearing up of the singular tragedy of the Atkinson brothers at Trincomalee, and finally of the mission which he had accomplished so delicately and successfully for the reigning family of Holland. —from A Scandal in Bohemia



*What though the spicy breezes
Blow soft o'er Ceylon's isle;
Though every prospect pleases,
And only man is vile?*

THE WORDS OF THE MISSIONARY HYMN I had sung as a schoolboy in chapel came to my mind as I stood on the deck of a ship, anchored just off the Port of Colombo. They were to prove singularly prescient.

Under more usual circumstances, the experience of looking up into the star-studded sky whilst feeling the warm, moist tropical breezes caress one's face is a sensuous joy. Yet on that night, more than twenty years ago now, I had a profound sense of foreboding.

“Are those the lights of Colombo Port?” I said to my friend, Sherlock Holmes, as he stood beside me.

“Yes,” he replied, “the tugs will pull us into the wharf at first light. We will meet with the governor and the inspector-general of police this afternoon.”

Here I must digress for a moment for the benefit of my readers. In one of my first stories of the adventures of Sherlock Holmes, *A Scandal in Bohemia*, I deliberately allowed readers to conclude that I have not been present alongside Sherlock Holmes when he cleared up the singular tragedy of the Atkinson brothers at Trincomalee. In truth, I did accompany him on that adventure but refrained from having an account of it published.

Our world today is different from that of 1887. With the passing of our beloved Queen, we have also witnessed the fading of a world in which civility and gentility reigned supreme. So, with some regrets, I have accepted that the unseemly subject matter of the account you are about to read has become commonplace. Those of you who have so faithfully followed the exploits of Sherlock Holmes are entitled to know the previously undisclosed events that took place in the fall of 1887 in the far-off colony of Ceylon.

Sherlock Holmes had been sent to Ceylon by the Foreign Office and directed to investigate the tragic death of a Mr. George Atkinson at the hands of a band of barbaric local thieves, or so it was reported.

There was some urgency to the assignment. We were immediately dispatched on the Condor Class Sloop, *Mutine*. It was a gleaming new ship that had been assigned to the China station and would drop us off in Ceylon on its maiden voyage. We had made our way around Gibraltar, past Port Said, through the Canal, and on across the Arabian Sea in remarkable time. Now, we were about to enter the capital of Ceylon, the gracious city of Colombo.

The following morning, we descended to the quay and were ushered immediately to a carriage that bore the crest of the Galle Face Hotel.

We enjoyed our short ride through the Fort district and down along the Galle Road, with the wide vista of the Indian Ocean on our right. The hotel, a magnificent whitewashed colonial edifice, sprawled for nearly a block along the seaside. No sooner had we arrived, but three fine-looking native men, all wearing uniforms fit for a maharajah, appeared to assist with our baggage. They all graciously placed their hands together under their chins, bowed, and gave us the traditional greeting of *ayubowan*. Once inside the majestic lobby, we were welcomed by an exotically beautiful young woman wearing a regal sari that exposed her slender midriff. She was bearing a silver tray on which were small rolled towels. Whilst still proffering the tray, she also bowed with an *ayubowan*. I took a towel and was surprised to find that it was damp, chilled, and scented with cloves. The feeling of it as I wiped my face, hands, and neck was beyond refreshing.

The setting, as Holmes and I relaxed in the shaded chairs on the hotel terrace, was as idyllic as I could imagine.

“I must say, Holmes. A man could become accustomed to a life in the tropics. An hour or two working in the colonial office in the morning, and the remainder of the day for taking the waters, playing cricket, and our every whim indulged by the natives. What do you say to that, my dear chap?”

“I would say,” he replied, “that it is not without cause that wisdom tells us the devil finds work for idle hands.”

“Good heavens, Holmes, must you always be so cynical?”

I was having altogether too fine a morning to argue with him. My only other time in this part of the Empire had been miserable, and the contrast between my morning on the Galle Face and my time in Afghanistan could not have been greater. Therefore, I merely changed the subject of the conversation.

“Very well, Holmes. What do we know of this poor George Atkinson chap?”

“Very little, except that the event must have been more significant than it first appeared. Otherwise, we would not be here. However, I am certain that soon we shall know more. We meet with the governor in an hour.”

Having rested and been refreshed, we departed the hotel for the Queen’s House. The gates and portico of the colonial mansion were guarded by a phalanx of soldiers in the dress uniforms of the Raj. An impressive young fellow, in a scarlet frock coat complete with epaulets, braid and turban, opened the door and escorted us inside. Holmes and I followed him up the wide marble staircase to a small terrace.

Seated at a table were two men of a certain age. Both were elegantly dressed, with one in a fine suit of white linen and the other in the buttons and braid of the highest-ranking officer of the colonial police force. Neither of them rose to greet us.

“Your Excellency,” said the attendant, “allow me to present Mr. Sherlock Holmes and his colleague, Dr. Watson.”

The chap in the white suit, Mr. Arthur Hamilton-Gordon, the Governor of Ceylon, I assumed, gestured toward the empty chairs opposite him.

“Sit down, gentlemen. This,” he said, pointing to the uniformed man beside him, “is George Campbell, our Inspector-General of Police in Ceylon.”

“An honor to meet both of you,” said Holmes, smiling graciously.

“Very well, then,” said the Governor. “Let us not waste any time with needless chit-chat. Inspector, would you kindly furnish Mr. Holmes with the facts pertinent to the tragic passing of Mr. George Atkinson?”

“Right. Very well. George Atkinson and his brother Geoffrey came from Westmorland. They both served a stint in the navy and, by chance, were stationed in Trincomalee. They must have found Ceylon appealing for, upon their discharge, they returned to Trinco and established a business of import and export and have done rather well. They have been there for the past five years with no issues that ever brought them to the attention of the police. They gave their time and talents to the local boys’ school and helped manage the cricket and football teams. However, on one night just four weeks ago, George Atkinson was returning to his home from one of the establishments favored by our sailors when he was attacked and robbed. He must have resisted, for he was shot and died. That is the case, Mr. Holmes. What else do you wish to know?”

“Thank you, Inspector. Would you mind telling me a little more about the nature of their business? What was it they imported and exported?”

“Right. At first, it was anything they could acquire the rights to—spices, lumber, tea, and so forth were sent out, and woolens, suitings, foodstuffs, and the like brought back in. Lately, however, they have become quite active in bringing in workers from Tamil-Nadu in India. The trade in indentured workers has grown and has been quite lucrative.”

“Yes, so I understand,” said Holmes. “I also understand that the influx of these workers has led to some unrest in the Eastern Provinces. Is that correct?”

“Bloody right, it has. The city and the districts around it are a witches’ brew of various groups of men, any one of whom would cut the throat of a competing group. There is a large contingent of Buddhists, the Singhalese, that is. Then there are the national Tamils who have been there forever. Most of them are Hindus, but many are Mohammedans, and there are some Christians. There is a handful of Burghers, mostly working for the Colonial Office, and a few Jews. It is quite possible that George Atkinson’s murder was connected to his arranging of imported labor, but we have no way of knowing that. Anything else, Mr. Holmes?”

“Yes. You said that George and Geoffrey were brothers. Is it true that they were twin brothers?”

“Aye. They were alike as Tweedledum and Tweedledee. Identical in every way, they were. Same speech, same mannerisms, same hairstyle, same way of dressing. I was told by my men up there that no one, not even their fiancées, could tell them apart. They were, howbeit, in the habit of introducing themselves whenever you met them, so one always knew which one it was.”

“Their fiancées?”

“Aye, there are two lassies from Glasgow who came here not long ago as missionaries and are teaching in the Methodist Girls’ College. Eligible bachelors and attractive British girls are both somewhat scarce commodities out here, so as you might expect, the two brothers began courting the two teachers. Within days, I was told, one of the girls was engaged to George and the other to Geoffrey. Within a month, one of the brothers was dead. You can ask for the report at the station in Trinco when you get there. Now, again, Mr. Holmes, is that all? I have a job to do here and prefer not to waste any more of my time.”

Without waiting for an answer, he stood and bade goodbye to the governor and to us. I began to stand to leave, but the governor raised his hand.

“A few minutes more of your time, gentlemen. There are some other matters to impart before you leave. Please, another cup of tea?”

“I have a reliable source of data in Trinco. Major Robert Garton has retired from the army and teaches in one of the schools there. He will be available to you whilst you are doing your work. Ah, but you were asking, Mr. Holmes, about the fiancées.”

“I was.”

“Lovely young ladies, both of them. Their names are Morag Douglass and Elspeth Linton. Morag was engaged to George and Elspeth to Geoffrey. I am sure you can appreciate that both of the ladies and the brother, Geoffrey, are devastated by what has taken place.”

“Entirely understandable,” I answered.

“You should be aware that Miss Elspeth’s family name is not actually *Linton*. Her true name is *Lipton*. Are you familiar with that name, gentlemen?”

“The grocery man?” I blurted.

“The same. One of the wealthiest men in Britain.”

“But he is not married,” I said. “The press keeps calling him the Empire’s most eligible bachelor. How can she be his child?”

Holmes gave me a sideways look and the governor a condescending smirk.

“Dr. Watson,” said the governor, “we have an entire segment of our population here in Ceylon, the Burghers, who trace their European ancestry through several hundred years of Portuguese, Dutch and British bachelors. Need I say more?”

“No,” I said, blushing somewhat. “Then she must be an exceptionally wealthy young woman.”

“Not yet, but upon her marriage, she will be. She has, however, kept her true identity concealed from the public, although it may be known to her small circle of intimate friends.”

“That data,” said Holmes, “does tend to thicken the plot somewhat.”

“I am sure it does,” said the Governor. “Add to that the news that Thomas Lipton expects to visit Ceylon soon and has plans to invest up to one million pounds in tea gardens. It will result in enormous growth in our tea business, a splendid boost to the economy of the colony.”

“And,” added Holmes, “opportunities for fortunes to be made.”

“Quite so. Now to make matters worse, I have received a constant stream of reports not only of dangerous events—two young students were recently murdered—but also rumors of inappropriate interactions between the native people of every tribe and faith with our sailors, merchants, soldiers, policemen, teachers, and planters, even with missionaries. The entire area is not merely a morass of crime and political intrigue, it is also a cesspool of appalling, immoral activity. Now, gentlemen, I shall assume that being forewarned is forearmed, and I look forward to your report upon your return. Your transport has been arranged to Trincomalee. You depart on the mail train tomorrow afternoon. Good day, gentlemen.”

He did not bother to stand but merely nodded to the man-servant, who quickly came over and gestured to us to make our egress.

Holmes met me for an early breakfast on the terrace. After a delectable serving of coffee, fresh scones, and tropical fruits, I asked concerning his intentions for the morning.

“I will go to the offices of the *Times of Ceylon* and read the reports of the spate of murders in Trincomalee. I should also send off some telegrams to Whitehall. I will be back in time to get to the train station.”

At three o’clock, I took a cab to the Colombo Fort railway station and, as expected, found Holmes waiting for me on the platform of the overnight train to Trinco. The accommodations in the first-class section were comfortable, and the food in the dining car passably palatable as long as one was fond of curry.

A knock on the door of my sleeping cabin at six o’clock the following morning, unfortunately, could not be ignored. We arrived at the Trincomalee station a half-hour later. The small building was a far cry from the bustling one in the center of Colombo and, being the end of the line, the remaining passengers who disembarked with us were few.

“*Namaste*, gentlemen. I trust your travel was not overly difficult.”

We were welcomed at the platform by a man who was dressed in the white buttoned uniform and helmet of the colonial police force.

“I am Captain Rajanathan Devasenapathy. It is my honor to welcome you to the Eastern Province, where you will find Ceylon’s finest beaches and loveliest palm trees. Come, come. Your

breakfast awaits you by the ocean. The fishermen have just brought in their catch, and you shall enjoy them along with the prawns, potato curry, dahl, and coconut water.”

We climbed into the waiting, howbeit modest, police carriage and trotted a few blocks until we stopped at the edge of a long narrow stretch of gleaming white sand. Dotting the beach was a line of small, brightly painted fishing skiffs and beyond them stretched the vast horizon of the Indian Ocean. The hotel was also modest, and its restaurant was no more than a thatched hut with an open stove and a few rugged benches and tables. We enjoyed a traditional Ceylonese breakfast and several cups of the finest tea I had even been served. I would have been more than happy to while away a full hour chatting amiably with the captain, but Holmes was anxious to redeem the time and get to work. He put down his cup and stood up.

“There is work to be done,” he said. “Forgive my impatience, but I suggest that we proceed to the police station. May I assume, Captain, that your office is our next destination?”

Reluctantly, I took one last swallow and trotted along after them. Once inside the small station, Holmes turned to the Captain.

“May I see your report on the incident?”

“Of course, sir. It is here on my desk, sir. I had taken it from our files in expectation of your visit.”

“Wonderful,” said Holmes. “Might you, by chance, also have files on the recent deaths of the two students from St. Joseph’s College?”

At first, the policeman’s face took on a look of questioning surprise, and then he slowly began to smile.

“I will be happy to provide those as well, Mr. Holmes. I was not aware that you would be making inquiries concerning that terrible event. We are at a loss to know what might possibly have brought about their killings. They were fine young lads, sir. Very good boys and promising young cricket players, sir. Their families have been in deep mourning, as has been the entire town. If there is any light you can share on what took place, we would be most grateful, Mr. Holmes, sir.”

Holmes smiled again. “Captain, I notice that you have a set of stairs outside the building leading to a godown. Is it possible that you have a police morgue under your station?”

“Yes, Mr. Holmes, we do. And now you are about to ask me if we still have the body of Mr. George Atkinson there, and the answer to that question is yes, we do. And you will want to know how we have managed to preserve it now for four weeks. The answer to that is that I obtained an ice-making machine from one of the merchant ships in the harbor when I received a telegram from London telling me to keep the body preserved if it were at all possible. So please, sir, come with me and allow me to show you what we have been able to do in our preparations for your visit, sir.”

“You are most kind, Captain,” said Holmes.

We descended a long staircase into a dark basement. It was surprisingly chilly for a tropical clime, and even with several lamps lit, it was not particularly easy to see.

“Our morgue, gentleman,” said the police officer, “is no more than the corner of this room. If we bring all of the lamps together, you should have sufficient light by which to see.”

On a set of racks in the corner was a stack of long grey metal cases that seemed like those I remembered as issued by the military for transporting artillery. The captain requested our help, and we lifted one of them over to a table in the center of the room. Holmes and I stood back while he opened it.

Inside was the reasonably well-preserved corpse of a young man. His appearance and dress said that he was English and his frame that he was an active athlete. There were no visible marks of violence anywhere to be seen.

“He was shot in the back of the head,” said the police officer. “If you will help me, gentlemen, we can lift the body onto the table.”

I will not disturb my readers with detailed descriptions of what then took place. As a doctor on the battlefield, I had removed countless bullets from all parts of the body, and my purpose now was to extract the one that had killed Mr. George Atkinson. I did so and handed the bullet to Holmes, who immediately extracted his glass and examined it.

“Did you observe any evidence of gunpowder on the hair surrounding the wound,” he asked me.

“None,” I replied.

“How interesting. Very well, Captain, you have been exceptionally helpful. We must now move on to interview those who were close to the victim.”

“Of course, sir. Before you go, would you also be interested in examining the body of young Mr. Selvarasa Pathmanathan? He was one of the lads from the senior cricket team who was also murdered several weeks ago.”

“Have you not,” asked Holmes, “delivered his body to his family for burial?”

“No, and they are very very angry with me for not doing so. It is a terrible violation of their faith that they should not be able to lay him to rest. However, he was the second boy from the team to be killed. When two young men who are associated with the same team at the same school died in the same fashion, I knew that there was something dreadful and evil in our midst.”

We replaced the one corpse in its case and opened a second one. The body was of a man in his late teens. He had the same dark skin tone as the other men of this region, and even at this many days after his death, it was obvious that he had been a handsome young man prior to his demise. As requested by Holmes, I removed the bullet from his brain and handed it over to him. Without his asking me, I also confirmed that there was no evidence of gunpowder on this hair or clothing close to the wound.

“Would you mind,” asked Holmes, “if I were to keep these two bullets for a day or two? They could be instructive for the case.”

“Of course, sir. Please, sir,” answered the captain. “is there anything else I can do to be of assistance, sir?”

“Yes,” said Holmes. “You are no doubt a diligent police officer who has served Her Majesty for at least a decade. Am I correct in that assessment?”

The man smiled briefly and nodded his head sideways in the manner of sub-continent, indicating ‘yes.’

“Indeed, sir. That is correct, sir. For fifteen years, sir. I have tried to do my duty in a responsible way.”

“Then kindly tell me what conclusions you have reached concerning these murders.”

“Oh, sir. It is not a good thing, not a good thing at all, to leap to conclusions when one has not acquired a sufficient amount of evidence.”

“I could not agree more, but please impart to me such insights as you have. I would be most appreciative.”

“Yes, sir. If you ask, sir. It has been like this, sir. You see, sir, when a single terrible crime takes place, it is a singular event. When a second crime of the same nature soon follows it, you may assume that they are connected and that the same felon has committed both crimes. But when a third takes place, then you know that you have a criminal conspiracy in your midst. The two students were both members of the senior cricket team, and both were fine students, very handsome boys, model students who had already passed their school-leaving certificates and had excellent prospects. At first, we assumed that there might be a connection to cricket, but even amongst those who are passionate about the game, there are none so inflamed as to commit murder because of a match. That would be most unsportsmanlike, sir.”

“Indeed it would.”

“Then we looked further into the affairs of the families. Both of the lads have uncles who own large tea gardens south of Trincomalee, and it was known that they were planning to become part of the consortium of plantations assembled by Mr. Thomas Lipton. His taking over the tea production of much of Ceylon has been met with fierce opposition, and perhaps their deaths were a warning to those who had thrown their lot in with Mr. Lipton’s plans. That is one hypothesis we had. But Mr. Atkinson was murdered in the same fashion, and he has no connection to the tea plantations that we know of, so we are back to the school, as improbable as that seems. I fear, sir, that we have not been able to make any headway beyond that. Any assistance you are able to provide me would be very very helpful. I am not concerned, no, not at all, whether I or any of my men are given credit for solving the case. All we want is to stop this terrible series of crimes in our midst.”

“I will help in whatever way I can, Captain,” said Holmes. “Kindly permit me a request. I wish to be able to conduct a close investigation of the residence and effects of Mr. George Atkinson. Would you be willing to authorize such an exercise? Perhaps you could join us whilst we do so?”

Again, the captain nodded his head sideways. “Yes, sir. All those requests will be arranged, sir. For now, sir, I have arranged for you to have a lunch meeting back at the hotel with Mr. Geoffrey Atkinson, his fiancée, Miss Elspeth Linton and her friend, Miss Morag Douglass. I interviewed each of them four weeks ago, but I am hoping that perhaps your skills will elicit some additional insights.”

Holmes nodded his assent, then continued.

“Another question, if I may, Captain,” said Holmes. “The Governor expressed quite positive expectations concerning the plans of Thomas Lipton to expand his interests in the tea plantations. Yet you informed me that there is a strong undercurrent of opposition within the local populace to the prospect. Therefore, I am curious to know why it is that the governor holds one view and you another. Can you offer me any explanation for that, sir?”

“The Governor,” he replied slowly, “places great faith in the insights and wisdom sent to him by Major Robert Garton. Perhaps tomorrow, when you meet him, you should ask that question of him instead of me.”

On the patio of the hotel, we encountered three young foreigners who had been waiting for us. The one male, an attractive man wearing white trousers and a short-sleeved white shirt, open at the neck, quickly stood up to greet us. The two young women with him remained seated but looked in our direction and smiled. Both were attired in light cotton dresses with sleeves that reached only their

elbows and hems that stopped well above the ankle. One of them was a pleasant if somewhat plain-looking girl; the other was strikingly beautiful.

“Mr. Holmes and Dr. Watson,” said the captain. “Allow me to introduce you to Miss Elspeth Linton, Miss Morag Douglass, and Mr. Geoffrey Atkinson.”

Introductions were followed by chit-chat concerning the climate of Ceylon, the wonderful view, the superb tea, and the latest news about the Old Girl, our beloved Queen, and her dissolute son, Bertie. The conversation was led by the vivacious efforts of Miss Douglass, whose lively banter, guileless questions, contagious laugh, and radiant smile could have turned the most tragic funeral procession into a birthday party. Then Holmes abruptly interrupted.

“I have no interest in whatever it is you are now talking about. We are here, my friends, to ask questions about the murder of your fiancée, Mr. George Atkinson. As time is pressing, allow me to end the pleasant frivolity and inconsequence and proceed to the matter at hand.”

“Oh, very well, if we must, Mr. Holmes,” said Miss Douglass, accompanying her words with an exaggerated pout. “But as one who knew George and loved him dearly, I can assure you that he was full of the love of life and were his ghost here with us and found us gloomy over his departure, he would terrorize us until we promised to laugh and enjoy our lives to the hilt as he did.”

She laughed merrily again and took a large swallow of the mango juice that had been provided for her, and that was, I suspected, seriously adulterated with gin. She did not at all fit my image of a young Scottish Methodist missionary.

“As neither he nor his ghost is present,” replied Holmes, “I shall continue without any further distraction with my questions concerning the events of four weeks ago.”

“Oh, Mr. Holmes, please,” came the plea this time from Miss Linton. “You mustn’t be harsh with Morag. These past weeks have been so hard on us, and I do not know what we would have done without Morag’s indomitable spirit. My fiancé lost his dear twin brother, and I lost a dear friend. Morag has been our pillar of strength during these terrible times. And Morag, my dear,” she spoke now to her friend, reaching over and touching her hand, “You must try to behave yourself.”

Holmes harrumphed and, for the next half-hour, asked and received answers about the events leading up to and following the death of George Atkinson. The answers seemed to me to be sincere and coherent. Geoffrey had been in his quarters that evening and had been notified around ten o’clock by a local police officer when George’s body had been discovered on the Kandy Road beside the Yard Cove. He had run to the site and identified the body for the police. Then he had run to the residence of Misses Douglass and Linton, arriving sometime just after midnight, to tell them the tragic news. The three of them had remained together until the morning when they took a rickshaw to the police station. Miss Linton at first said that she thought she had been awakened somewhat later than midnight but admitted that she had been in a deep sleep and could not precisely remember the exact times and conversations that had taken place.

Miss Linton also replied when Holmes asked for her suspicions concerning the possible killer, that she honestly had no idea, for George was loved by everyone who knew him. His brother and Miss Morag also asserted quite forcefully that they had no insight whatsoever as to who the murderer could have been or why.

None of the three had anything to offer concerning the deaths of the two students except to repeat the story we had already heard concerning the connection of their families to rival interests in the tea industry.

Holmes and the captain thanked them for their time and cooperation. We had finished lunch and now had an opportunity to talk between ourselves and the police captain.

“Captain, would you mind taking us over to the St. Joseph’s school. I should like to have an opportunity to chat with this Major Garton fellow.”

“Most certainly, sir. The school is not far from the hotel. We can be there very soon, sir.”

As we traveled, Holmes turned to me and asked, “Watson, during your time with the BEF, did you ever meet Major Garton?”

“Never directly,” I said. “I had heard of him and his reputation. Very highly respected, not just for his exceptional bravery, but he was one of the rare breed of officers who sincerely cared for the well-being of his men. Not that any officer does not have a responsibility to do so, but Garton went beyond that. Those serving under him did not just admire him, they loved him.”

“How then did he end up as a school teacher in Ceylon?” asked Holmes.

“I cannot say. He was well on his way to general. Even had he stayed until he made colonel, he would have secured a fine pension. Last I heard, he was posted in Somaliland, and then he up and quit. I can only guess that during his posting here in Trinco, he fell in love with the tropics and decided it was a much finer life than the army. Perhaps he became enamored with a local woman. You know, Holmes, *cherchez la femme*, as they say.”

“Ah, yes. One of the oldest and most certain motivations known to man. I must look into what happened.”

The St. Joseph school occupied a full block adjacent to the beach and harbor and was nestled amidst a grove of palm and milkwood trees. I could see several long, three-story buildings, behind which lay a well-worn sports field. Our guide led us to the office of the headmaster and requested that a message be sent to Major Garton. As we had arrived during the mid-day break for the noon meal and rest period, we were assured he would be available shortly.

A tall, lean gentleman—somewhat taller even than Holmes—soon descended from the upper floor. He had a striking bearing and appearance. His posture was unmistakably stiffened by years of service in Her Majesty’s armed forces. His face, tanned but now showing a few signs of age, was handsome to the point of aristocratic. His hair was wavy and still mostly brown, with some edges of white beginning to assert themselves. He was distinctly attired in a blue blazer, white shirt and tie, and spotless white trousers.

“Mr. Holmes, Dr. Watson,” he said in a clear, authoritative voice. “I have been expecting you. Follow me, please. We can chat in the tea room.”

He turned without waiting for us to respond and began back up the stairs. We followed him to the area of the school reserved for the staff and then out onto a pleasant terrace that afforded a lovely view of the great harbor. A young woman appeared almost immediately with a tray of tea and biscuits. The cups were filled to the brim and, fearing that I would dribble, I leaned forward to reduce the distance from the saucer to my mouth. I could not help but notice that Major Garton sat ramrod straight and lifted his cup fearlessly all the way from the table to his lips without the least sign of a tremble.

“The governor sent a note that you chaps were coming here. Whitehall seems to be stirring the pot over the death of George Atkinson. A terrible tragedy, I say. Yes, a terrible tragedy indeed. Now, I

have half an hour before I have to get back to teaching my dear boys their maths. How may I be of assistance to you, gentleman?"

"The governor," said Holmes, "spoke highly of you, Major. He places great trust in the intelligence you forward to him."

"I am flattered, Mr. Holmes. It is no credit, however, to me. All that is required to command respect in that function is to send in the unvarnished truth and avoid ever playing favorites. My years in the services taught me that."

He then looked directly at me and smiled. "You also served, if I am not mistaken, Dr. Watson. Northumberland Fusiliers was it not?"

"It was indeed," I replied, pleased that he remembered.

"Had a bit of a rough go at the end, did you not?"

"A bit rough, yes. But that is now all behind me."

"And obviously doing well. I hear you went and got married to a Beauty. Well done, old chap. There are so many lads who go back home in pieces and never recover. It does my heart good when I meet one who has made a go of it."

"Kind of you to say so, Major," I said. Sensing the opportunity, I moved ahead to ask the questions that I knew Holmes was waiting to have answered.

"Do tell, though, Major," said, "how is it that such a decorated soldier decided to leave the BEF and toil for the good Lord in this forgotten corner of the Empire? I trust you will not take offense at my asking."

"Not at all, not at all. I did my duty shooting Ashantis in the Gold Coast, Maoris in New Zealand, Zulus in the Cape, and no end of angry young natives in every post in which I served. One day, I looked down at the body of a lad I had shot dead outside the fort near Berbera. He was no more than fourteen years old, and he was dead. I had killed him for no reason other than he was hacking away at one of our caravans. His dead eyes seemed to look into my soul and tell me that some day I would have to stand before Almighty God and account for what I had done. I have never been overly given to religion, but I had my own humble version of the road to Damascus, and decided there and then that I had had it with military life. I had spent some time at the garrison here in lovely Trinco and came back. The school was in need of a maths teacher and was kind enough to accept me. I have been living in paradise ever since, Doctor."

"Yet you remain unmarried," said Holmes."

"As do you, Mr. Holmes," came the immediate reply. "I do not know about you, but there are some of us who are proudly married to our calling."

"I am familiar with the predicament," said Holmes.

"I am sure you are. But come now, Mr. Holmes. I am sure you did not come all the way to Ceylon to inquire as to my marital situation. You wish for me to tell you what I know about the death of George Atkinson. Perhaps we should move on to that topic now before I rhapsodize endlessly about the beauty of Ceylon and the native Ceylonese."

"I concur," said Holmes. "so, let us begin by your telling me about the fellow who was killed, Mr. Atkinson. What was he like? What was the nature of your acquaintance with him?"

“George was an excellent fellow. Every day he would quit his office by three o’clock and make a beeline over here to the school so he could direct the senior boys’ football team. I had the task of doing the same for the junior boys’ cricket team. We would see each other almost every day out on the pitch, sharing what was left of the grass. In past years, we had seen a bit of each other at one of the pubs near the harbor where the soldiers and seamen socialize, but of late, he had been spending his spare time with his fiancée. Quite besotted with her, I gathered.”

“Yes, and which one was she?” asked Holmes.

“George had fallen for Miss Morag. His brother, Geoffrey, was stuck with Miss Elspeth.”

“Stuck with?” asked Holmes.

“A poor choice of words. Forgive me. Most ungentlemanly of me. However, any man can see straight away that Morag Douglass is as stunningly attractive a lass as a man could ever hope to meet. Dear Elspeth Linton is more on the plain side. Mind you, she is as sweet and kind a girl as can be imagined. Her heart must be made of honey, and perhaps that is why Geoffrey found her so good a prospect for a wife. Who can say? Would you agree, Doctor?”

“A distinct possibility,” I said. “Beauty fades. A kind heart lasts.”

“And what about Geoffrey?” asked Holmes. “You continue to be on good terms with him as well?”

“As well as can be expected. I have seen very little of him since the death of George. The brothers were exceptionally close, and Geoff has taken George’s death very hard. He still comes to the school to direct the senior cricket team, but I fear his heart is no longer in it.”

“That is entirely understandable,” said Holmes. “perhaps we can now move to the night when George was shot. What can you tell me about that night? Do you remember how you spent the evening?”

“Quite so, Mr. Holmes. There is a small tavern on Orr Hill Road, not far from the Army base. I was there for an hour in the evening, chatting with some of the fellows. Geoffrey was also there, and we chatted briefly. We left at the same time, about eight o’clock. I took a rickshaw back to my home on this side of the harbor and he to his home on the other side. I did not see George at all that evening, and it was the following morning when I heard the terrible news. All I can say is that George must have been in the wrong place at the wrong time. This is a harbor city, Mr. Holmes. It is not safe. He was in the foolish habit of traveling about the town unarmed.”

“Thank you, Major,” said Holmes. “Might you have any insights into the deaths of the two boys from your school?”

“You are referring to Selvarasa and Chandran? A terrible tragedy, indeed, Mr. Holmes. The police looked into that matter and concluded that it was connected to the rivalry within the tea planters’ families. I am not privy to any news about the progress of their investigation. You will have to ask them.”

“You knew these boys?”

“Of course, I knew them. They were members of the senior cricket team. Before moving up to that level, they had been members of my junior cricket team. Wonderful boys. Good natured. Splendid athletes. As I said, a terrible tragedy. But you must speak to the police if you wish to know more.”

“Thank you, Major. There is just one thing that puzzles me, if you will permit my asking you.”

“Carry on, Mr. Holmes.”

“It concerns the plans of the Lipton firm to expand their activities here. The police captain has informed me that there exists considerable conflict amongst the local people. Many do not wish to have such a wealthy interest move in and take over their tea gardens. Yet you have reported to the governor that the expansion by Lipton would be a boon and welcomed by all. Would you mind telling me why you hold to your opinion?”

“Oh, come, come, Mr. Holmes. These native folks are beautiful in their own way, remarkably attractive. As much as I love them, you have to understand that the vast majority of them still bow down to wood and stone. They are a simple lot but exceptionally jealous of any success by those who are not of their particular tribe. The Tamils are jealous of the Singhalese and vice versa. The Ceylonese Tamils are jealous of the Estate Tamils. Everyone is jealous of the Burghers. But, I assure you, Mr. Holmes, the minute they see their pay-packet of rupees start to swell when Mr. Lipton begins to pay them, they will suddenly forget whatever objections they might once have held and band together as one people, even if it is to demand even more pay. It is just how these people are, Mr. Holmes.”

“Ah, yes. An interesting observation. Again, thank you, Major Garton. We have kept you from your students for far too long. Allow us to wish you a good day.”

“And to you too, sir. I trust you will enjoy your time in our rather idyllic corner of the Empire.”

Captain Devasenapathy was waiting for us with his police carriage and took us to a small restaurant near the wharf section of the harbor. Holmes imparted to him the gist of the conversation we had with Major Garton, tactfully omitting any colonialist references to the simplicity of the natives.

“Thank you, Mr. Holmes,” said the captain. “This is very very helpful. Now, if you will come with me, I will take you to the residence of Mr. George Atkinson. If we move smartly, you shall have most of the afternoon to investigate his rooms before his brother returns. Come, come.”

The two Atkinson brothers shared a spacious house a few blocks north of the China Bay sector of the harbor. The house was as neat as a pin, thanks in part to the diligent maid, but also reflecting a couple of young men who gave the immediate impression of being exceptionally fastidious. There was a large common area in the central front of the building, adjacent to a front porch that afforded a pleasant view of the harbor.

Holmes moved immediately into the room that the captain informed us had been occupied by George Atkinson. It was also as orderly and immaculate as any barracks inspected by a tyrant sergeant-major that I had ever been in.

“If you would, my good doctor,” said Holmes. “Please, start on the books. I shall inspect his personal effects.”

It was a pattern of inspection that I had expected, and that was to become quite familiar in the years afterward. One by one, I took a book off the shelf and examined it, page by page. Anything that struck me as noteworthy, I noted.

Holmes slowly and methodically went through each drawer in the dresser, removing every item of clothing, jewelry, toiletries, and odds and ends. He had his glass at the ready and gave many of the objects a close look.

After an hour and a half, Holmes departed from the bedroom and took a seat in the comfortable parlor. The captain and I followed him.

“Very well, Watson. Let us hear your report. Quickly through the mundane, and some detail on the anomalies, no matter how trivial.”

“As you could see, there were three shelves of books, each of six feet and attached to his wall above the writing desk. Quite well organized, as might be expected. Perfectly aligned. The lowest shelf was entirely books related to the business of the Atkinson brothers. The second row, all in order by the last name of the author, held a fine selection of the best of England’s writers. There were even a few from America.

“The top row,” I continued, “held his memories from his boyhood. All his photographs, prize cups, and favorite storybooks. I suspect he brought a trunk full of these old friends with him and still read them during some of the long nights here in the tropics.

“The anomalies, Watson, please.”

‘Ah, yes. Getting to those, Holmes. None of the business books on the lower shelf were inscribed or had nameplates inserted. However, stuck inside some of the books were notes, copies of memos, purchase orders and the like. Oddly, any of them that had a name attached were addressed not to George but to his brother.’

“How very interesting, Watson. Good work.”

“Thank you, Holmes. Now it is your turn.”

“As you have dutifully recorded, the fellow had an exceptionally orderly mind. I have gone through all of his belongings, and they are all arranged in a regimented manner ... with two exceptions.”

“Ah ha,” I said. “Then do deliver, Holmes.”

“His shirts, sweaters, trousers, and jackets are all aligned perfectly. His handkerchiefs are folded in perfect symmetry and stacked as if a plumb line had been used on the edge. Even his cufflinks and studs are placed in a row along a uniform edge.”

“Yes,” I said, “and what is the point of your observation.”

“His socks and underwear wear tossed all together in an unholy jumble.”

“Goodness, Holmes, a man cannot be expected to be utterly faultless in all his domestic habits.”

“True, perhaps of you, Watson, and most certainly true of me. But not, I submit, of this man. Now, as to the second item, I examined his bank book. As I have observed before, a man may lie to the police, to his wife and children, to his closest friend, to his employer, and even to his solicitor. He cannot lie to his bank book. George Atkinson made scrupulous notes in his personal ledger accounting for every cheque issued and every deposit made. One of them, however, could not be accounted for.”

“Indeed, and what was that?”

“He records that six months ago he paid for a wire of funds to W. J. Brooks of Northampton.”

“The shoe firm?”

“Precisely. It was for a new set of boots at a cost of two pounds, six. There was a later note confirming the delivery three months later.”

“Yes, go on, Holmes.”

“Those boots are missing.”

“Goodness, Holmes. Maybe he was wearing them when he was killed, and they are still on his feet in the morgue,” I said.

“No, his body was wearing a fine set of brogues.”

Once back on the hotel patio, Holmes turned to me.

“Watson, do you have your service revolver with you?”

“Of course. I never go east of Aldgate without it, and I most surely would not walk the streets of a backwater town unarmed.”

“Excellent. Now come and stand here.” He jumped out of his chair and went quickly to a place about thirty feet back from the low stone wall that bordered the patio. I followed and stood as asked, not having the foggiest notion what he was up to. He then ran out onto the beach and approached one of the many local vendors. He returned, carrying two fresh coconuts. Carefully, he balanced one of them on the top of the wall.

“Now, my friend, please take out your revolver and see if you can hit this coconut from that distance.”

“Holmes,” I cried, “what in heaven’s name ...”

“Oh, Watson. Just humor me. See if you can hit it. I assure you, there is method in my madness.”

I took out my Webley and took aim. The gun has only a six-inch barrel and is not accurate in the least at any distance more than twenty feet. I raised and fired. I missed, and the bullet proceeded unhindered to some distant splash in the ocean.

“Try again,” shouted Holmes.

I did and missed again.

“Once more!”

This time I pegged the coconut. A gun with a larger caliber might have splatted the target, but a bullet from a small revolver merely penetrated the side and lodged itself somewhere in the interior of the fruit.

“Excellent,” said Holmes. “Just what I wanted.”

He took the coconut and departed. That was the last I saw of him for the entire remainder of the afternoon and evening. I assured the startled hotel staff that we were only engaging in target practice.

Early the following morning, I came out from my room in time to observe the glory of the morning sunrise emerge over the eastern horizon. Holmes was already sitting at a table, sipping a cup of tea and reading the previous day’s Colombo newspaper.

“Good morning, Watson,” he said, beaming. His face was smugly happy, a look I have seen many times in the years since that day when Holmes knew that he had solved a difficult case.

“Do have a cup and your breakfast, my dear Watson,” he said, not bothering to put down the newspaper. “We are being joined at half eight by the people we met with yesterday. Until then, kindly do not disturb me. I have some lines to rehearse.”

I began to say something, but he held up his hand to indicate that I should be silent. I had no choice but to wait until he deigned to speak.

I ate my breakfast and sipped my tea in solitude and then took myself for a stroll along the beach, returning to the patio at twenty minutes past eight o'clock. Holmes was still reading and did nothing more than look up at me, smile, and return to the newspaper.

At half past eight, he rose and looked toward the door that led back into the hotel. Coming through it was the police captain, followed by Misses Elspeth and Morag, Mr. Geoffrey Atkinson, and Major Robert Garton.

"I have brought them all as requested, Mr. Holmes," said Captain Devasenapathy. His tone and the look on his face said that he was not at all sure why he had been so instructed.

Holmes smiled and greeted our visitors.

"Really, Mr. Holmes," said Geoffrey Atkinson, "is this necessary? The ladies and the major have classes to teach, and I have a business to run."

"I assure you," said Holmes, "I shall not keep you for more than a few minutes. I have an obligation to report my conclusions to you before Dr. Watson, and I depart this afternoon."

The major was the last to enter the patio, and Holmes walked toward him. Suddenly, Holmes stumbled and staggered directly into Major Garton.

"Oh, I am so sorry, major. My apologies, sir. I was distracted whilst looking at the ladies and did not notice the uneven pavement. I am terribly sorry."

His voice and face conveyed profound embarrassment, and the major forced a smile and muttered a few forgiving words. The seven of us gathered around one of the round tables and waited whilst the mandatory morning tea and scones were served by the ever-attentive hotel staff.

"Mr. Holmes," said the major, "please get on with your report immediately. Time is wasting."

Holmes stood, holding a small sheaf of papers in his hands, and began as if he were about to address the local parish council.

"Captain Rajanathan Devasenapathy of the Trincomalee Police, Major Robert Garton, Misses Elspeth Linton and Morag Douglass, and Mr. George Atkinson ..."

"Geoffrey, not George," I interrupted. "Holmes, George is the one that was killed. This is Geoffrey Atkinson."

"No, my dear Watson, it is not. The man sitting with us is George Atkinson. It was Geoffrey who was killed. Immediately after his tragic death, his brother assumed his identity."

"Oh, honestly, Mr. Holmes," said whichever of the Atkinson brothers it was. "Where did you get such an absurd idea. You must have been reading far too many of the penny dreadful novels. I assure you that I am Geoffrey and always have been."

"No, George, you are not. You were the first to hear the terrible news about your brother, and you reacted as any man would. You immediately sought the company of your fiancée. For reasons that I am sure you know better than I, the two of you agreed that you would assume your brother's identity and act as if you were engaged to be married to Miss Elspeth Linton. Then you rushed back to your house and made such minor changes in your belongings as were necessary to support your ruse and only then went to wake Miss Linton and share the tragic news with her of the death of George."

“Utter nonsense!” said George or Geoffrey. “You have no proof whatsoever of such lunacy.”

“Ah, but there you are wrong, George,” said Holmes. “When you re-arranged your belongings, you knew that you could wear your brother’s shirts, trousers, sweaters, and neckties, but you drew the line at wearing another man’s socks and underwear. You exchanged those items in his dresser for the ones from yours, but you failed to replace them with the obsessive neatness that you and he practiced in all your belongings.”

When he said these words, I detected a momentary flash of George’s eyeballs in the direction of Miss Douglass. Holmes noticed it as well.

“Ah, allow me to correct myself. Your now former fiancée, who was helping you and who is not nearly as compulsively fastidious, replaced those items for you. Meanwhile, you exchanged a few of your daily reference books with those of your brothers but failed to remove the odd notes addressed to Geoffrey that were hidden between the pages. And, it truly is most unseemly to steal the boots from a dead man, even if he is your brother. Yet the new boots sent recently from Brooks are now adorning your feet ... George.”

“You are proving nothing at all. This is all piffle and conjecture. George bought those boots as a gift for me.”

“Perhaps. Men give many types of gifts to other men, but gifts of footwear are very rare. Regardless, it is difficult to get around the evidence of fingerprints. It is a known fact that even twins who are identical in every other way, do not share identical fingerprints. Fortunately, both you and Geoffrey have an array of cabinet photographs, prize cups, and various odds and ends along your top shelf. The local police officers are collecting them as we speak.”

“The local police,” said George, “have no ability whatsoever to extract and examine fingerprints. You know that as well as I do, Mr. Holmes.”

“No, but Mr. George William Robert Campbell, the Inspector-General of the Ceylon Police and two of his finest most certainly do have the required expertise. And they are on their way to Trincomalee also as we speak. Now, would you like to explain your reasons for disguising your identity, or shall I?”

“No, I will,” came the unexpected response from Miss Morag Douglass. “It was my idea. We did it for the sake of my dearest friend, my sister, Elspeth. She is the most generous and kind and pure soul on earth, an angel. But she has a spirit like a frail reed that would have been crushed by the news of the death of the man she was pledged to marry. I could not let that happen to her. George and Geoffrey are, quite frankly, interchangeable. When we first met them, Elspeth and I flipped a coin to decide who would become smitten with whom. For her to marry George instead of Geoffrey would make no difference. She would have a loving husband and father of her children, regardless. Giving up my betrothed in return for the love she has given me for all my life was the least I could do. That is why I insisted that George become Geoffrey.”

Miss Elspeth Linton had sat throughout this entire exchange in shocked silence, her face becoming paler by the minute. Now, she reacted.

“Morag! Oh, Morag. My darling, Morag!” Elspeth Linton cried out. “Oh, my sweet, sweet sister. You did that for me?” Oh, my darling ...”

Miss Linton had risen from her chair and thrown her torso, somewhat awkwardly, against the sitting torso of Miss Douglass. She was now clutching her friend tightly and sobbing loudly. Miss Douglass was using her restricted arms to pat Elspeth on the back, much as one might burp a baby.

“Elspeth, my dearest, Please. I had no choice. I had to do it for you.”

The scene was full of emotional intensity, even if not with convincing sincerity. Elspeth slowly disentangled herself from Morag's arms and, with the help of a firm upward push by Morag, staggered to her feet. No sooner had she done so than she swooned and collapsed back onto her friend's lap. I shouted for the hotel staff, who came running and immediately carried Elspeth Linton to an empty bed somewhere in the interior of the hotel, with George following close behind. Morag made as if to follow her, but Holmes stretched a long arm in front of her body.

"The staff will look after her," he said. "Your presence is required here."

She glared back at him, but the police captain rose to his feet and gestured her back to the chair she had been sitting in.

"That was," said Holmes, "awfully considerate of Miss Linton to excuse herself. She might have found the next few minutes even more trying to her delicate constitution. And our next stage of questions shall begin by my acknowledging that Miss Linton is legally named Miss *Lipton*. Upon her marriage, she will come into the possession of a small but significant fortune. That fortune, Miss Douglass, would have remained very close to you had Elspeth married Geoffrey, and you had married his twin brother, George. But when Elspeth suddenly lost her prospects for marriage whilst you remained engaged to the surviving brother, you saw the shared enjoyment of that fortune vanish. What I do not understand is how you convinced the man who was engaged to you, by far the more attractive and vivacious woman of the two, to agree to marry Elspeth instead. Would you, Mr. George Atkinson, care to enlighten me on that matter?"

Holmes looked directly at George Atkinson, who rather quickly began to blush and appeared decidedly uncomfortable.

"It would be better," said Miss Douglass, "if I were to explain. Let me ask you, Mr. Holmes, do you consider me better equipped to become a Madam de Pompadour of the French Court or a General Mrs. Catherine Booth of the Salvation Army?"

Her question was accompanied by a sly smile.

"The former," said Holmes, attempting to conceal a smile in return. "I interpret your question to mean that you offered to continue as George's mistress after the marriage."

"You can interpret however you wish, Mr. Holmes," she said. "Now, why don't you move on. I am sure your questions are not through."

"No, indeed, they are not. We must now move on to what you did to avoid the potential loss not only of access to a part of the Lipton fortune but to the equally lucrative position that would become available for George and Geoffrey to manage the business of Thomas Lipton and Company when they moved to expand their holdings in Ceylon. Miss Lipton communicated regularly with her father, even if neither of them cared to make their connection to each other known to the world. Were she to be married to a capable young businessman and you to his twin brother, you would soon be up and out of your missionary posting and off to a villa and a fine life for years to come in Colombo. With one of the brothers dead and the region reeling from the murder of the two students, sons of tea garden families, that lovely future position was put in jeopardy. So, you did what any intelligent young woman would do, and you blackmailed the man who was relied upon to send reports to the governor—our friend here, Major Robert Garton."

Garton immediately stiffened in his chair. "Holmes, that is absurd. No one blackmails me, and no one has ever had reason to. Withdraw your accusation immediately. That is an order!"

“I fear I cannot, Major. You see, you left yourself open to being blackmailed when you murdered Geoffrey Atkinson, followed by murdering two student members of the St. Joseph’s senior cricket team. The secret of your abusing them for your sexual pleasure whilst they were members of your junior cricket team was confessed by them to Mr. Geoffrey Atkinson. He confronted you that evening in the tavern on Orr’s Hill. You followed him and shot him and the following day shot the two students.”

“Enough!” shouted Garton. He leapt from his chair and strode over to Holmes. He towered over him and pointed a finger an inch from Holmes’s eyes.

“You have slandered me, Holmes. I shall see you in court and, if you are man enough, I will see you immediately behind the hotel. Now get up and prepare to defend yourself!”

Holmes did not move but began to chuckle.

“Oh, dear me. Am I being threatened with fisticuffs? Why not, instead, threaten to shoot me with your service revolver, the one you used on all three of your victims. Oh, dear me, your revolver is no longer in your pocket, so I fear you cannot do that.”

Instinctively, Major Garton shoved his hand into his jacket pocket. He then took it back out again, empty.

“You bloody thief. You picked my pocket when you bumped into me. Give me that revolver back immediately, or I will break every bone in your body to take it from you.”

Holmes said nothing and slowly turned to the police captain.

“Mr. Holmes does not have your revolver, Major. I do,” said the captain.

“Then give it to me. Now!”

“I am very very sorry, Major, but your gun is now considered evidence in the case of the murders. So, it must remain in my possession, not yours.”

“You have no reason whatsoever to keep it and no reason for these insulting accusations. I demand the return of my gun and an immediate apology. Now!”

“Captain,” said Holmes. “Do you happen to have the two bullets that Dr. Watson extracted from the heads of Mr. Geoffrey Atkinson and one of the murdered students.”

“I do, Mr. Holmes.” From one of his pockets, he took out a small paper packet and from it removed two bullets and laid them on the table.

“And,” said Holmes, “what about the bullet that Dr. Watson eventually managed to leave in the coconut? I gave that one to you also.”

“It is here.” From another pocket, he took out a packet, removed a bullet, and placed it beside the previous two.

“What can you tell me about the bullets, Captain,” asked Holmes.

“They are almost identical. It is very probable that they were fired from the same make of gun.”

“Dr. Watson,” said Holmes, “would you mind placing your service revolver on the table.”

I took out my gun and laid it on the table. It was a standard-issue Webley, carried by tens of thousands of men who had served in Her Majesty’s army. The captain laid the major’s gun beside mine. They were identical models.

“There are at least a hundred of those guns in Trinco,” said Major Garton. “This proves nothing. Now, end this nonsense immediately.”

“Ah, yes,” said Holmes. “There are many such guns. You are correct. But there are far fewer that are owned by the last man to have seen Geoffrey Atkinson alive; by the man who was accused of gross indecency by Geoffrey Atkinson; and by the man who has the rare skill to hit a small target moving in a rickshaw from a significant distance. To that, Major, I would add that as we speak, the members of both the junior and the senior cricket teams are being removed from their classes at St. Thomas and brought to a private location for questioning by the police. Once they know that you can no longer harm them, and they are advised of the consequences of lying to the police, I expect they will tell all, no matter how humiliating it may be for them to do so. What you considered to be your affection for them, the courts consider an offense requiring imprisonment. If you doubt me, I suggest you speak to Mr. Oscar Wilde. The game is up, Major. You may have served your country with distinction, but throughout your career, you took advantage of your position and betrayed the trust of the children and families you were called to protect. I advise you to obtain a good barrister.”

“And I advise you to do the same,” said Garton. “Enough of this bloody drivel. I have classes to teach.”

He turned and began to leave the patio.

“Major Garton,” said the police captain, leaping to his feet. “I am so sorry, Major, but I am afraid that you must come with me.”

Three police constables had emerged from just within the hotel to block the major’s path. They escorted him through the hotel and out to a waiting police carriage.

That left me, Holmes, and the beautiful if unusual Miss Morag Douglass sitting on the patio. Holmes stared at her, and she met his gaze, unflinching and clearly not the least intimidated.

“Perhaps another cup of tea, Miss Douglass?” asked Holmes.

“One perhaps, yes. I am somewhat pressed for time. I had devised a splendid plan to ensure that I could live my life in the manner to which I fully planned to become accustomed. When that plan failed, I devised another one. Now, thanks to you, Mr. Holmes, I shall have to come up with a third one. None of which has in any way broken the law.”

“I admire your imagination,” said Holmes, “even if your morals are somewhat suspect. However, would you mind terribly, as a favor from one imaginative person to another, explaining what took place that brought you to a patio in Trincomalee, whilst holding intimate knowledge of three murders and of behavior that is usually not named in respectable company.”

She positively smiled at Holmes and opened her handbag. She extracted a cigarette case and slowly, sensuously put one in her mouth, lit it, and took a long, slow inhalation.

“God, how I have missed these. They are forbidden at the Methodist Girls’ College, but since I do not expect to be welcomed back there, I may as well enjoy them. Will you join me, Mr. Holmes?”

Holmes took out his cigarette case and did exactly as she had suggested.

“Your story, Miss,” he said after several puffs.

“Oh, yes, that. Have you been to the Gorbels, Mr. Holmes? No? Ah, but Dr. Watson knows what they are, don’t you? The poorest, most utterly miserable part of the city of Glasgow. That is where I was born and where I learned to look after myself. As a four-year-old school girl, I met another child, one who was kind and pure and generous beyond belief. My father had died in an accident in the shipyards.

Elspeth Linton's father had abandoned her and her mother. Finding ourselves in similar circumstances, we became as close as sisters. Yet there was a difference. I could see that my mother, living on piece work, was always desperately worried as to where the next shilling would come from. Elspeth's mother always seemed to have just enough to get by. She confided to me that her father sent a regular allowance for her and her mother. Not much, mind you, but enough to keep the wolf from the door. And whatever Elspeth had, she would always give a portion of it to me. In turn, I protected her. She could never stand up for herself, so I had to. If another schoolgirl was mean to her, I would grab her hair and threaten to bite her nose off. If a boy even dared to lay a finger on her, he would end up crawling on the pavement, clutching his privates.

"We continued that way through our schooling. Her allowance increased as her father became wealthier, and she always shared it with me. Then, one day, she confided in me not only the identity of her father but also that she was expecting to receive a considerable portfolio of securities and title to property upon her marriage. I feared that once she was married, to some ambitious and possessive young man, she would be forced to abandon me. So, I devised a plan to keep her away from any prospective husband. I took her to a week of evangelical revival meetings and convinced her that God was calling us to go and serve on the mission field. Ceylon was her suggestion. She had learned that her father was looking into expanding his interests here, and so we came.

"Once here, we soon met the Atkinson brothers. At first, I had no use for Mr. Tweedledum and Mr. Tweedledee, but it came to me that here was a solution to my fears. If she were to marry one and I to marry the twin brother, and if the brothers were to take over the Lipton empire in Ceylon, we would not only be inseparable for the rest of our lives, we would become the wives of successful gentlemen, live in Colombo, and eventually move to Belgravia.

"It was all going perfectly until Geoffrey passed on to George what two of the boys on his senior cricket team had told him about Major Garton. George told me, and I urged Geoffrey not to make an issue about it. I had learned in the Gorbals that it is not wise to poke a bear. But Geoffrey was sure that an honorable soldier would never act against the law, so he confronted the major and immediately paid the price, as did both of the students, the following night."

She stopped here for another cigarette. Holmes posed a question that had been on my mind as well.

"How did you manage to avoid becoming the major's victim too. You blackmailed him to send highly biased reports to the governor concerning the potential of the Lipton plans for the tea industry. I suspect he did not take kindly to that."

She took another puff on her cigarette and laughed. "Oh, you can say that again. What I did Mr. Holmes, was to furiously write out all possible accusations against the major, with detailed evidence, and make four copies. Three I immediately sent to solicitors in New York, Paris, and London with instructions to pass them along to the *Times* in both London and America and the *International Herald-Tribune* in Paris should they hear of anything untoward happening to me, or Elspeth, or George. Then I gave a copy to Bob Garton. And, oh my, he was not happy with me. I told him that I would not demand any money from him as I would never stoop to blackmail, but that from then on, he had to be the biggest booster of the Lipton invasion of Ceylon that could be imagined. He complied. I had far more to gain by having him serve my purposes than having him hung.

"So, that is my story, Mr. Holmes. Now, if you will excuse me, I must go to the Methodist College and tender my resignation, with regret, of course. And then I have to come up with a plan that will ensure that Elspeth marries and stays married to George, but I will need to find an exceptionally

clever young man to be George's indispensable business partner as well as my husband. You would not happen to know any men who fit that description, would you, Mr. Holmes?"

Try as he might, Holmes could not resist smiling at her. "No, my dear, I do not and, if I did, I assure you, I would never recommend that he come to Ceylon."

She laughed, smiled radiantly, and departed.

Holmes sat in silence, enjoying his cigarette.

"How," I asked him, "did you know about the Major's problems in Somaliland?"

"It was you, my friend, who put me on to it. A highly successful officer on his way to the top does not up and quit because of some religious epiphany. A telegraph sent last night to Whitehall was answered immediately with the details of the accusations that had been made against him."

We both sat in silence for several more minutes and were about to get up, pack our baggage, and prepare to depart when Captain Devasenapathy returned. He was looking horribly distraught.

"Good heavens, man," I said. "what is it?"

He collapsed his body into one of the chairs.

"Major Garton had a second revolver on his person."

"Oh no," I cried. "He did not shoot any of your men and escape, did he?"

"No. He waited until we had placed him in a room in the station. Then he shot himself. He is dead."

For a full minute, not one of us spoke. Then the captain stood, nodded a quiet good day to us and departed.

"I suppose," I said to Holmes, "that it was a better way for him to go than to face the shame and humiliation that would precede a certain trip to the gallows."

I could tell that Holmes was not listening to me.

"Watson," he said while looking out to the endless, beautiful expanse of the Indian Ocean, "when you were a schoolboy and had to attend chapel, did you ever sing a hymn that begins with the words *From Greenland's icy mountains?*"

"I did."

"Does not the second verse go something like *What though the spicy breezes blow soft o'er Ceylon's isle; Though every prospect pleases, and only man is vile?*"

"It does."

The Barrel of Lagavulin

A story in which the adventures of Sherlock Holmes and the tales of Edgar Allan Poe meet.



“AH, WATSON, HOW GOOD OF YOU TO JOIN ME. I trust I did not disturb your work at the hospital.”

“Not at all. We younger doctors are not exactly choc-a-block with patients.”

“Not yet, my dear chap. Not yet. However, I am very grateful that you are here, and I expect that you will quite enjoy recording my meeting with this fellow.”

“Do you know his name yet?” I asked.

“No, only that he is an older man and not English. That much is clear from his note.”

He handed me a small sheet of notepaper. The message on it was written by a masculine hand and showed the unsteadiness of age. The date at the top of the page read: 2 Septembre, 1885. The brief contents were cryptic and ran:

Mr. Sherlock Holmes: I have heard of your accomplishments, and it is imperative that I speak with you. I shall you visit at two o'clock after the noon hour on the third of Septembre.

You will know who I am when I am arrived.

“A European chap,” I said, “going by his spelling and inversions when writing English.”

“Precisely. But how might he have heard of me? I have a difficult enough time as it is making my services as a consulting detective known in London.”

“I am sure that every criminal on the continent knows of you by now. Perhaps this chap is one of them.”

That brought a smile and a twinkle to Holmes's eye, and he was about to respond when the bell at the Baker Street door rang. A few moments later, Mrs. Hudson appeared.

“Shall I shoo him away, Mr. Holmes? He does not have a card, he would not tell me who he is, and he is unmistakably a Frenchie.”

“No, my good lady,” said Holmes. “Please show him in. We are expecting him,”

The steps sounding their ascent of the stairs were slow and punctuated by the sharp knock of a cane. An older man, dressed in a no-longer-stylish suit and sporting a cravat and a beret, entered the room and bowed stiffly first to Holmes and then to me.

“*Monsieur Holmes, docteur Watson, Je suis honoré de vous rencontrer.* I am told that you think me an inferior fellow, Mr. Holmes, but it matters not. I am now an old man, and I am in need of your assistance.”

Holmes was uncharacteristically flustered and embarrassed. I do believe I detected a flush come to his face.

“I assure you, Sir, my unkind opinion referred to your actions when you were at the very start of your illustrious career. I have come to admire your accomplishments and indeed to incorporate your methods of reasoning into my own work. Please, Monsieur, be seated. The honor is ours to have you visit us.”

Holmes then turned to me. “My dear doctor, it is a privilege to introduce you to Chevalier C. Auguste Dupin.”

“Oh, my goodness,” I said. “I have read so many stories about you. This is indeed a great honor. Please, Sir, take a seat. May I offer you a bit of refreshment? I fear we have no absinthe, but there is a bottle of fine Cognac in the sideboard.”

I poured out a glass for each of us, and we sat in silence, sipping, for several minutes. For once, Holmes did not demand that a visitor get on with it and state his case. *Le Vieux* set his glass on the side table, placed his cane in front of him, and folded his hands over the top of it.

“*Mes amies*, if I may call you that, during my long years of fighting for the forces of righteousness and justice, I have faced every conceivable practice of crime and vice and cruelty. I have heard of every imaginable horror visited by one man upon another. There is no account of human depravity that can unsettle me ... *seulement un*. I am here today because, for the past thirty years, I have been haunted by a singular story of murder. I first read it thirty years ago while sitting in an obscure library in Montmartre. Perhaps you know of it. It was an account of a most hideous and cruel murder, wrought merely by a desire for revenge. A man whose offense was nothing worse than to have insulted another man was chained against a wall in a catacomb, walled up, and buried alive.”

Holmes nodded. “I know this story well: *The Cask of Amontillado*. The writer had a most unusual imagination, with unparalleled insights into the criminal mind. A splendid piece of fiction.”

Monsieur Dupin looked down at the floor, and then at the ceiling and then spoke in hushed tones.

“Monsieur Holmes, I am old now, but I am not a fool. Kindly hear me out. This story ... was not fiction. It was true. Over forty years ago, this horrible murder indeed took place.”

I gasped. “Surely not. What sort of monster would be so deranged, so utterly evil to do such a thing?”

“*Oui, mon cher docteur*, I thought the same. But the man who published this story in America had many admirers in Paris. Our poet, Baudelaire, translated Mr. Poe’s stories and they were wildly popular with the people of France. He never set foot in our city of light, but our painters, our writers, our *philosophes*, all adored him and made it a point to speak to those who knew him when visits were exchanged between France and America. They heard about something. At first, it was dismissed as *absurdité*, but the story persisted. It was said that before he died, Mr. Poe, in one of his many alcoholic

rantings, told a small gathering of his few friends that the horrifying tale was true. All he did was to change the names of those involved and falsely claim that the murder had taken place fifty years ago when, in fact, it had been more recent. By the time it was told to me, it was third or fourth hand, but even the faint possibility that it was true set my mind on fire. I am sure you can understand my reaction, Monsieur Holmes.”

“Most certainly. Mine would be the same. Please, Sir, continue.”

“I re-read the story many times and noticed some similarities to a murder I had investigated but had failed to solve in Bordeaux. A fine young father had been killed most cruelly, leaving his family in ruins to this day. The day before his death, he had exchanged harsh words with a man in a bar. My intuition told me there might be a connection. I applied my process of ratiocination to the story by Mr. Poe. I reasoned that the original murder had taken place in the city of Viareggio.”

Holmes nodded his assent and understanding, but I was in a fog.

“How did you know that?” I asked.

Holmes gave me a look, but I was the one who had to record the details of the story, not him, So, I asked our visitor again.

“*Pas difficile*. The names of the men in the story—Fortunato, Luchesi, and Montresor—are all Italian, and even if they were altered, it was obvious that the murder took place in Italy. It was during a period of the Carnival when people dress in motley and wear *roquelaires*. The most famous carnival in Italy, of course, is in Venice, but there are no catacombs in Venice; everything there is built above the level of the sea else it would be filled *avec de l'eau*. Yet the story says that the catacombs were very damp, so the town could not have been high in the hills or in an arid region. Most likely, it was close to *la mer*, on the coast. There was but one town that was famous for its Carnival and located on the western coast, and that was Viareggio.”

I was confused. “There must be several towns and cities along the Italian coast that celebrate Carnival.”

“*Mais oui*, but we read of three wines being available. The Amontillado is from Spain and is exported from the Mediterranean port of Malaga. The Medoc and the DeGrève are from Bordeaux. They are imported into Italy through the excellent harbor of Viareggio. *Alors*, it was a reasonable place to begin. So, at my first opportunity, I went there.”

Holmes’s eyes had lit up, and he was rubbing his hands in anticipation. “Yes, and what did you discover.”

“I began by asking some of the old people if, many years ago, a wealthy, public man had vanished during the Carnival. Yes, they said, during the 1840s a Signore Benedictus *avait disparu*. The connection could not have been more obvious. *Fortunato, Benedictus*. The disguise of the name was so thin, anyone could see through it. The name of the villain was not as *facile*. In Paris, *Montresor* is a term of endearment—*my treasure*. Italians call their loved ones *mio tesoro*. Therefore, I began my quest by asking about men whose names might also be used as a term of endearment. Were there any *Cucciolas*, my little puppy? No, not a one. What about *Patatinos*, little potato? None. *Topolinos*, a little mouse. The Italians, it must be said, have strange appellations for those they hold dear. Finally, I asked if there had been a man named *Diletto*. In English, it means *darling* and is a recognized surname. And there I had success.”

“Well done,” said Holmes.

Our visitor stopped his account briefly and lit a cigarette, a foul-smelling French *Gauloise*. Holmes joined in by lighting his pipe. I opened a window. Monsieur Dupin then continued.

“There had been a family in Viareggio named Diletto, but they no longer lived there. *La mère et le père* had died over a decade ago, and the only son had moved away. ‘How long ago,’ I asked. ‘Did anyone remember him?’ I was told to go and speak to *le grand-père* of the family who owned the best wine shop in the town. His name, of course, was ... *Luchesi*. The murderer had not bothered to disguise it. I sought him out and, *certamente*, he said, there had been a son in the Diletto family, but he had left the town many years ago, perhaps around 1844, maybe longer. Now, I knew not only in my heart but in my mind, using my powers of ratiocination, that I had my man. I resolved to find him and bring him to justice.”

The old fellow paused here to inhale from his cigarette. Holmes was about to say something when the Frenchman, as if reading his mind, spoke first.

“You are about to comment that my quest has been very long and very unsuccessful.”

“Indeed, I was,” said Holmes.

Monsieur Dupin responded by lifting his shoulders in a Gallic shrug.

“For this quest, I am not paid. I must earn *mon salaire quotidien*, and so I cannot devote my full time to it; only a month here and a month there. After I learned the name of my quarry, I began to search for him. I was not surprised to learn that he had moved to Bordeaux. This made sense. The story tells us that he was familiar with the wines of that region, and now I knew he was there at the same time as the murder I had investigated had taken place. I went to Bordeaux to look for him and learned that he had indeed lived there years ago, but then had fled. I was told that he had sailed to America.”

“A common choice,” Holmes noted. “for Europeans running from the law. The criminal class is particularly fond of New York, Boston, and Chicago.”

“Ah *oui, monsieur*. They are. But I knew not to depend on my general impressions. I sought the data I needed. In the passenger lists of the ships that sailed from Bordeaux to the New World, I found his name. He had gone to Baltimore in the fall of 1845.”

“Ah-ha. And might it have been there,” asked Holmes, “that he met a certain Mr. Poe and boasted about what he had done in Viareggio?”

“*Bien sûr*. I believe it was. Perhaps it was late one night when both of them were into their cups. *In vino veritas*. The threads of my quest were coming together. But he had not stayed long in Baltimore. He moved from there to Savannah, and so I followed his trail only to find he had journeyed south to Buenos Aires, and finally north to Montreal. He had remained in each of these cities only for a year or two. In every city, I found people who remembered him, and I heard from them *une histoire similaire* of how this man, angered by the slightest offense, was suspected of having committed murder of men, of women, and even of children, but the evidence was always no more than a mixture of circumstance and conjecture, and the man who I first knew as Signore Montresor went free.”

The elderly Frenchman paused his story. The distant look in his eyes suggested that his memory had wandered back to his travels of years ago. Holmes brought him back to his account.

“And may I assume,” said Holmes, “that you learned that he had returned to Europe.”

“*Oui, oui*, he had. I tracked him first to Porto and then to Genoa. I was certain that he felt it safe to go back to his home country. But I was wrong. By diligent investigation, I traced his steps to a house in the old section, the *Porto Antico*, but he was long gone. The people I spoke to there were not happy to

speaking about him, as many believed that he had been responsible for the death of a man whose wife had become, as the Italians say, *trop sympa*, overly friendly with Signore Diletto. For the next decade, I followed him. From Genoa, his trail led me to Oporto and from there to Glasgow. After two years in Scotland, he crossed Europe all the way to Sevastopol. I was on his heels, but he slipped one more time through my grasp. He vanished into Eastern Europe... and then the trail went cold. It remained cold for the past ten years.”

“And then,” said Holmes, “you received news that he had been seen in London.”

“*Vraiment, monsieur*. Yes, and it came from an excellent source. At first, I was happy and invigorated to begin my quest again. Even though my travels had been curtailed, my mind was consumed with this man. I had to find him and make him pay for his sins. *Alors*, I rushed across *la Manche* and came to London. But then my world broke apart around me. *Hier*, I am in my hotel, and I look in the mirror and looking back at me is a tired seventy-five-year-old man. A very tired old man. I no longer have the energy, let alone the powers of ratiocination that I had when I was young. Painfully, I came to my senses and told myself that I had no choice. I was too old to carry on this mission *par moi-même*. With sad reluctance, I admitted to myself that I would have to go and see Monsieur Sherlock Holmes and ask if he would take over from me. *Donc*, here I am. It is to you that I must, from my fading hands, entrust this quest. I implore you to take over this case and bring this monster to justice.”

He leaned back in his chair, slowly inhaled from his cigarette and fixed his gaze on Sherlock Holmes. Holmes, in return, puffed on his pipe whilst looking directly back at our visitor.

“You know me too well,” said Holmes. “You know that I cannot refuse your request.”

“It is possible, Monsieur, that I suspected as much.”

“I accept, but I must make two requests.”

“*Pas de problème*. What is it you wish?”

“You will entrust to me all of the data you have concerning this man.”

“*Bien sûr*. And the second?”

“You will remain in London for the next fortnight and shall make yourself available to assist me if necessary.”

The old man smiled. “It shall be my honor and pleasure. I am staying at the Langham. It is close to here, *n’est-ce pas?*”

For the next hour, the two of them sat at the desk and chatted as Holmes peppered C. Auguste Dupin with questions about the case and the elusive villain. After he had departed, Holmes turned to me.

“My dear Doctor, please do not be alarmed if, for the next several days, you see very little of me. I may need a week to complete this task.”

“You think you can find this man in a week?”

“Of course not. I could find him by the end of the afternoon. But to weave together a case that will bring him to justice? That will take a little longer.”

For the next several days, I saw nothing of Holmes. When I rose in the mornings, I observed evidence of his having arrived late the previous night, smoked several pipes and eaten the food that Mrs. Hudson had left out for him. It would not be the first time he had gone for days with little rest, subsisting on his zeal, but I was nonetheless worried for his health.

On Thursday of the following week, I found a note from him on the breakfast table. It ran:
If convenient, please adjust your schedule today, and meet me here at two o'clock. S.H.

I did as requested and returned to find him sitting in his customary chair, cleanly shaven and elegantly attired, puffing on his pipe.

"Ah, Watson, thank you. I knew I could count on you."

"Are you going to tell me what is about to happen?"

"Yes, we are going to meet the monster."

"Where, if you don't mind?"

"Are you familiar with a pub known as *The Grapes*?"

"Certainly, I know of it. Can't say I have ever set foot inside. In Limehouse, right? It is somewhat famous, or better said, infamous. Did not Dickens send one of his chaps there?"

"He did indeed, disguised by the name of *The Six Jolly Fellowship Porters* but accurately described as having a dropsical appearance and in a state of hale infirmity. Yes, that one."

"What of it?"

"We are going there. So, please fetch your service revolver and make yourself ready."

"Would you mind terribly telling me what is going to happen?"

"We shall have a chat with our Italian man of international business, Signore Montresor, or Signore Diletto, or whatever name he now prefers."

"If we leave now," I said, "we shall be there before three o'clock. If he is a man of business, he will not likely be relaxing in a pub before six."

"He is Italian."

He donned his hat and took his stick in one hand. With the other hand, he picked up his violin case.

"Why are you bringing that thing?" I asked.

"He is Italian."

The Grapes public house was in the farthest east part of the city, squeezed into a row of shops and cheap boarding houses in Narrow Street, a vile alley lurking behind the high wharves which line the south side of the river to the east of London Bridge. It catered to all classes of men from the Docklands. Its customers hailed from every corner of the earth and spoke in the entire cacophony of tongues that began at Babel. Except for the odd round of fisticuffs that broke out several times an evening, it was a jovial place for hard-working dockers. The lower floor opened in the front to Narrow Street and the back sat on piers directly above the Thames. Stevedores sat at the long tables on that floor, but the upper floor was reserved for those men who conducted the business of import and export from London's busy wharves.

It took almost an hour in a cab to travel across London from Baker Street to Limehouse, and I took advantage of the time to cross-question Holmes.

"Did you find out anything else about the Montresor fellow, or Diletto, or whatever his name is?"

“I did. I sent wires off to police inspectors in every city noted by Dupin. They not only confirmed that a man matching the description of Diletto had lived there at some time in the past, they seemed quite familiar with him.”

“How is that possible? Years have passed, decades.”

“The members of a police force do not tend to forget men who were suspected of committing vile murders and who got away with it. Their memories for such villains are quite remarkable.”

“How do you know he will be in this pub?” I demanded.

“Please, Watson, try to use your brain for some simple logic. What did all of the cities that Monsieur Dupin followed Diletto to have in common?”

I reviewed the list in my mind. “They were all ports. But I can think of another twenty cities—fifty if you give me a minute or two—that are also ports.”

“No doubt, you can. But what product is exported from every one Dupin visited?”

“I haven’t the foggiest. Wine from Bordeaux, of course. More wine, Italian, from Genoa. Port from Oporto.”

“What about Buenos Aires?” asked Holmes.

“Beef and wheat.”

“And excellent Malbec wines from the Mendoza region.”

“But Savannah? They don’t have wineries in Georgia, do they?”

“If they do, the wines are most likely not fit for human consumption. However, it is the primary port for the export of the American whiskey known as Bourbon. The Beam family has been distilling it, to general acclaim, for over a century.”

“Baltimore?”

“Rum.”

“Montreal? All they have there is snow,” I said, “and it does not export very well.”

“Canadian whiskey.”

“Sevastopol,” I said, “then must be the center for exporting vodka, if there is any left after the Russians have devoured most of it. And Glasgow is where the world’s Scotch is shipped from.”

“Excellent, Watson. The world trade in alcoholic beverages is highly lucrative. Our man has lived in the world’s leading ports for its export. Most of it enters a country through legitimate channels and is subject to excise tax. There is, however, a million-pound business in contraband that is smuggled into England. London is the primary market, and it enters along the wharves of the Thames, mostly at night. The Grapes public house is well-known as the hive of such activity. It is reasonable to assume that if our monster is in London, that is where he will be spending his time.”

The cab arrived in Limehouse, a part of London I had avoided since having to enter an opium den in search of Mr. Isa Whitney. The Grapes Pub was as Dickens described it: *not a straight floor, and hardly a straight line ... a narrow, lopsided wooden jumble of corpulent windows ... the whole house impended over the water*. The first floor was occupied by a scattering of stevedores who were sitting at tables, nursing their ale and chatting quietly.

“He will be upstairs,” said Holmes as he made his way to the steep, uneven steps that led to the second floor. In the open room that filled the entire floor, windows on one side gave a view of Narrow Street and a set of doors at the other end led to a small balcony perched out over the River Thames. The

forty or more men gathered in this room were clearly not dock workers. They were well dressed and sat around a cluster of tables, some sipping ale from glass mugs and others lifting smaller glasses containing various shades of alcohol. Papers and files were strewn across the tables, and pens and inkwells were at the ready. Almost all of the patrons were puffing on pipes, cigarettes, or cigars, and the smoke in the room would have been asphyxiating had it not been for the breeze blowing in from the Thames.

Holmes took a seat in an empty corner of the room and opened his violin case. Some of the men looked across at him and, assuming that the pub was providing music to make their enterprise more convivial, smiled, and nodded at him. He, somewhat theatrically, smiled back.

“Watch carefully,” he whispered to me. “Try to spot those who start to sing along.”

“What are you going to play?”

“Verdi. A tenor aria.”

He tuned up and launched into a spirited musical accompaniment to *Di quella pira* from *Il Trovatore*. Every head in the room turned and looked at him, most vigorously nodded their heads. I scanned the room, and Holmes, without missing a note, did the same. I counted six men whose lips had started to move, mouthing the words to the famous aria. These, no doubt, were Italians.

Five of the men ranged in age from their late twenties into their forties. The sixth was the only one with a full head of silver hair, and he had started to sing out loud. He was richly dressed and adorned in tastefully situated gold pieces and several diamonds. I could tell that Holmes had also identified him.

When the aria had ended, the patrons gave a light round of applause, except for the Italians, who were more high-spirited, like all Italians are. Holmes nodded a modest bow and then picked up his violin again and delivered a stirring rendition of Verdi’s *Triumphal March* from *Aida*. The older Italian chap leapt to his feet and began to keep time to the march with the pounding of his fist. When the piece ended, all of the patrons clapped vigorously, but the Italian fellow, with a beaming smile, strode over to us.

“*Miei amici, eccellente!* Who would have suspected that an Englishman could play Verdi with such passion? *Per favore*, allow me to buy for you a drink.”

“Sir,” said Holmes, “you are too kind. The honor is mine to find a man who knows and appreciates the beauty of the great operas from your home country. So, please, I insist, allow me to offer a libation that we may share and raise a toast to Giuseppe Verdi.”

Holmes called for the waiter to bring three small glasses, and then, from his suit jacket, he withdrew a pocket flask.

“For such an occasion, let us share one of the finest products of the British Isles. I expect that a man of your distinct and cultivated taste will recognize this select brand of the water of life.”

He poured three glasses and handed one to me and one to our newly acquired comrade.

The Italian raised the glass first above his eyes and looked at it, then he brought it to his nose and gave several sniffs.

“An Islay Scotch, and quite a peaty one,” he said.

“Ah, a connoisseur,” said Holmes. “I would not have guessed that you had been to Scotland.”

“I lived in Glasgow long enough to admire the Scots for their whiskey and despise them for their food.”

“A most understandable reaction. And your verdict on the taste?”

The three of us raised the glasses to our lips and took a first sip. As far as I was concerned the concoction, whatever it was, was of sufficient strength to tar a boat. However, the Italian’s eyes went wide. He lowered his glass and gasped.

“*Mio Dio*, this is a Lagavulin 37! *Che bello*, where did you get this? A bottle of this Scotch sells for over four hundred pounds in Mayfair.”

“Perhaps even more in Rome?” said Holmes.

“*Certo*, in Rome, I could sell a bottle of Lagavulin 37 for five hundred pounds. Maybe more.”

“That is what I had heard,” said Holmes. “Someone told me that the highest prices paid for the world’s finest Scotch could be found in Rome. And I must confess that I came here today with the hope that I might find an experienced Italian buyer for my shipment. I am also a musician and a lover of opera. I knew if I played Verdi in a room full of importers and exporters of fine spirits, a man with Italian blood in his veins might come forward. I hope, Sir, you will forgive my unorthodox means of finding you.”

The man ignored Holmes’s obsequious apology and appeared to be stunned.

“Did you say,” he said, “that you have an entire shipment of Lagavulin 37 and are looking for a buyer?”

“Oh, yes, I did. Perhaps you can recommend one. I fear I am somewhat of a neophyte in this line of business.”

“*Quanto grande*, how big is this shipment of yours?”

“Oh, not terribly. I hope to have larger ones in the future. There are eight barrels of twenty gallons each.”

I could sense the Italian doing the arithmetic in his head.

“*Certe?* Eight barrels of twenty gallons? This would fill almost one thousand bottles. How is it you, who say you do not know this business, are in possession of such a shipment of the most expensive whiskey in Europe?”

Holmes somewhat arrogantly lit a cigarette and blew a long stream of smoke toward the ceiling.

“There are some questions, my friend, that it is best not to ask.” He followed his answer with a forced, smug smile. In return, a sly smile appeared on the Italian’s face.

“*D'accordo*, and you wish for me to help you find a buyer? There is a very big risk involved. If Scotland Yard were to learn of such a transaction, a severe penalty would be imposed.”

“You are quite correct, Signore. And for that reason, I would be willing to accept a purchase price well below the going rate. As a man of experience in these matters, what do you advise me? What would be a fair price to ask?”

“Considering the risk, I would say ten thousand pounds would be reasonable.”

Holmes laughed. “Surely, you jest. Once all the whiskey is bottled, it will sell for over four hundred thousand pounds in Rome. You may as well ask me to give it away.”

The Italian forced a smile in return. “Ah, signore. It is a well-known rule that if you offer two pounds and it is accepted, you will never know if you could have bought it for one. Very well, then, fifty thousand.”

“You are moving in the right direction,” said Holmes.

“Seventy-five thousand. And as I would be the buyer, let me assure you that it is my final offer. You will have to wait a very long time to find a better one.”

Holmes turned to me and, with a solemn face, asked, “What do you think, my friend? Should we settle for seventy-five?”

I had a sense of the answer Holmes wanted from me, so I leaned down, picked up his violin, and handed it to him.

“Good whiskey only gets better as it gets older,” I said. “Try playing a polka. Perhaps the Poles are not likely as parsimonious as the Italians.”

The hot glare I received from the Italian was enough to burn a hole through my head. It was all I could do to keep a straight face.

“*That* will not be necessary,” he said. “I will pay one hundred thousand, but you must wait for two days for me to arrange the funds, and I must be able to inspect the goods before making payment. Unlike you, I know this business very well, and I can assure you that no one is in a position to make you a better offer, certainly not a Pole.”

Holmes looked over at me, and both of us exchanged meaningless facial expressions and shrugs. Finally, I nodded once, and Holmes nodded twice.

“One hundred thousand it is, then,” said Holmes. “The shipment is being stored close to the Thames and may be conveniently transferred to a small vessel. Permit me to suggest that we agree to meet on Friday at six o’clock in the evening at the entrance to Southwark Cathedral. You shall come alone, as shall we. I will escort you to the barrels. You may examine them at your leisure and then, both sides being satisfied, an exchange shall be made. Is that agreeable to you, Signore?”

“For someone new to this business, you seem much too clever. But I know every man in London who traces in select spirits, and I do not know you. Who are you?”

“What little I know about this trade,” said Holmes, “suggests that I refer to myself as Mr. Smith.”

The Italian gave Holmes a sideways look. “You know much more than you are letting on. However, I am pleased to meet you, Mr. Smith. You may call me Mr. Jones. As we appear to be cut from the same cloth, permit me to say that I look forward to working with you to our mutual benefit in the future.”

Once Holmes and I were out on the pavement of Narrow Street, I demanded an explanation.

“Holmes, you do not own eight barrels of absurdly expensive whiskey. What are you doing?”

“But I do own them.”

“Where did you get them?”

“I stole them fair and square out of the Lagavulin warehouse at Butler’s Wharf.”

“Have you gone mad?”

“Not at all, my dear Watson. I had the generous assistance of Scotland Yard and the manager of the warehouse. A report of the theft will appear in tomorrow’s press.”

“But where did you put them?”

“In a cool, dark place in a structure adjacent to the Southwark Cathedral.”

“The only structure adjacent to that cathedral is London Bridge.”

“Precisely.”

A note from Holmes requested me to join him at 221B on Friday afternoon and to bring along my service revolver. I suspected that he assumed the Italian would be armed and wondered how he imagined pistols drawn and shots exchanged would be possible in broad daylight on the steps of Southwark Cathedral or the open expanse of London Bridge. No doubt Holmes had an answer, so, at four o’clock that afternoon, I appeared in 221B. Holmes was waiting for me in the front room and, to my surprise, so was Monsieur Dupin. Holmes responded to the questioning look on my face.

“The esteemed Chevalier Auguste Dupin has visited me twice in the past two days to provide additional data and insights. He was adamant that he come with us this evening. As our apprehending this criminal will be the final resolution to his quest of three decades, I could not refuse.”

“But,” I said, “you told Diletto that we would come alone.”

“*Pas de problème,*” said Dupin. “I shall follow only at a distance and shall not be seen, *pas de tout*. But the satisfaction it will bring to *mon âme*, my soul, will be beyond measure. I will be able to die a happy man.”

I mumbled my agreement, but still, it seemed out of keeping with the methods Holmes had used in the past. Nevertheless, as he thought it appropriate, I went along.

Holmes then handed me a thick, wool cardigan and a muffler. “My dear Doctor, you will need these.”

“What in heaven’s name for? It is a lovely fall afternoon.”

“Ah, but where we are going will be damp and chilly.”

“Does Diletto know that?”

“Of course not. And make sure that you do not imbibe beyond one ounce of Lagavulin.”

The cab took us from Baker Street, past Portman Square and Cavendish Gardens, down through the West End and across Waterloo Bridge. When we reached the Borough Market, the cab stopped, and Monsieur Dupin descended.

“*Jusqu’à la bataille,*” he said, giving us a salute.

We continued to the entrance to Southwark Cathedral. Our arrival was punctual to the minute, but there was no one there to meet us. Holmes nonchalantly put the satchel he had brought with him down on the steps, took out his cigarette case, and commenced a leisurely enjoyment of tobacco. Ten minutes passed.

“Holmes, he’s not coming,” I said.

“He will be here.”

“What sort of businessman comes late to a meeting where one hundred thousand pounds is to be exchanged?”

“An Italian.”

It was twenty minutes past six when a private carriage appeared bearing Signore Diletto. He stepped out and looked around. Seeing only Holmes and me, he walked over to us.

“You have brought your payment?” asked Holmes.

He patted his suitcoat pocket. “*Certe*, and I am sure you have the barrels of Lagavulin. I did not expect to see them on the steps of the Cathedral, and unless you are more sacrilegious than even I am, I do not expect that you are hiding a fortune in whiskey behind the altar.”

“An astute deduction,” said Holmes. “I required a place that was not only secretive and secure but had convenient access to the River Thames. It will be the site of all future transactions. I will take you there now. But before we go, I would consider it appropriate if we were to raise a glass to the success of our venture and to the future of a mutually beneficial partnership. Will you join me, Mr. Jones?”

From his satchel, Holmes drew out a hip flask and an engraved metal case of the size and shape one might receive from a jeweler when purchasing a heavy bracelet. He opened it and held it out to our latest commercial associate. In it were three crystal shot glasses. Each of us took one, and with his flair for theatricality, Holmes filled them with the precious amber liquid and raised his glass to Signore Diletto. He raised his to Holmes’s, clinked against it, and tossed the strong, peaty Scotch back in one gulp. Remembering Holmes’s caution, I took only a sip and surreptitiously disposed of the remainder behind my back.

“Now, please,” said Holmes, “come with me.”

Diletto and I followed Holmes across the Borough High Street to the east side of London Bridge and descended a long, narrow flight of stone steps until we were at the base of the massive first pillar of the bridge, just a few feet from the edge of the river. In the wall of the pillar was a small wood and iron door with a rounded top. Holmes inserted a key into the keyhole and, making a bit of a show of jiggling it, undid the lock and opened the door.

“Welcome, Signore, to the catacombs of London Bridge, relics of the old London Bridge and used for several centuries, as were the great catacombs of Paris and Rome, to keep the bones of those who had been previously buried in paupers’ graves.”

I was not aware of these subterranean passages but, as I have noted in other accounts of the adventures of Sherlock Holmes, his knowledge of every conceivable nook and cranny of London was encyclopedic.

“At the time,” he continued, “of the construction of the New London Bridge, fifty years ago, the bones were removed and the catacombs closed off. They are now being used by the fraternity of gentlemen who are engaged in the confidential, trans-national exchange of select products. I am a proud if recent member of this company of adventurers.”

We stepped inside the dark passage; the only light being provided by the open door. Again, Holmes reached into his satchel and extracted three hessian and paraffin torches. Holmes lit them one at a time and handed them around.

He started to walk toward a stairwell but stopped and turned to the Italian.

“Signore, forgive me for not asking. I trust you do not object to entering a place that was once used to house the dead.”

“*Niente*, it is not the first time I have entered a catacomb. In Italy, we have such places all over the country.”

“Oh, that is splendid, but then you must forgive me for I am not at all used to it and find this place rather, shall we say, haunted. I have made it a habit to give myself a small dose of liquid courage

before entering. Even if you are not fearful in the least, Signore, you might wish to join me. Your glass is in your pocket, is it not?"

Holmes had taken out the flask again and proceeded to pour each of us another glass.

"Ah," said Holmes after appearing to drink another ounce or two of the famous Scotch, "it warms the cockles of your heart, does it not?"

I muttered my enthusiastic agreement, and we continued into the ever damper and chillier depths of the bridge's foundations. I began to be glad of the cardigan and muffler that Holmes had provided. In the uneven light from the torches, I observed our accomplice. I could see that he was starting to feel the cold and had hunched his shoulders and drawn his elbows into his sides.

We had descended to a depth that I estimated must be a full fifty feet below ground level. Once there, we began to walk along an ancient bricked tunnel.

Holmes stopped and put his hand against the wall.

"Signore, are your lungs affected by nitre? I fear these tunnels are full of it."

"Every man's lungs are afflicted by nitre," he said. "Of course, mine are. Why did you not warn me in advance to take precautions?"

"I took the necessary precautions for all of us," said Holmes. "Here, this handkerchief has been soaked in camphor, just breathe through it, and the nitre will be neutralized."

The Italian took a handkerchief, as did I. I could not detect any trace of camphor, but he doubled over with a round of coughing after his first breath.

"Oh, dear me," said Holmes. "Perhaps you should wave it around for a few seconds to dilute the scent. Here, let me do it for you."

He took the cloth back, waved it vigorously, and returned it. It did not cause any more coughing spells.

"How much further?" demanded the Italian.

"Just up ahead," said Holmes, "do you observe rows of steamer trunks?"

The torchlight had made visible a long row of wooden cases and steamer trunks on each side of the tunnel.

"You cannot store whiskey in those."

"Quite so, but as I am only a junior member of the select company who make use of this location, I am obliged to store my goods at the end of the line. As my seniority level advances, I shall be able to come closer to the front."

"I have been importing and exporting contraband through London for almost a year," said Diletto. "Why have I never known of this place? It is ideal for receiving and shipping product from the Thames."

"It is a closely guarded secret," said Holmes. "And forgive me as no offense is intended, but the English gentlemen who use this facility are not inclined to share their secret with an Italian. If they were to learn that I had brought you here, there would be the devil to pay."

We must have passed forty trunks and cases before coming to a wheeled cart on which rested eight oaken barrels. Each one bore the markings of the Lagavulin Distillery in Islay, Scotland. Two coils of rope sat on top of them.

"Your products, Signore," said Holmes. "May I invite you to inspect?"

“What is the rope for?”

“The cart will take the barrels to the foot of the steps. After that, we have to move them up to the surface. The easiest way to do so is to use the ropes to form slings and share the load. My colleague, Mr. Johnson, and I will assist you in moving them.”

“That is very considerate of you, Sir. I believe that I shall enjoy doing business with you.”

“I am of the same opinion. Allow me to suggest that whilst you inspect the product, I shall inspect the payment. Is that agreeable to you, Signore? I have inserted spigots into each of the barrels for your convenience.”

“In the future, Mr. Smith, I am sure such an inspection will not be necessary as we are both honorable men. However, as this is our first transaction, I find myself agreeing with you.”

Diletto took a bulky envelope from his pocket and laid it on top of the barrel. He then removed his shot glass from his pocket, knelt down, and held it up to the spigot of the first barrel. Holmes gave me a signal by quickly twisting his wrist, and I took out my revolver and, grasping it by the barrel, gave a well-placed hard whack to the base of the occipital bone of our victim’s skull. He crumbled into a ball on the damp, dirt floor.

“Well done, Watson. Now, would you be so kind as to help me drag the poor chap over to that wooden pillar, grab the ropes, and bind his feet together and his hands behind it?”

We took an arm each and began to move the unconscious body. As we were doing so, Holmes lifted his head and shouted.

“Halloa! Monsieur Dupin! Time for you to take over!”

Like a ghost emerging from a tomb, the famous French detective appeared out of the darkness.

On seeing Signore Diletto propped up against the pillar, he clasped his hands together. “*Merveilleux*. After all these years, Monsieur Holmes, you have brought joy to the heart of an old man. I do not know how to thank you.”

“You may begin by assuring me that you are certain that this is the murderer you have sought for all those years.”

“If you will wait until he comes back to his senses, I shall prove it to you. Your torch, please, *mon cher docteur*.”

Holmes extinguished his torch, and the two of us retreated into the darkness of the tunnel. The old Frenchman pulled a steamer trunk up in front of the feet of the bound man. He sat down on it, holding the torch in his hand.

It took a full ten minutes for signs of consciousness to reappear. Perhaps, I should not have hit him so hard. But by the twelve-minute mark, his eyes had opened, and the look of fear and shock was all over his face.

“Bonjour, Signore Diletto,” said Dupin. “Welcome to your eternal punishment.”

Diletto squinted into the light. Dupin held the torch closer so that his face was illuminated.

“Do you not know who I am, Signore? No? Of course not, you have never seen me. But you have heard, have you not, of Chevalier Auguste Dupin?”

“You!?”

“*Oui, c’est moi*. For thirty years, I have followed you and your trail of murder and theft and corruption. For thirty years, you have escaped my clutches.”

“*Certe*, I did. Because you are a bumbling *rana*, a Froggie. You had thirty years of failure. It was easy to move on and open a new territory.”

“Ah, *mon cher poseur*. You are a very poor gambler. You could escape me a thousand times. I only had to catch you once. And now I have.”

“Don’t be *stupido*. I am Italian; you are French. We are in England. You have no authority. You cannot touch me here. Now untie me before I have you arrested.”

“*Oui, c’est dommage*. It would never do to have me arrested. Therefore, I shall have to proceed without a trial or an arrest. I shall have to serve *moi même* as the prosecutor, judge, and jury.”

“What do you mean? Untie me now. Where are those two English toffs? SMITH! JOHNSON! Get back here and get this crazy Frenchie off of me.”

“I am afraid Signore Diletto that they will not hear you. Or if they do, they will not reply. They have been my assistants in bringing you to your punishment.”

“And just what are you going to do to me? What punishment can you inflict? You do anything, and my associates will come after you.”

“I fear, Signore that they do not know where you are.”

“Well, someone will be here soon. There are scores of trunks and cases in here. Those who are transferring them will be along, probably within the hour. Now, let me go.”

“Ah, *mon cher voleur*. You must stop and think. You have been in the business of contraband for many years, and yet you never heard a whisper of this secret place. Perhaps if you had used your powers of ratiocination instead of your greed for a quick profit, you would have deduced that there was a reason you knew nothing. No? Allow me to tell you. This place is nothing more than a damp, miserable catacomb and a small labyrinth of tunnels. These cases and trunks? Look.”

Dupin stood up and, with only his thumb and forefinger, lifted the steamer trunk in the air.

“*Voilà!* They are all empty. Obtained from the unclaimed baggage service of the P and O Steamship Lines in the Docklands after their contents were auctioned off. We brought here so that you might be deceived and fall into my trap. No, Signore, no one will come here. Perhaps not for years.”

“You cannot just leave me here. What sort of devil are you?”

“Merely the same as you are. Do you recall what you did to Signore Benedictus in Viareggio? Your fate will be the same. Shall I explain what will happen to you? I will try to be concise. You will struggle against the ropes. But they are strong, and you are securely bound. All you will accomplish is to chafe the skin off your wrists. Sometime in the next few hours, your bladder and bowels will empty themselves no matter how hard you try to restrain them, and you will spend the remainder of your life sitting in your filth. It is cold here, and you are lightly dressed. Already you are beginning to shiver. Your body will draw blood away from your fingers and toes, and then your arms and legs in a vain attempt to protect your organs. But eventually, they will become chilled and will slowly shut down. Your brain will be the last, which is good. You will be conscious and know that you are dying until almost the end.”

In the glow of the light from the torch, I could see Diletto thrashing his arms and kicking his legs. It was to no avail. He was no longer a young man, and soon, he had exhausted himself.

“You *bastardo*,” he said to Dupin. “I will escape, and I will come after you and kill you.”

“No, you will not. Of course, you may be fortunate and not succumb so quickly to the cold as I might have hoped. But you have no water to drink. Have you ever gone a full day without anything to drink? No? Let me tell you what happens. Your mouth becomes dry, and your body screams for water. Again, your body tries to protect itself by drawing moisture away from your skin so that it shrivels. But soon there is no more liquid to draw, and the blood to the brain thickens and slows. You become delusional. You are not only dying, you are going mad. It will take about four days, maybe five. But then you will die of thirst. You will die in madness and misery.”

“NO! You cannot do that! SMITH! JOHNSON! Wherever you are. Take this monster off of me!”

Neither Holmes nor I responded.

“HELP!” He began to scream this word over and over. The only response was an echo reverberating off the walls of the tunnels.

“*Au revoir* Signore Diletto. I assure you that not only will no one come to rescue you, no priest will be present to hear your final confession and give you your rites. Immediately after you die, your soul will wake up in hell, and you look into the face of Satan. He will be the keeper of your tormented being for at least a thousand years.”

Dupin stood, turned his back to Diletto, and walked slowly toward the shadows which Holmes and I were concealed.

“*C’est fini*,” he whispered as he passed us. We stood and followed him. Behind us, Diletto was shrieking and screaming. He was calling for Holmes and me to help him, and he was bellowing every known oath and blasphemy at Dupin in Italian, French, and English.

I was profoundly confused. Even if the man were a vile criminal, we could not possibly just leave him there to die in horror and agony. Surely Holmes and Dupin had some sort of plan to release him and bring him to justice.

A few minutes later, we had returned from the London Bridge catacombs and were seated in a nearby pub, sipping on snifters of brandy.

“I have the names,” said Holmes, “of the widows and children of the men that Diletto is suspected of having murdered. The money paid for the barrels of whiskey will be divided and sent to them.”

“A wise and enlightened decision,” said Dupin. “I have only the names of the families in Bordeaux who were so affected. Thank you for obtaining the others.”

Here he stopped and took a sip of his brandy before returning to the topic that appeared to be consuming him.

“And you must forgive me if I cannot help thinking about the appropriate end to which that miserable criminal will now come.”

Chevalier C. Auguste Dupin was smiling and rubbing his hands together in unmitigated glee.

“*Magnifique, absolument magnifique*. Oh, Monsieur Holmes, you thought of everything. The irony of having him die in the same manner as Signore Benedictus so many years ago—in agony and terror—is more than I could ask or imagine. Tricking him with the empty cases and steamer trunks was a stroke of genius.”

“It was all nothing more than the application of reason and logic,” said Holmes.

“Ah, you are too modest, Monsieur Holmes. It was brilliant. And you must tell me, what was your trick with the handkerchief?”

Holmes replied with a shrug of modesty. “A mere sleight of hand. The one I handed him had been treated not only with camphor but also with chloroform. When I waved it in the air, I exchanged it for one less scented. Having inhaled the stronger one, he was more likely to use the weaker one repeatedly. The chloroform simply dulled his mental capacities.”

“And how long do you expect it will take until he dies. Two days at the very least? Five days would be wonderful.”

“Four would be most likely,” said Holmes

Here, I had to voice my horrified objection.

“Enough! What has come over the two of you? You cannot possibly be sitting here planning to let any man, even the most abject criminal, die in such a manner.”

“*Pourquoi pas?* It is how the man in Viareggio died. It is entirely fitting that he should suffer the same fate.”

I glared in disbelief at this famous French detective and then at Sherlock Holmes.

“Holmes! You simply cannot be part of any such act. It is vile and evil and utterly against English law.” I had, involuntarily, raised my voice, and was now shouting at him. “If you do not go to Scotland Yard this minute and report what happened, I will!”

“My dear Doctor,” said Holmes. “Five days is all we ask. By then he will be dead and, according to our good Catholic gentleman here, burning in hell. What are a few days between friends?”

I was apoplectic with rage. I leapt to my feet, sending my chair crashing to the floor behind me. I was about to turn when I felt the firm grip of Holmes’s hand on my forearm. He was looking up at me, his face hidden from Dupin. I caught a hint of a twinkle in his eye, and he gave me a quick wink.

“Watson, do restrain yourself. Please, allow me one more minute.”

I sat down tentatively. It had dawned on me that he had something up his sleeve.

“I suppose...yes...I suppose that you are right, Doctor,” he said. “I will inform Lestrade, and he will send his men to rescue the villain by this time tomorrow. He will still be very much alive at that time.”

“What!? *Impossible!*” exploded Dupin. “No, you cannot. He must suffer. He must suffer terribly and then wake up in hell. If he is taken by the English police, there is nothing with which he can be charged and convicted. He will go free. No, that is not possible. I will not stand for it.”

“He will be charged,” said Holmes, “with being in possession of stolen goods with the intent to evade customs and excise. It is an offense punishable by up to seven years in prison. I left a bill of sale made out to him on the barrels. He will not walk free. Given his age, I expect he will die before he is allowed to leave Wandsworth.”

Dupin was shaking with anger. “*Pas possible.* How can they arrest a man who is tied up?”

“I assure you, Chevalier, I have taken care of that small detail. Lestrade will send one of his men in ahead to untie the fellow and then vanish into the darkness. A moment later, Lestrade will apprehend him whilst standing beside his stolen barrels of whiskey.”

Dupin was silent for a minute and then, as if accepting the inevitable, sighed.

“You appear, Monsieur Holmes, to have indeed thought of everything. I must congratulate you, although I would have wished for a more suitable punishment, a more satisfying *acte finale* to my quest.”

“Would you? Why?”

“Why? You are asking me *pourquoi*? Because the man is a monster. He deserves it.”

“Over the past decades of your illustrious career, you have encountered many evil men, some of whom have been every bit as malicious and depraved as this one. Some of them are still at large. Why has this particular man consumed your entire being for so long?”

Dupin gave a Gallic shrug. “Who can say? Some criminals get under a detective’s skin. This one got under mine.”

Holmes paused and then spoke softly to the Chevalier. “Would it have anything to do with Bordeaux?”

Dupin said nothing and stared at Holmes. Then he leaned back in his chair and slowly lit a cigarette and inhaled and exhaled several times before replying.

“You are a very good detective, Monsieur Holmes. You are asking me a question to which you already know the answer.”

“The answer, I suspect, is that the young father he was suspected of murdering in Bordeaux was named Dupin.”

“*C’est vrai*, Monsieur Sherlock Holmes. That man was my brother. He died in agony. My dear sister-in-law and my nephew and niece lost their father. I vowed to wreak revenge on Diletto for what he did to them.”

“Revenge, you say? Ah yes, *rache, revanche*. A tormentor of men’s souls in every corner of the globe. And now you have achieved your revenge. Very well, tell me. In truth, is revenge a dish best served cold?”

Chevalier C. Auguste Dupin did not immediately answer. He took a slow sip of his brandy and several more puffs on his *Gauloise*.

“No, *mon semblable, mon frère*, it is not. It is a dish best not partaken of at all.”

Author’s Notes:

This story is a tribute to *The Cask of Amontillado*, considered by critics to be one of Poe’s masterpieces. It incorporates numerous details from the original story.

The Cask of Amontillado was published in 1846. *The Mystery of Marie Rogêt* was published in 1842, and the notes to that story tell us that “several years” have passed since “the tragedy upon which the tale is based.” C. Auguste Dupin is described as “a young gentleman” in *The Murders in the Rue Morgue*, published in 1841. Therefore, his age when he came to London to meet Sherlock Holmes in 1885 would have been close to seventy-five, and the murder that took place in the story of *The Cask of Amontillado* must have occurred at least forty years previously. It is quite reasonable to assume that the claim by Montresor at the end of that story that his murder of Fortunado happened “half of a century” ago is false and added on to the end of the story only to fool the reader and divert any efforts to find Montresor and bring him to justice.

Sherlockians generally agree that Holmes and Watson met in 1881 and, in 1884, Watson was still living in 221 B Baker Street, prior to his marriage to Mary Morstan.

As explained by Monsieur Dupin in this story, it is reasonable to conclude that the murder of Signore Fortunado took place in Viareggio.

Amontillado is exported through Malaga and Medoc, and the DeGrève wines are both from Bordeaux.

The names and places mentioned in London are accurate. Several catacombs are located under London. One of the more famous is under the south entrance to London Bridge. It is a popular tourist attraction to this day.

The Grapes pub is still in operation on Narrow Street in Limehouse. It has been there for more than two centuries and has been identified as the pub, *The Six Jolly Fellowship Porters*, described by Dickens's in *Our Mutual Friend*.

The Lagavulin Distillery on the island of Islay began creating its distinctive peaty Islay Scotch in the 1830s and has been recognized since then as one of the great whiskeys of the world. Lagavulin 37 currently retails for around £3500 a bottle. There is, however, no record of its being offered in 1885.

Smuggling, opium dens, and other criminal activities were popular along the Limehouse stretch of the River Thames in the late-Victorian era, as recorded by Dr. Watson in his account of *The Man with the Twisted Lip*.

All Italians love Verdi.

The Fear of Retribution

A sequel to The Valley of Fear



“I WAS UNDER THE IMPRESSION THAT YOU WERE DEAD,” said Sherlock Holmes to the man who had entered the front room of 221B Baker Street. “I am now inclined to think that you were not murdered after all.”

The gentleman was of the same age as Holmes and me but sported a full beard, gray-on-its-way-to-white hair, and a short suit jacket that immediately identified him as an American. He grinned and gave his fingers a snap.

“Well by Gar and darn. Sure, and you just cost me five dollars, Mr. Holmes. I had a bet with my wife that it would take you at least ten minutes to figure who I was. She said I was a goner the minute I stepped into this room. I reckon she was right.”

“Your eyes,” said Holmes, “and your teeth have not changed. As your wife appears to be waiting in your carriage, may I suggest you invite her to join us.”

“Sure, and I will, Mr. Holmes. Why don’t you just wait a minute and I’ll fetch her.”

He turned and descended the stairs.

“Who is he?” I asked Holmes. In response, he handed me the fellow’s card. It bore the imprimatur of the government of the United States of America and the name:

Lawrence Carmichael III
Agent for Special Assignments
Department of the Treasury

“With some effort,” said Holmes, “you should be able to think back fifteen years. I expect that you will recognize his wife, and do not be misled by his veneer of American vulgarity.”

A few seconds later, a couple entered the room. The gentleman was preceded by a woman who was easily twenty years younger than he, and truly, a Beauty. Both of them were dressed smartly in an American style and looked the picture of health and well-being.

“Why, Mrs. Ivy Douglas,” I sputtered. “And, yes, you must be John Douglas?”

“I was once upon a time,” the fellow replied. “For reasons that I am sure you can understand, I have assumed yet another *nom-de-plume*. Allow me to present my wife.”

The woman stepped forward and held out her hand first to Holmes and then to me. As she did, she cast a glance back to her husband.

“And who am I this time, darling? Oh yes, I am Mrs. Barbara Carmichael and delighted to renew my acquaintance with Mr. Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson.”

She smiled radiantly one of those smiles that compels a man to smile in return.

“We are quite delighted,” said Holmes, “to see that your husband has returned from the dead. Please, take a seat. You have a bit of explaining to do before we go any farther.”

The elegant couple took a seat on the sofa, and the man gave a nod to his wife.

“Why don’t you start, honey. You were the last one of us to be in touch with Mr. Holmes.”

“I suppose I was. Well, Mr. Holmes, do you recall that a few years back, I sent a cable to Cecil Barker which, I assume, he passed on to you?”

“Yes, madam,” said Holmes. “I do recall.”

“In it, I reported that Jack had been washed overboard just off St. Helena. I knew that you would conclude that he had been murdered in revenge for his destroying the Scrowers. Was I right, Mr. Holmes?”

“You were, madam.”

“I confess that it was a ruse. We had learned that there was a spy on board who was part of the web of your nasty professor, Moriarty. We also learned that agents were waiting for Jack ... or, I should say, Larry, ... in Cape Town, our next port of call. We came up with a crazy plan, and my husband was indeed washed overboard. You best take it from there, darling,” she said, turning to her husband.

“Well, you know, we really weren’t all that far off St. Helena—less than a mile. And it wasn’t really a gale, just a good stiff breeze. And the South Atlantic is not all that cold. And since I had been on the college swimming team, we decided that I would take a plunge and swim for the shore. So, I stripped to my underwear, tucked a set of clothes and shoes and some waterproofed money in a canvas sack and swam for the beach. Three days after crawling out of the waves, I took the first boat to the coast of Africa.”

“And I,” continued his wife, “acted quite hysterical and demanded no end of searches of the ship to prove that he was not hiding. As he was not found, I disembarked in Cape Town, filed all the necessary papers related to his death and, two weeks later, made my way up to Luanda in Angola, where we met. Three months later, we were back in Chicago.”

“I reported,” said the fellow who I shall now refer to as Mr. Carmichael, “into the Pinkerton offices and, by golly, weren’t they surprised to see me. I explained everything that had happened, and we agreed that I could continue to work for them, but I could not do so as Jack McMurdo, or as Birdy Edwards, or as John Douglas. I was given a new identity as the scion of a real fine family from Richmond, Virginia, and my lovely wife became Mrs. Carmichael. We had some good assignments that took us all over the world, mainly in the interest of Uncle Sam. I did my part in the problems we had in the Haymarket. And then, a couple of years ago, the government of the United States of America passed an act saying that no Pinkertons could work directly for any branch of Washington. So, I kept my vocation but took a promotion. I moved up from being a private detective to being an employee of the government.”

“Such a move,” said Holmes, “is not considered by some of us to be a promotion, but if you say so. Pray continue. How do you account for your presence in front of me on this summer morning in August of 1897?”

“Forgive me for setting conviviality aside, Mr. Holmes, for I am here on a deadly serious mission. I am sure you know that the British Empire had a bit of a dust-up with the folks in Venezuela starting a couple of years ago.”

Of course, Holmes and I knew about it. It had been all over the Press during the past two years. Significant deposits of gold had been discovered in our colony, British Guiana, but the region’s vague boundaries were disputed by neighboring Venezuela. They claimed that the former Spanish colony owned some two-thirds of Britain’s territory, all the way to the Esquibo River, including all the gold deposits. The Empire was having none of that, and we were prepared to send in the Fleet. The arrogant Americans intervened, impudently claiming rights under their self-proclaimed Monroe Doctrine and even threatened “war if necessary” with Great Britain. They demanded that a tribunal be set up to settle the matter. Lord Salisbury was annoyed but, being a sensible conservative, had acquiesced. The representatives were appointed, and the deliberations were to begin in the near future.

“We do read the papers, sir,” said Holmes. “Keep going.”

“Sad as it is to admit, Mr. Holmes, there are some parties in this world who do not wish to see a peaceful settlement and would be much happier if a thorough-going war broke out. And if it were to spread to other countries, well then, those fellows could not be happier.”

“Good heavens,” I interjected, “who in their right mind would wish war instead of peace?”

“Well, Doc, it’s like this. Every captain of industry knows that in chaos there is profit. And the greatest chaos of all is a good war. Armies and navies have to be supplied with guns and ammunition, and uniforms and blankets, and wagons and carriages, and horses and feed, and the list goes on. Whoever signs the right contracts ends up with a fortune. Doesn’t matter a hoot who’s fighting or who’s winning. The man who is procuring and selling the goods is making money.”

“And would I be correct,” said Holmes, “in concluding that your government has received intelligence that certain parties are intent on destroying the work of the resolution council? So much so that war could break out involving Great Britain, Venezuela, and even the United States?”

“That’s good thinking, Mr. Holmes. If it got real bad, then Uncle Sam would have to get involved, and maybe Spain would get drug into the mess too. And that means it could get real profitable. So, we would not be surprised if some *ombroy* thinks it’s a good idea to shoot one of your Brits and blame it on the Spaniards, or shoot a Venezuelan judge and blame it on the Brits. Or shoot one of our American boys and blame it on whoever was standing closest.”

“Surely,” said Holmes, “all countries involved have provided protection for your judges. The panel is as blue-blooded as one can imagine.”

“Oh, they have protection, all right. But there’s a chink in the armor. Starting in three days, the panel of Brits is hearing from any British party that has a financial interest in the gold mines. The more data they have about how long your chaps have been in the disputed area and how much they’ve invested, the stronger they think their claim might be. They’ve even offered up to one hundred pounds to those who can show that they have had longstanding interests in the disputed territory. There’s forty fellows signed up to make their pitch. Some are representing themselves, some their long-lost uncle who went off to Guiana, and some an English mining firm. But any one of them could be a loose cannon who might either shoot someone or get shot himself. You see what I mean?”

“And you,” said Holmes, “wish to engage my services to help make sure that such an untoward event does not take place. Is that correct?”

“Close, but it’s not *me*, it’s the government of the United States of America that wants you. Their check will be backed by Yankee dollars. Can’t get any better than that, now can you? We are prepared to pay for brains. It’s the American business principle. So, what do you say, Mr. Holmes? Can we count on your help?”

Holmes paused before responding. I knew that he was not overly enamored with either the American government or this particular client, but the prospect of making a contribution to the preservation of world peace was important work, and not something to sneeze at.

“Very well, I accept,” said Holmes. “Kindly furnish me with such documents and data as you have, and I shall undertake to do whatever I can to identify potential threats to the process.”

“Well now, that’s real good, Mr. Holmes. You can start right away.”

From his suit pocket jacket, Carmichael took out a folded set of papers and handed them to Holmes.

“Here we’ve got the names and addresses and what-not of everyone we know so far who’s going to be showing up. Top page is all the blue-bloods. Second and beyond are all those who have registered saying that they have some kind of interest in the affair.”

Holmes gave the pages a cursory glance and passed them over to me. The bluebloods, as Carmichael had called them, were a very impressive bunch, up to and including the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of the United States. I then gave a quick glance to the names of those who claimed to have a stake in the matter.

“Oh,” I said. “I know this fellow. Gerald Mahoney. He lives just up in St. John’s Wood on Circus Road. I see him at Lord’s every so often.”

“Excellent, Watson,” said Holmes. “Do you have any useful information about him to impart?”

“A decent fellow as far as I know, even for an Irishman. Met him a few months back. It makes sense that he’s on this list. I do remember him saying that he had spent some time in South America and in the States. No family that he’s ever mentioned. Not at all sure what he does here in London, but he does not seem to be short of funds. He looks as Irish as the day is long. Beyond that, I cannot say anything more.”

“Well now,” said Carmichael, “that doesn’t seem like the type of man to be causing trouble. But I’ll make a note of him.”

“Any others, Doctor?” asked Holmes.

I gave the list another look-over. “I recognize a few names from the Press, but none I know personally. No, I am afraid that’s it.”

We chatted on about the list and the concerns of Holmes’s newly-acquired client.

“We are gathering, Mr. Holmes,” he said, “on Tuesday evening at the Northumberland Hotel to commission the Council and its members. The Prince of Wales and the Prime Minister will attend briefly. Those who have registered a claim or interest in the matter have also been invited. One or more of them could be scoundrels up to no good. I am hoping that you will use your famous powers of observation and deduction to identify them before they do any damage to the cause.”

“I shall see you at the Northumberland,” said Holmes.

Three days later, Holmes and I entered the hotel. Readers of the adventures of Sherlock Holmes will recall that the Northumberland, just down from Charring Cross, was the site of a boot that went astray. It is now quite the select establishment and has recently added a pub to the ground floor. The reception for the Council was held in the ballroom on the second floor.

“Mr. Holmes and Dr. Watson,” said Carmichael. “allow me to introduce Mr. Charles Rowe of your Foreign Office and Señor Juan Cortez, the First Officer of the Embassy of Venezuela.”

The chap from Whitehall looked every bit the part of a nondescript bureaucrat. The Spanish fellow was somewhat swarthy, with a thin mustache. He was better dressed than our man and had far better teeth.

“Pleased to meet both of you,” said Holmes. Mr. Rowe responded with a shallow smile and nodded. The Spaniard was much more effusive.

“*Mucho gusto*, Señor Holmes! It is an honor, *muy bien*, to meet you. You have many readers and fans in my country.”

He shook Holmes’s hand vigorously whilst I contemplated the realization that my stories had been pirated and translated into Spanish.

Holmes, Mr. Carmichael, the two consular officials, and I were seated at a welcoming desk in the lobby whilst Mrs. Carmichael mingled graciously with the guests. As the blue-bloods arrived, they were recognized and announced by the major-domo, but all of the claimants were required to come by our station and present their papers before being granted admission.

Beginning at about half seven, men began to walk up to the desk at which we were stationed to show their papers and *bona fides*. Holmes and Carmichael engaged them briefly in conversation whilst Messrs. Rowe, and Cortez looked on, and I scribbled notes. By eight o’clock, some thirty-three chaps had been admitted, and we adjourned to the reception room. The group of us continued to observe our claimants as they chatted and then as they took their seats and endured the formalities.

The members of the Council and the rest of us were welcomed by Lord Salisbury and the Prince, who both said nice things about America and Venezuela whilst not neglecting to comment on the splendor of the British Empire. The stunning spectacle, just a month ago, of the representatives of every country in the Empire coming together to celebrate the Diamond Jubilee of the Queen was noted numerous times. Other speakers also made high-sounding remarks appropriate for the evening with the compulsory conclusion that all of us, in our hearts, sincerely desired the preservation of world peace.

Our troop gathered briefly at the end of the evening to compare notes.

“Señors,” began Mr. Cortez, “*lo siento*, but I suspect all of these claimants. They are all English of some sort or other and loyal to your British Empire. Do you know why it is true that the sun never sets on the British Empire? It is because God does not trust an Englishman in the dark.”

He laughed loudly at this old saw. No one else did.

“If that is all you can say,” said Holmes, “*por favor, no digas más*. Now, were there any useful observations?”

“I have,” said Mr. Rowe, “a rather good ear for accents. Of the thirty-three who registered with us, twenty were from England. All of them claimed to be an agent representing a British firm that had interests in Venezuela. Judging by their dress, speech, and comportment, I concluded that all of them were men from the City and not given to violence. Of the remaining thirteen, four were Welshmen who

claimed that they had actually worked in the mines of the Esquibo region. As the Welsh have no other known profession, except as tenors, and noting the dirt ingrained in their knuckles, I considered them legitimate. There were four Scotchmen, three of whom had rather refined Edinburgh accents, but one was obviously from Glasgow. It is a known truth that those from Edinburgh are generally as well-behaved as is possible for a Scot, but that the same cannot be said for a Glasgow man. Therefore, he would be on my list of possible suspects.”

“And the rest of them?” I asked.

“Good heavens, man. They were all Irish,” said Rowe. “It goes without saying that for that reason alone, they should be suspected. Look at the bloody mess they are making over Home Rule. They never leave the house without a revolver and a stick of dynamite. For five pounds, they could be hired as ruffians or even assassins.”

“Any one of them?” asked Holmes.

“Couldn’t say. But the five of those blokes and the one from Glasgow, that’s where I would start if I were you.”

“And you, Doctor? Your thoughts?”

I hesitated to answer, knowing that my insights invariably fell short of Holmes’s standards, but I gave it a try.

“Two of the Irish chaps,” I said, “seemed hesitant when you asked them to sign their names. It was as if they needed a moment to remember what the name was they were supposed to be writing.”

“Brilliant, Watson. Brilliant,” said Holmes. “And which two were they?”

Feeling chuffed, I consulted my notes. “The one calling himself Brendan O’Boyle and the other was Patrick Collins.”

“Excellent, Doctor. Did you happen to notice anything peculiar in their speech?”

“No, nothing except that they were obviously Irish.”

“They were, indeed,” said Holmes. “But those two also appear to have spent some time in America and used a few words and expressions that are peculiar to that former colony.”

“Oh,” I said, “I did not notice. What did they say?”

“American slang is very expressive. The O’Boyle chap said that whilst in Guiana, he had been ‘Chicagoed.’ I do not recall that verb being used recently in London. Do you?”

“Can’t say as I do.”

“And Collins said that he would never ‘tell us a thumper.’ Again, his speech betrayeth him as one who has spent time across the pond.”

“Sure, and that’s real good,” said Carmichael. “We’ll put these two at the top of our list to watch. But what about the ones on the list who did not show up? Are you prepared to track them down? More than happy to pay you good bucks to do that.”

“I shall begin that task tomorrow morning and keep you informed,” said Holmes. “Now is there any further need for our presence this evening?”

“Nope. Go on home,” said Carmichael smiling. His charming wife bade us good evening and offered her hand and a smile.

The hour was approaching eleven when we returned to Baker Street. As we stepped out of the cab, we could not help but notice a tall man who was standing at the door of 221B.

“Good evening, Mr. Holmes, Doctor Watson,” came the greeting in a distinct Aberdonian brogue. “Pardon me for disturbing your return to your home.”

“Inspector MacDonald,” said Holmes. “To what do we owe this unusual honor? You could have waited for us inside. You are always welcome.”

“Thank you, Mr. Holmes. But it’s a wee bit urgent. I hope it is not too much to ask you to come with me even at this late hour. My carriage is there across the street.”

Holmes looked at me, and I gave a shrug in return. “Why not?” I said.

“And where is it we are going?” asked Holmes, once we were in the carriage.

“Just a few blocks north. Up to St. John’s Wood, just by the Sisters’ Hospital.”

“And the reason?”

“There was a fire there earlier this evening.”

“When did fires become the responsibility of Scotland Yard? Are they not the responsibility of the London’s Fire Brigade?”

“They are until a body is found and the death looks very peculiar.”

“Ah, well now, that sounds more interesting. Worth the candle at this time of night. What say you, Watson?”

“Quite so,” I agreed.

We drove north past the Park and Lord’s and then up Wellington Road to the charity hospital, where we turned left on Circus Road. A block along, we came on a cluster of Fire Brigade wagons and another police carriage in front of a small but quite select private hotel.

“He’s in here,” said Mr. Mac. “Burnt to a crisp, he is. Registered under the name of Gerald Mahoney. The proprietor says he hails from Londonderry.”

Holmes gave me a knowing glance and a sly smile as we followed the inspector to a set of rooms on the ground floor. The parlor room was a charred and stinking mess, but the other rooms and the remaining parts of the hotel had been spared by the quick action of the Brigade. In the affected room, I observed a cluster of burnt pieces of furniture, underneath and protruding from which was the charred corpse of the unfortunate victim.

Holmes stood in the door for some time before entering.

“Inspector,” he said. “Kindly share with me such data as you have.”

“Aye. The owner of the hotel and the other residents agree that the alarm went up at just before half-past eight. They said that within seconds there was a blazing inferno, so hot they could not dare enter the room. The Brigade was here in less than ten minutes and were able to pump water in through the window and from the hallway and stop the spread much beyond the one room. Not much damage. You can see that the lamps are still working. Within ten minutes more they had it out and they entered, and that is when they found this fellow dead in the middle of the mess.”

“It is unfortunate,” said Holmes, “but people die in fires all the time. I assume that the captain of the Brigade sent for you. May I ask you why?”

“Aye, that he did. And he did so on account of the fellow could easily have escaped. There was egress out the door or the window, but he didna move. None of the residents, who were here right quick, hear anyone screaming for help. So, the captain knows it looks suspicious, and he sends word to the Yard. I came straight away, took a quick look and made my way to you. I would say the whole thing is a downright snorter of a case.”

Holmes took his glass from his pocket and began a slow, methodical inspection of the scene. As he did so, I dropped to my knees beside him and we examined the charred remains of Mr. Mahoney. Twenty minutes later, we reassembled in the hallway.

“Your instincts, Inspector,” said Holmes, “were correct. The furniture has been moved into the center of the room and thoroughly soaked in kerosene, as was the victim. There are no traces of rope or cloth fibers on his wrists and ankles that might have indicated he was bound and not able to escape. The only alternative, I suggest, is that he was drugged and left unconscious by whoever started the fire and used it to murder him. Because of the kerosene, the fire would have gone from a match to a blaze in under a minute. You say that the alarm went up at near eight-thirty. Is that correct?”

“Aye, sir. That’s what they all said.”

“Then whoever it was that set the fire must have fled the room and the scene at about that time. Was anyone seen?”

“Narry a soul, Mr. Holmes. The witnesses are of one mind on that matter,” said MacDonald.

“That is singularly odd,” said Holmes. “Ghosts are not in the habit of starting fires.”

His voice trailed off at the end of his sentence as his gaze became fixed on a section of the floor. He dropped again to his knees and removed his glass. Inch by inch, he worked his way from the center of the room and the pile of charred furniture to a place on the wall, some ten or so feet away. Reaching his long arm behind a cabinet, he extracted a small dish. He stood up, put his glass away, took out a small penknife and began scraping the inside of the dish.

“Is this,” he asked me, “what you call a *petri dish*?”

“It is,” I said. “Every laboratory in the city would have a stack of them. What was in it?”

“Wax,” he said. “And the stub of a wick.”

“A candle.”

“Precisely, Watson. Leading up to it is a trail of burnt fibers that served as a wick. Whoever set this fire laid a strip of cloth, no doubt soaked in kerosene, from the center of the room over to the candle. When the candle burned all the way down, the flame touched the wick and traveled to the center in of the room and became the conflagration.”

“Aye,” said MacDonald. “So, this could have been set up an hour or more before the alarm.”

“Possibly longer,” said Holmes. “He could have used a tall candle.”

“Well now, as I said, this case is going to be a real snorter,” said the inspector.

“Would you mind,” said Holmes, “if I inspected the other rooms of this suite?”

“Please, sir. Go right ahead. I did a wee look myself and saw nothing amiss, but then I am not Sherlock Holmes.”

“Ah, but not far off, Mr. Mac,” replied Holmes. “Your instincts are excellent. Just force yourself not to be in such a hurry.”

As if to prove his point, Holmes spent over an hour going through all of the possessions of Mr. Maloney. Nothing struck me as unusual. The articles of clothing, shoes, boots, hats, toiletries, and such were what would be expected in the rooms of a man of the age and apparent income of this visitor from Londonderry. Holmes stopped and paused at the stack of newspapers sitting on a cabinet in the bedroom. After turning over each of them, he looked at MacDonald.

“Inspector, would it be acceptable to you if I were to take these newspapers back with me to examine in detail?”

“Aye, that is fine with me, Mr. Holmes. Mind if I ask if you have come to any insights?”

“The temptation to form premature theories when one has insufficient data . . .”

“Auch, Mr. Holmes. Ye’ve bin telling me th’ identical thing fur fifteen years. It’s past midnight, and I’m done for it. So, just be a good fellow and give me a wee bit of yur mind, will ya?”

Holmes smiled at one of the few inspectors he was, in his way, rather fond of.

“The man who was killed here was supposed to attend an event earlier this evening at the Northumberland Hotel. The trick with the candle was used to make it appear that he was murdered whilst the event was taking place, thereby removing any of those present from suspicion. Therefore, I will concentrate my initial efforts on those who *were* present. A list of attendees is available to Scotland Yard from the Foreign Office.”

“Yer a guid laddie, Mr. Holmes,” said the tall Scotsman, with a warm smile. “Do you need a ride back to your home in my carriage?”

“It is a warm summer night, inspector. We shall enjoy the short walk.”

The streets of London in the hours past midnight are void of life. On a warm summer night, a stroll, however unplanned, has a soothing effect on the soul. I would have been happy to chat, but Holmes was not for that. He made only one comment before becoming silent.

“What I did not tell the inspector,” he said, “was that whilst there were no traces of fibers around the wrists and ankles, there were a few by his mouth and on his cheeks. He had been gagged.”

“But why,” I asked, “if he were unconscious?”

“I can only conclude that he was not drugged into unconsciousness but only into paralysis. His mind and his senses were fully alert. He could have screamed but could not move.”

“Merciful heavens,” I exclaimed. “What a horrifying way to die.”

“Yes, exceptionally cruel,” said Holmes.

He uttered not another word all the way back to Baker Street. I thought if I listened closely, I might hear the wheels inside his mind turning furiously.

The night air had the atmosphere of a storm about to arrive, and we were fortunate to reach our door as the first few drops were starting to fall. Within ten minutes, that wind was blowing and the lightning flashing. I was soon in my bed and fast asleep.

Holmes was considerate enough to permit me a short lie-in the following morning, but at just past eight o’clock, I felt my shoulder being rudely disturbed.

“Come, Watson, we have work to do and the day is half gone.”

I grumbled my way through a rapid bath and wolfed down my breakfast whilst Holmes stood impatiently hovering over me. We hailed a cab on Baker Street and started off along Marylebone.

“Where to?” I asked.

“To the address we have for Patrick Collins. He lives in a flat just up ahead in Fitzrovia.”

“Is he expecting us?”

“I certainly hope not.”

“So, why are we going to see him?”

“We identified him as one whom we found suspicious. He was present at the reception, which means he could very well have been the one who did in that poor Mahoney chap. Mind you, there could have been others, but we need to start somewhere.”

The streets were wet from the rain and busy with the morning traffic, but it was not long before we had passed the Great Portland intersection and turned south on Cleveland Street into Fitzrovia. Seven minutes later, we pulled up to an address on Howland Street.

There was a police carriage standing in front of the door.

“Man, this is witchcraft!” bellowed a voice as we entered the house. “How in the name of all that is wonderful are you arriving here? I just sent a man to fetch you no more than two minutes ago.”

Glaring at us was the weary, unshaven face of Inspector MacDonald.

“I fear,” said Holmes, “that our meeting here means that there is some mischief afoot.”

“Aye, that there is,” came the tired reply. “I no more got myself back to the Yard, and my report written and almost out the door back to the missus, but doesn’t a constable come charging in saying there is a murder up in Fitzrovia. I come tearing up here, and I see a note on the poor bloke’s table with the address you and I departed from no more than six hours ago. So, I sent for you, and like some mercurial ghoul, here you are.”

“I am as surprised as you are, Inspector, that we meet again. May I ask if the man who has been murdered is registered under the name of Patrick Collins?”

“Auch, and why am I not surprised that you know that, Mr. Holmes? Aye, Collins he is, and he is right inside. But I warn you, ’tis not a pretty sight.”

We walked into the flat. Several constables were standing guard, and the other residents of the building were as close as was permitted and looking all curious. In the middle of the small parlor was the body of a man clad in nightclothes. A chair, toppled over, lay beside him. He was lying on his back with his arms outstretched.

His face was gone.

There was nothing but a bloody mass where once a face had been.

“A shotgun?” asked Holmes.

“Aye. That’s what it’s looking.”

“What time?”

“No one knows for certain. But none of the residents say they heard a shot, so it must have been whilst the storm was pounding. I would say he was shot right after a big flash of lightning in perfect time with the thunder.”

“An excellent deduction, Inspector. Did anybody report seeing a man with a shotgun coming or going?”

“No. Mind, they were all in their rooms and in their beds during the storm. It passed between two and four in the morning, so that must be when someone broke in and shot him.”

“But he is not in his bed,” said Holmes.

“Aye, that he is not. A’m thinking that he was marched out of the bedroom and made to sit in the chair before he was shot.”

“Another good deduction, Inspector. We appear to be facing something more like an interrogation and execution. Were the lights on when the first person entered the flat this morning?”

“Aye, they were. The landlady said that the lights were blazing all night long, and she came by first thing to give this fellow a piece of her mind for wasting the gas. At half six, she knocked and heard no answer. She says she assumed he must be away and had left the lamps burning, so she used her key to let herself in and found him. She was the one that called for a constable. She’s a wee bit upset as you can imagine, Mr. Holmes.”

“Most understandable. Now, again, Inspector, with your permission, may I investigate the premises?”

“By all means. Gang ahead. I will wait on the sofa, and if you find me asleep, do not be surprised.”

We entered the bedroom, and immediately Holmes’s gaze went to the corner of the room. There was a small pile of newspapers which he immediately snatched up and began to look through.

“Something about newspapers, Holmes?” I asked.

“Usually a pile of them means only that a man has not yet put them out for the dustman. But look at these, Watson.”

I did and saw that there was half a dozen or so, but none were from London or anywhere near. All were American and from different cities across that country. None bore current dates but stretched back over the past three years.

“A bit of an odd collection,” I said.

“Not just odd, Watson. They are the very same editions as I found in Mahoney’s place.”

“You read them?”

“Yes, Watson. Whilst you were sleeping so soundly, I read them all, and all the way through. A man does not keep an old newspaper except for some good reason. And Mahoney and Collins have kept the exact copies. Here, come, look.”

He was holding the stack of papers and quickly flipped through their front pages. They came from eight different American cities. I recorded the *Baltimore American*, the *Sioux City Journal*, the *New Haven Register* and five other places. After quickly passing the front pages before my eyes, Holmes then held open the first page of each paper and bade me read a story. Each of the stories was an account of either a murder or a death under suspicious circumstances. A man in the Inner Harbor of Baltimore had been found hanging in a cellar. His body bore signs of torture. Another told of a body discovered in the burned remains of an abandoned barn near the west bank of the Missouri River in Iowa. The third recounted how some poor fellow had staggered into a hospital in Columbus, Ohio, holding in his intestines. He died in the hospital lobby. Every one of these men had Irish names. There was a Harrigan, an O’Henry, a Mulligan, an O’Dowd, an O’Keefe, an O’Toole, and an Egan. All had died in the past three years.

“These deaths are all connected to each other,” he pronounced. Then he paused. “And they have no connection whatsoever to Venezuela. That is odd.”

He looked through the seven again slowly and then picked up the eighth.

“This paper,” said Holmes, holding the one that was on the bottom of the pile, “was not in the pile at Mahoney’s. There is no story in it of the violent death of an Irishman.”

He took the paper, the *Ithaca Journal*, sat down on the bed, and began to read each and every column. I stood behind him and read over his shoulder. On the fifth page, a small note was attached. He read it and handed it to me. It had only a few words and read:

Collins: They are in England. Take great caution. B O’B

Holmes is the fastest reader I have ever known. His eyes functioned more like cameras, taking a photograph of a page, committing it to memory, and then recalling it verbatim when needed. I could not possibly keep up with him and was still on the second story of the page when I heard him gasp. He threw the paper down on the bed and shouted at me.

“Watson! Quick. Roll up the right sleeve of the dead man. Please. Now!”

His urgency was accompanied by his extreme agitation. He leapt to his feet and began pacing the floor as I knelt down to the corpse. The sleeve of his nightshirt was wide and loose, and I pushed the material back up toward the elbow.

“Turn it over. Turn the arm over,” Holmes commanded.

I did. On the underside of the thick wrist was an unmistakable mark, one that I remembered seeing fifteen years earlier on a corpse in the manor house at Birlstone. It was a circle of about an inch and a half in diameter. Inside the circle, with the apexes touching the circumference, was a triangle. The skin had been burned and scarred. The man had been branded with the mark of the Scrowers.

“Inspector! Up man!” Holmes was shouting at the slumbering MacDonald. He opened his eyes, dazed for a brief second, and leapt to his feet.

“Whit? Whit’s it?”

“Hurry. We may be in time to prevent a third murder. Watson, bring that last newspaper.”

He was already rushing out of the building and commandeering the police carriage.

“Soho Square. And gallop!” he shouted to the driver. The man was disconcerted and looked at MacDonald.

“Whatever he says,” the inspector shouted back. “Get to it.”

The driver laid his whip across the backside of the gleaming brace of horses, and we took off with a jolt.

“Use the bell,” shouted Holmes. “And your voice!”

The fellow kept the horse running as fast as he dared, rang his bell furiously and shouted to anyone in our way.

“Scotland Yard! Make way! Emergency! Scotland Yard! Make way!”

It is only a few blocks from where we were to Soho Square, and we were there in five minutes.

“Number twenty-one,” shouted Holmes. “Across from the church.”

We approached an elegant house on the corner of Sutton Row. To my relief, there was no police wagon in front of it.

“Come,” commanded Holmes. “We have to find him before they do.”

“Who?” I demanded. “Who is *him* and who are *they*?” I confess that it got my back up when Holmes accorded himself the rank of Sargent-Major.

“Read the story,” he shouted back from the pavement. “Page five. Inspector, please come with me.”

If he was only going to apprehend some fellow, then he did not need me on the spot, and I opened the *Ithaca Journal* to page five. After scanning the columns, I settled on a short item that bore the headline:

Tragedy Above Cayuga’s Waters

And the story ran:

Three children and their governess lost their lives last night in a house fire in a small cottage on Lakeside Drive. The children were all from the Edwards family, who had moved to this idyllic location only a year ago from Chicago. The children ranged in age from an eleven-year-old boy, Jack, to his younger sister, Ettie, aged four, and a little brother, James, three. The children’s governess, Miss Iphigenia Carrothers, also lost her life. All appear to have been caught in their beds when the fire broke out. Residents who arrived on the scene reported that the house seemed to have become consumed with flames within minutes and the flames were so intense that those who tried to enter were driven back. The tragedy was made even worse by the arrival of the parents, John and Ivy Douglas in their carriage as the fire became a raging inferno. Neighbors reported that several men had to hold back Mr. Douglas as he rushed to enter the house. The husband and wife were terribly distraught, and the last thing they heard before the roof collapsed was the terrible screams of their children.

A reporter from The Journal was at the scene within the hour and sought to find Mr. and Mrs. Douglas but was not able to do so. The station master reported that they had departed Ithaca on the first train of the morning.

The thoughts and prayers of all the citizens of Ithaca are with this stricken family.

On behalf of the devastated family of our fair city, The Journal demanded that the Chief of Police, Harold McTavish, say whether there was any suspicion of foul play. He refused to say one way or the other but admitted that several strange men had been seen in the area near the lake earlier in the day. He also admitted that an investigation was being considered.

“Good God in heaven,” I said to myself as the truth of this case was beginning to dawn on me. I leapt out of the carriage and ran into the house only to meet Holmes and MacDonald rushing back out.

“O’Boyle’s not there,” said Holmes. “This is the address he gave at the reception desk. His belongings are all in place, but he has fled.”

“Where to?” I asked.

In response, Holmes handed me a telegram slip.

“We found this on his desk. He is walking into a trap and perhaps deserves what is waiting for him, but if we hurry, we may be able to put a stop to this carnage.”

I looked at the telegram. It ran:

HE demands to see you at once. Come immediately to the location below. For your safety. Your life depends on it. Col. S.M.

Below that message were directions to an address on a country road to the east of Crawley.

“This is in Sussex,” I said. “Just on the north border.”

“Precisely,” said Holmes. “it is about a mile from the manor house at Birlstone. There are regular trains from Victoria, and we should be able to get there before noon.

We were all now back in the police carriage and instructions were shouted to the driver to get us to Victoria Station as quickly as he was able.

“Mr. Holmes,” said MacDonald as we galloped past Piccadilly, “you will have to enlighten me. Who is *HE* and who is *Colonel S M*?”

“HE,” replied Holmes, “is Professor Moriarty, and SM is Colonel Sabastian Moran.”

“Holmes, that is nonsense,” I said. “Moriarty is dead, and Moran is in prison.”

“Correct, Watson. I know that, and you know that, but whoever this Brendan O’Boyle is, it is safe to assume that he does not. He is a relatively recent transplant from America by way of Venezuela and likely only knows that his Scrowers are linked to what was Moriarty’s international web of crime. He has received a summons and, fearing for his life, he obeys.”

“But who summoned him?” asked MacDonald.

“Those who intend to murder him.”

Holmes closed his eyes and held up his hand indicating that he did not wish to converse any further. Except for the brief interval when we departed from the police carriage and entered a southbound train at Victoria, he remained in that pose.

In less than an hour, the train stopped at the Crawley station. It was a small station and, as I feared, there were no cabs waiting. Fortunately, directly across the road was a small livery, and we were able to arrange an immediate rental of a trap and a spirited young horse. Holmes began to mount to the driver’s bench when Inspector MacDonald grabbed him by the arm.

“Permit me, Mr. Holmes. Knowing how to gallop a horse and carriage is part of basic police training. You and the doctor just hold on, and I’ll get you there. All you have to do is shout directions.”

The directions were complicated. We were soon out of the town and making our way along a country road through the farms and forests to the southwest. The inspector skillfully gave the horse free rein every time the road opened up in front of us. Holmes and I held on as the cart bounced and shook for over half an hour.

“We’ve come this way before,” I shouted to Holmes.

“Yes,” he shouted back. “We just passed the fork that leads to Birlstone. I have no knowledge of where this is taking us.”

The directions led us to the entrance of a long, narrow drive. We turned into it and made our way slowly through the thick forest. At the final turn, the forest opened, and we could see a broad expanse of unmown lawn at the end of which stood a small house that had the look of having been abandoned. On the open grass, thirty-five yards in front of the house, was a circle of chairs. A man was sitting in one of them with a woman beside him. We climbed down out of the cart and approached Mr. and Mrs. Lawrence and Barbara Carmichael. They smiled at us but did not stand up.

“Well, hello there, Mr. Sherlock Holmes,” said Carmichael. “We thought there was a possibility of your showing up. We were ready to wait until five before giving up on you, and you did not disappoint.”

“Inspector MacDonald,” said Holmes, “arrest this man for the murders of Gerald Mahoney and Patrick Collins. There is also a possibility that he has murdered Brendan O’Boyle.”

MacDonald looked more than a little bewildered but stepped toward the couple. In a quick move, both the man and the woman brought their hands out from under their jackets. The man was holding a sawed-off shotgun in one hand and a revolver in the other. The woman had a revolver in each hand.

“Whoa there, inspector,” said Carmichael. “Not so fast. I don’t think anybody is going to be arrested today. There’s more important work to do. Now I suggest that you three gents just have a seat and we’ll have a nice little chat. Uh, did you hear me? I said, sit down.”

He pointed the shotgun at the empty chairs across from him and, having no choice, we complied.

“A few days back,” began Carmichael, “I recollect you saying that I had a bit of explaining to do, did you not Mr. Holmes?”

Holmes made no reply, and Carmichael continued. “Well, sure and I reckon that maybe I have a bit more to do, seeing as I really do not want Mr. Sherlock Holmes angry at me for years to come. So, before we get to the final act, let me deliver my soliloquy.”

“Not interested,” snapped Holmes. “Explain now the whereabouts of Brendan O’Boyle, or have you already murdered him as you did the others?”

“Murdered, Mr. Holmes? No, sir. We are not murderers, merely the instruments of justice who have carried out the unpleasant but necessary task of executing those who did commit murder.”

“You mean,” said Holmes, “you are taking revenge for what happened to your children.”

“Ah, you have been doing your homework, sir. Sure, I expected nothing less from Sherlock Holmes. That permits me to give an abridged version of my story, and whether you are happy about listening to it or not, you are going to.”

He waived the shotgun back and forth in the direction of the three of us.

“You are more than welcome,” he continued, “to enjoy your pipe or cigarette while giving me your ear.”

None of us moved.

“Oh, very well then. It goes like this. So ... when I told you that Ivy and I had a pleasant life over the past few years, that was a bit of a little white lie. Maybe more than a little one. What I did not tell you was that Ettie, my first wife, and I had a child together, a boy. Ettie took sick and passed away when he was only seven years old, but the good Lord then brought me a godsend in the person of my beloved wife, Ivy. After getting through the mess at Birlstone, which I am sure you remember, and the escape off at St. Helena, we thought we might enjoy a somewhat normal life, and the good Lord blessed us with a son and a daughter. For a few years, we heard nothing from the Scrowers and believed, falsely, that they had let bygones be bygones. That was a terrible mistake. Our good life ended one night in Ithaca, New York, when a band of Scrowers tracked us down and came at night to kill me and my family. As fate would have it, we had gone into town that evening to enjoy a theater production put on by the college, and we returned home just in time to hear the dying screams of our children and the governess as they perished in the fire that the Scrowers had set to our house.

“That night, the two of us made an oath to each other. We swore that we would never again be the hunted. We would be the hunters. We knew that those who killed our children would never be brought to justice and so we became the force of justice ourselves. As you know, Mr. Holmes, I also am a detective. Not as fine a one as you, not nearly, but good enough to know how to track down a man anywhere in America. So, one by one, we followed the trail of those ten Scrowers, and one by one, we put them to death. We ended their lives in ways that inflicted sustained pain and torture, knowing that it would be reported in the Press, and those who were still living would tremble to know that such a terror was on its relentless way to them.

“We took down seven of them, but three high-tailed it out of America and ran off to Venezuela. They were miners by trade and knew they could make a good few dollars in the gold mines, and they thought they would be safe from the vengeance we were bent on delivering. We followed them to South America, courtesy of the State Department, but by the time we landed in Georgetown, someone had warned them, and they fled that country and came to London.

“So, I had to get myself a new assignment for the government and put my name in for the team who would help look after our American delegation that was being sent to sort out that ridiculous dust-up you Brits were having in the jungle. That brought me to London, again courtesy of Uncle Sam. I confess that the part about someone wanting to start a war ... well, I made that one up.

“However, I do not have to tell you, Mr. Holmes, that finding an Irishman in London is like looking for a needle in a haystack. So, I did the obvious, sensible thing. I hired the best detective in the world, Mr. Sherlock Holmes, to help me find the men I was looking for and darned if he did not deliver the goods faster than you can say Jack Robinson.

“You used me,” said Holmes, “to abet in murder.” I had seldom seen him angrier.

“Execution, Mr. Holmes. Not murder. Execution. And please, Dr. Watson assisted as well. Doc, your knowing that first fellow and telling me where he lived gave us the opportunity check him out real quick. As soon as I saw his face, I knew who he was. His true name was Scanlon, and I knew that he would immediately recognize me if he showed up at the hotel, so we had no choice but to get rid of him before he could do that. With the fellow calling himself Collins, well, the good Lord sent us a very convenient thunderstorm. But for the last hour of his wretched life, he was looking down the barrel of a shotgun before getting his head blown off.”

“Darling,” interrupted his wife, “you did not act alone. It was I who pulled the trigger.”

“Yes, of course, you did, my dear. So, Inspector, you will have to add my dear wife to your arrest warrant. Obviously, I do not have to tell you how we lured the last of those killers to this remote location seeing as you followed him here. Real fine detective work, I must say, Mr. Holmes.”

“Where is he now?” demanded Holmes.

“Oh, I’m getting to that, sir. Just content your soul in patience. There is one other thing you should know. That is that we have come to the end of our mission. All those who took part in the murder of our children have been brought to justice, and we will give you our word that we will not be doing any more executions. Right, honey?”

“Correct, darling,” his wife replied. “We will now try to enjoy as good a life as possible in the years we will still have together, somewhere.”

“Somewhere?” echoed her husband. “Yes, gentlemen, we will be somewhere a long way from here. Maybe the Cape, or Burma, or maybe Canada. What do you think, honey? They say Calgary is a splendid spot, right next door to the mountains.”

“Anywhere,” she whispered. “Anywhere that we can put this behind us and start our lives over.”

“I will find you a such a place, my love. Any suggestions, Mr. Holmes?”

“Enough!” shouted Holmes. “Stop your childish taunts. Where is O’Boyle?”

“Him?” replied the man still pointing a shotgun and revolver at us. “He’s tied up inside that house, but I don’t reckon you’ll be seeing him sometime soon.”

“Why not?” said Holmes.

“Sure, and it’s like this, Mr. Holmes. Ivy, will you do the honors?”

The woman put down one of the revolvers she had been pointing at us and, with one hand, opened her small handbag and pulled out a single Lucifer match. With a trembling hand, she struck it on the arm of the chair, held it up in front of us and dropped it on the ground.

Immediately a flame appeared in the grass. Like a fast-moving snake, the flame raced across a path that must have been soaked in kerosene. Within seconds, it reached the steps of the house and quickly leapt up from one to the next. On hitting the porch, a large flame ignited and swept across. A moment later a loud *whoosh* could be heard as the entire house became a raging inferno.

Over the sound of the fire, we heard loud screams shouting “Help! Help!” The screams then turned to awful cries of terror and pain.

Then they were silent. We stared in horror as the tinder-dry structure disappeared behind the smoke and flame.

“Mr. Holmes,” said Birdy Edwards, quietly, “the man who went by the name of O’Boyle has now gone to meet his maker. He will soon be in hell where he belongs. Now, if you will excuse us, we have a train and a boat to catch. And please, do forgive us, but we will be returning your cart to the livery. You, gentleman, will have to walk. But it is a fine summer day. Enjoy it.”

“You know,” said Holmes, “that I will not rest until you are behind bars.”

“No, Mr. Holmes. What I know is that you have far more important work to do that will demand the full use of your very impressive skills. Good day, gentlemen.”

As the woman walked past me, she dropped a slip of paper in my lap. It was a check, payable to Mr. Sherlock Holmes and drawn on account of the Government of the United States of America. It was denominated in American dollars.

The two of them walked backwards, facing us and with guns pointing until they reached our cart. The man waited beside it, continuing to point his shotgun in our direction, whilst his wife walked quickly behind a copse of trees. She emerged a minute later, sitting in the driver’s seat of a dog cart. After a short look in our direction, she started off down the lane in her cart. Her husband followed in ours.

We watched them briefly, and then, hearing a loud roar, we turned around to see the burning house collapse and become an enormous bonfire.

“By tomorrow morning,” said Inspector MacDonald, “the fire will have burned itself out. Did you wish to return to investigate the place and the victim, Mr. Holmes?”

Holmes continued to gaze at the fire for a full minute and then slowly turned to the inspector.

“Thank you, Inspector. However, I fear I have more important work to do.”

The Adventure of the Winchester Heart-Breaker

A sequel to The Adventure of the Copper Beeches



“TO THE MAN WHO LOVES INTELLECTUAL STIMULATION,” remarked Sherlock Holmes, “London in August is the lowliest month on the calendar. Those with the means to do so have departed for the Algarve and the Riviera. Those without are off to Blackpool and Brighton.”

“And what about those,” I asked, “who are left behind? You and I are still here.”

“You at least have your sensational accounts of my efforts to keep scribbling. I, on the other hand, am losing faith in the enterprising criminal class. They appear to have faded into the great unobservant public and are somnambulating about the city, doing nothing more than stealing lead pencils from blind beggars.”

“Tut-tut, Holmes. We mustn’t complain. In a week, we can join the madding crowds and cheer on our new king.”

Holmes gave me a withering look and returned his gaze to the back pages of a newspaper.

Our soon-to-be king, Edward VII, known affectionately by the populace as Bertie, or less affectionately as Edward the Caresser, would be crowned on the next weekend. For years, whilst his mother ruled with dignity and decorum, he had been the frivolous, boisterous *bon vivant* who was seen constantly in the company of famous actresses, singers, and stunning debutantes. All of England now hoped and prayed that he had matured sufficiently to be the King of the greatest empire the world had ever known.

His coronation parade on the coming Saturday would be thronged with hundreds of thousands of English men, women and children.

Sherlock Holmes would prefer to be anywhere but close to their antics and adulations.

So, when a police carriage came clanging up Baker Street and stopped outside our door, Holmes stood, walked over to the bay window, and sighed with relief. A police constable rushed out, rang the bell and, a minute later, handed a note to Holmes. It was a summons from Inspector Lestrade and ran:

Holmes: Come immediately to Winchester. Man murdered. Known to you. Bring Watson if possible. Will be waiting at Black Swan at 7:00. Lestrade

“Really, Holmes,” I chided, “you might make a small effort not to look so utterly gleeful when hearing about a murder.”

“Permit me then to share my good fortune. As your wife is still away for a few days, would you be free to join me as a guest of Scotland Yard on a short journey to the South? I am certain you would be every bit as pleased as I am with the prospect of getting out of London.”

“Gentleman,” interrupted the constable, “Please. If I might prevail upon you to pack and come straight away, there is a train leaving from Waterloo that will get you to Winchester in time.”

Once we were inside our cabin in the SWR train to Southampton, we relaxed. Holmes took out his beloved pipe and sloped back into the seat. I could not restrain my curiosity and had to ask, “Well, Holmes, who do you expect you are going to find murdered?”

“I can think of any number of blackguards in Hampshire who deserved to be murdered but not many who were likely let that happen to them.”

“And who might be at the top of your list?”

“Jethro Rucastle, if he is anything like the horrible monster he was twelve years ago. His deeds have no doubt caught up to him. And on your list?”

“Rucastle as well.”

At six o’clock, the train pulled into the station at Winchester where a young police officer stopped us on the platform and led us to a waiting carriage.

“Inspector Lestrade,” he said, “sent a note telling me to meet you and take you directly to the Copper Beeches. He said to remind you that it’s August and we’re running out of ice. He doesn’t want to leave the body lying on the floor of the house any longer than he has to. It’s already smelling.”

The five miles from the center of the city to the country house were scenic and, with the heat gone from the day, remarkably pleasant. The house looked no different than it had the last time I had been there twelve years ago when we came to the assistance of Miss Violet Hunter. If anything, the building and grounds seemed somewhat spruced up. A fresh coat of paint and a trimmed lawn enhanced its appearance.

“I assume that Mrs. Rucastle inherits the estate?” I said as we pulled up the drive.

“Unless he designated otherwise in his will,” said Holmes. “Given his hostility toward his daughter, I would not expect him to leave her a farthing. He might bequeath a portion to his son. He should soon be of age to receive it.”

“Eighteen by now,” I said.

Lestrade was waiting for us at the front door.

“He’s in the parlor,” was all he said before turning and walking back into the house.

As we approached the prone corpse, I took notice immediately of an arrow protruding from the chest. He had been shot in the heart. The shirt was stained with red that was on its way to turning to brown.

But there was something wrong.

The body was not the corpulent older man I expected to see. It was long and lean. As I stepped up to it, I realized that it was not Jethro Rucastle at all. It was Mr. Toller, the elderly groom.

The man's face was older than the last time I had seen him, and his appearance was more genteel. His face was shaven, his shirt, now despoiled with blood, had been clean and white earlier in the day, and his boots were new. I squatted down to examine him.

There was no sign of a struggle. His clothes were neatly in place, and there were no bruises on his hands or face. His death from the arrow must have been unexpected and would have been almost immediate.

"Right," said Lestrade. "I know, you likely came thinking it would have been the master of the estate. He and his wife are upstairs and, other than being put out by a body in their front room, there is nothing wrong with them. Mind you, they're rather upset about their son."

"Edward?" said Holmes. "What did he have to do with this?"

"To start with," said Lestrade, "he shot the arrow that killed this old fellow."

"How can you possibly know that?" asked Holmes.

"To continue with, he confessed."

Holmes was uncharacteristically silent and then asked.

"If you know who the murderer is, why would you send for me?"

"Because I don't know," said Lestrade. "You and I have both been at this game for a long time, Holmes, and you know when something does not smell right. You can go and talk to the lad yourself and tell me if you come away believing you were told the truth."

"Some data first, please, Inspector."

"Right. Well then, let us go back twelve years. Do you remember, Doctor, what you wrote about the boy in the story you published? And yes, Holmes, I do read all your heroic accounts, including those in which you give all the glory to Scotland Yard only to have your Boswell publish his account in the *Strand* and take it all back again. Well, Doctor? What did you write about the child?"

I wracked my memory. The boy played a minor role in my account of the travails of Miss Violet Hunter, and there was not much I could offer.

"He was six years old at the time," I said. "His father had noted his penchant for whacking cockroaches. Miss Hunter described him as having a slight body with an unusually large head. I do recall she did not like him. He went back and forth between fits of temper and period of gloom. She said that he enjoyed inflicting pain on mice, birds, and insects. Spoilt and ill-natured; yes, that was what she called him. Spoilt and ill-natured."

"Right. Well then, according to the few neighbors we've been able to talk to, he not only stayed that way, he became worse. His father bought him a bow and set of arrows, hoping, one would guess, that it might get him out of the house and interested in the manly sport of hunting. Well, didn't the little devil become quite the expert archer, and he would go walking along the lanes and take shots at the neighbors' calves and colts, shooting arrows into them just to watch them scream in pain."

“How utterly wicked,” I said. “But it is not unknown. Children often exhibit cruel behavior. The most horrible creatures in Broadmoor all started the same way as children.”

“Right. Broadmoor, you say. I’ll get to that in a moment. When he was ten, he was shipped off to a decent school, but he was sent down after the Michaelmas term ended. They said he was constantly cruel and incorrigible. The usual things, you know, tacks on masters’ chairs, dead mice on other boys’ pillows. But then he set fire to the field house.”

“That would not be appreciated,” I said.

“Not at all,” said Lestrade. “After that, he was sent to a different school every year and was sent down as many times. Same offenses. Never questioned authority but could not stop being an evil little devil. That ended when he was sent to a school in Lancashire run by the Jesuits.”

“Stonyhurst?” I said. “The old priests there would not put up with much, from what I’ve been told.”

“Right. The story told in the village is that on his first day there, he walked into a classroom and went straight away and sat in the back row. The old father looks down and sees him and can spot trouble and tells him to come and sit at the front. Edward gives some excuse and doesn’t move. The priest tells him a second time, and again Edward mumbles something and stays put. Then the priest walks over, grabs the miscreant by his tie and collar, and with one arm hauls him out of his seat and pins him against the wall. With his face an inch from the boy’s, he holds a pencil up and says, ‘We’re not supposed to leave marks on the body. So, do you want this shoved up your left nostril or your right?’ From then on, young Edward does what he is told.”

“That is not surprising,” I said. “But I will warrant that he was far from having reformed in his heart.”

“Right you are, Doctor. Every week or so, something bad takes place. A dog was found drowned in the fountain pool. A cat was hung by its neck and dangled over the refectory tables. A calf was found writhing in pain in the farmyard, impaled from behind with a long, sharpened stick. And then a young girl, from the village, not much more than a child, was found beaten and bleeding and lying in the mud beside the River Ribble. Horrible things done to her body. She lived but will never be the same. Her attacker was masked, and she could not identify him.”

I shuddered, but Holmes now pressed Lestrade.

“And would I be correct,” he said, “in assuming that everyone suspected Edward of these evil deeds but could find no proof whatsoever?”

“Precisely,” said Lestrade. “But toward the end of the Lent term, that ended. Three of his classmates—ones who had bullied him, chevied him about the playground and beaten him over the shins with wickets—were sitting in a room, and Edward locked the door on them and set the room on fire. All three screamed in pain and terror but could not be rescued. Someone spotted Edward in the act, and he was arrested.”

“I recall that case,” said Holmes. “His name was not released to the press because of his age, but he was assessed by doctors, declared to be criminally insane and sent off to Broadmoor. I did not know that the culprit was one and the same Edward Rucastle.”

“Well, now you do. Being an enlightened and progressive country, we no longer hang those who are criminal lunatics, we compassionately lock them up and throw away the key. Edward Rucastle’s only way out of Broadmoor would likely have been in a casket when he died of old age.”

“Then how did he escape?”

“If I knew that, Holmes, along with the answer to every other question you’re about to ask me, I would not have called you in, now would I? That’s your job. So why don’t you get to work. You can start with interviewing the young madman if you want.”

“I believe I would prefer to leave that until later. I shall start with speaking to the others who were present. I would request that Dr. Watson meet the coroner in the morgue and participate in the autopsy. I assume that you will not object.”

Lestrade shrugged and sighed. “I’ve watched you long enough Holmes to know that you have your methods and we ours, and I will never understand yours. So, yes. Come and start your investigation. Edward will be taken to a cell in the local station, to be sent back to Broadmoor tomorrow morning.”

“If it makes no difference to you, please do not move him until tomorrow afternoon.”

Lestrade rolled his eyes and turned away from us.

“Whatever you want, Holmes. Are you sure you won’t need a week?”

“No. Not necessary. I expect to have solved the case by tomorrow evening. Kindly do not disturb the site any more than your men already have. I would like now to have a brief chat first with Mrs. Toller and then with Mr. and Mrs. Rucastle.”

“The Rucastle’s are upstairs. The widow is in her cottage. All three were attending church this morning in Winchester and have over a dozen witnesses. They’re all yours if you think they will help you solve the case.”

“They will.”

“Fine. I will see you at the inquest. The constables are at your disposal.”

The Tollers’ cottage was situated adjacent to the drive, a few yards from the Copper Beeches house. The exterior and small garden appeared well-cared for, and the dog pen, which I remembered and not-at-all fondly from our last visit, was mercifully abandoned.

In response to our knock on her door, Mrs. Toller shouted for us to come in. We found her in her parlor, sitting in a rocking chair and dressed in black, as one would expect of a recent widow. As we entered, she laid aside a book she had been reading, a recent novel by an American woman, Kate Chopin. I had not read it but had heard that it was quite controversial.

She remained seated and merely looked up at Holmes as he approached her. Though older, she was still the tall, strong woman who had been so unpleasant to Miss Violet Hunter over a decade ago.

“They told me you were coming,” she said wearily to Holmes. “I have already told the police everything I know. What do you want from me?”

“Only some answers to a few questions, if I may.”

“You may, but only if I ask you one first.”

“Kindly proceed.”

“What sort of incompetent fools do they have running that Broadmoor place who let a known, evil monster escape, come running home, and kill an innocent man? Answer me that, Mr. Holmes, the brilliant detective.”

“I fear I have no answer. However, I am making that a point in my inquiries with the hope that it shall never happen again.”

“Wonderful. But isn’t that a little late for my husband?”

“I fear it is, and all I can offer to you is my condolences. Now, may I continue?”

“Are you sure you would not be happier if you were to lock me up in a cellar for an hour first? That was the way you treated me last time, was it not?”

“Regrettably, it was, but necessary for the rescue of Miss Alice Rucastle.”

“Who escaped with no help from you, thanks to her husband. I can only hope you will not be so useless in whatever you are here for this time. What is it you want to know?”

Holmes let his gaze wander the room for several seconds before launching into his questions.

“Please tell me the recent source of your money. Your situation here has improved here quite significantly over the past two months.”

She looked quite offended.

“Has it now? That is a highly impertinent thing to ask. What possible connection can there be to Edward’s paying a visit and shooting my husband?”

“Even improbable connections are always possible,” said Holmes. “I could not help but notice your good fortune, and possibly Edward did likewise. The tea service in front of you is gleaming, and there is still a sliver of straw attached to the base that must have stuck to it when it was removed from the packing case. Your shoes are not only stylish, they were made by a skilled cobbler of fine leather, as were your husband’s. On your sideboard are fourteen bottles of select spirits, none of which has been opened. I can see at least a hundred pounds in recent purchases just from here. No doubt, I would find more if I were to inspect your entire house. It is, therefore, quite appropriate for me to inquire concerning the source of your funds.”

“Very well, if you insist,” she said. “Three months ago, my husband was successful in negotiating a significantly higher salary from Mr. Rucastle. We agreed to spend it on a few creature comforts that we have, of necessity, denied ourselves for the past thirty years.”

“Ah, yes, of course. Most understandable after all those years. But why the generous, large increase in your husband’s wages? Those items you have been able to purchase indicate that Mr. Rucastle must have doubled his wage or close to it.”

“You will have to ask him.”

“You mean, Mr. Rucastle.”

She gave Holmes a look of utter scorn.

“Unless, Mr. Holmes, you are in the habit of carrying on conversations with the dead, of course, I meant Mr. Rucastle.”

“Yes, of course. But wives often share knowledge of their husband’s affairs. I assume that you know the answer to my question.”

She sighed and again gave Holmes a scornful look.

“My husband drove Mr. Rucastle anywhere and everywhere he wished to go, including weekly overnight visits into Winchester. I am certain he knew every one of his employer’s secrets. You can draw whatever you want from that, Mr. Holmes. Now, are you finished?”

“I am, Mrs. Rucastle, and, again, please accept our sympathy and condolences.”

She said nothing in reply, and we departed and returned to the Rucastle house.

Mrs. Rucastle was in her sitting room, working on a piece of needlepoint. Although she had aged since our last visit and appeared wan and weary, she was still an attractive woman and not yet beyond the forty-year mark.

“I regret, madam,” began Holmes, “that I have to prolong the disruption of your daily routine with my questions, but they are necessary.”

She put down her work but did not look at him. “So, ask.”

“Why did your son come to visit this weekend?”

“He turns eighteen years old today. He wished to spend his birthday with his family. Do not ask me how he escaped the prison they keep him in as I have no idea. He is very clever and was intending to return to the prison unseen. If you wish to know more, you will have to ask him, although he is not likely to give you a truthful answer.”

“How well do you know your son, Mrs. Rucastle?”

She did not immediately answer. When she did, she spoke to the window in front of her. “I knew a baby boy many years ago who laughed and giggled and hugged his mother. There are times when that little boy reappears and talks and laughs, but those times now are rare. He was not very old when the child to whom I gave birth began to hide in the same body as a cruel and ill-natured creature. The doctors told me that his fragile mind had become sick, and he could not help what he did. The priests said he must have become possessed by a demon. Whoever the horrible creature is that now lives in my son’s body and mind, I do not know him at all.”

“Do you believe he could have killed Mr. Toller?”

“Anything is possible, Mr. Holmes. Before he was sent away, he relished inflicting pain on animals and people but never on those he was fond of, and it was pain he wanted to watch, never death.”

“And was he fond of Mr. Toller?”

“He bore him no ill. They got along well when he was a child. Of course, Mr. Toller was usually drunk and good-natured when he was in his cups.”

“You say he never killed, but he did cause the death of the students at Stonyhurst.”

“Yes, he did. But during one of his lucid moments, he told me that he had not intended for them to die, only to be terrified, scared to death, and therefore to treat him with respect knowing what he was capable of doing to them.”

“Yet Mr. Toller’s death appears to have been sudden. He died immediately without much more than a twitch or two before expiring. That does not fit with what you have said about your son.”

“Mr. Holmes, I have already said that anything is possible. When a young man’s mind cracks and is taken over by something horrible, something diseased, there are no explanations. Ask your friend here, the doctor. He will tell you the same.”

She was right. There is truly no way of understanding what takes place in a mind gone mad. Most who suffered in that way continued to manage their affairs but lived in abject poverty, outcasts from society. A tragic few turned to criminal behavior, not consciously responsible for their actions.

We found Mr. Rucastle in the room that served as his library and office. He scowled at us as we entered and did not get up. Holmes and I each took a chair from another part of the room, brought it in front of his desk, and sat down.

He was still prodigiously stout, and his chin, bearing some ugly scars, drooped even farther down over his collar than it had a decade ago. His hair had now all but vanished, and puffy bags bulged from under his eyes.

“You are,” he said, “no more welcome in my home than the last time you were here. My only regret is that Carlo was not free on the grounds to welcome you.”

“But then,” said Holmes, “we might have had to shoot him again to keep him from tearing your throat out. However, we have not come to ask you about dead dogs. As you know, we are here to inquire about your dead groom.”

His eyes, somewhat obscured by the folds of flesh around them, flashed in anger, but he said nothing. Holmes carried on.

“Some time ago, you gave Mr. Toller a substantial increase in his wages. Why did you do that?”

“I had assigned additional duties requiring him to work more hours. I am a fair employer.”

“And what were those additional duties?”

“He accompanied me to London as I am no longer able to manage the travel and baggage on my own. And when I stayed overnight in Winchester, he had to wait there until morning. Perhaps there are some other miscellaneous personal tasks that I now require assistance with.”

“On those overnight visits to Winchester, might they have involved your remaining from evening until morning in a room above the *Cathedral Chimes* tavern?”

“Yes, they did. Why—,”

He interrupted himself with a loud, scornful laugh, pounding the table several times in mirth before getting up and waddling to the door of the room. He leaned his head out and shouted down the hallway.

“Mrs. Rucastle! Could you please come and join me and this fool of an amateur detective?”

He waited until his wife appeared and then fetched her a chair and put it beside his.

“The brilliant Mr. Sherlock Holmes has deduced that Toller was blackmailing me over my nights above the tavern. What do you think of that, Mrs. Rucastle?”

The woman looked blankly at him and then contemptuously at us.

“I thought you might have noticed, Mr. Holmes, that my husband’s body is old, fat, and physically repulsive. He pays some poor woman in town to keep him company, and I am grateful beyond words for her services as it means he does not expect such services from me. My only concern is that he pay her enough to keep her at her post and not be tempted by more attractive offers.”

Rucastle laughed at us again, this time thumping his flashy palms on his wide thighs.

“You see, Mr. Detective, that is how you can make a marriage work. We provide each other with pleasant dinner conversation and otherwise live separate lives with occasionally shared activities; like this weekend, which began with a surprise visit by our poor demented boy on his birthday but has ended with the loss of my groom and a stupid detective who thought I was being blackmailed. Now, if you have no more imbecilic questions, Mr. Holmes, please be on your way before the police take you back to Broadmoor and leave Edward behind.”

Lestrade had left a constable with a dog-cart to attend to our needs, and he took us back to the *Black Swan*.

“Blackmail,” I said to Holmes, and we bumped along an hour before sunset, “would have been an excellent motive for Rucastle to get rid of Toller. But it doesn’t appear to have been a matter at all. Mind you, he was prone to showing off by writing large checks.”

“Not as they related to his extra-marital activities. There may yet be a reason that we know nothing about as of yet. But the truth will out. However, this case may take me longer to solve than I had expected. When are you participating in the autopsy?”

“First thing tomorrow morning. I shall come straight away back and report to you.”

“Thank you, that would be very useful. And now, let us hope that the kitchen is still serving dinner. This appallingly healthy country air has made me hungry.”

It was gone half-six by the time we reached Winchester, and both of us retreated to our rooms to prepare for supper. At seven, we met at the dining room.

“Good evening, Mr. Holmes, Dr. Watson,” said the head waiter when we entered. “We have been waiting for you.”

“And why were you doing that?” asked Holmes.

“Oh, not we ourselves, but there are two ladies at the table by the window who asked us to let them know as soon as you arrived. Come, please, let me take you to them.”

On the far side of the room, two women were seated, chatting with each other. On becoming aware of our approach, they turned and looked at us. Both were fashionably dressed in a way fitting to an attractive woman who was part way between thirty and forty years of age. What was striking about them, however, was their magnificent hair. Both had lovely rich, chestnut hair that was bound on top of their heads, except for a few locks and ringlets that hung down, adorning their faces. One of them had a complexion that was as freckled as a plover’s egg. The other’s skin was clear, pale, and almost translucent in its radiance.

“Good evening, Mr. Holmes, Doctor Watson,” said the freckled one. “We appear to meet again. Please let me introduce my friend, Mrs. Alice Fowler.”

“Good evening, gentlemen,” said Mrs. Fowler. “Please accept my belated thanks for the risks and danger you faced whilst attempting to rescue me. Oh, do be seated. You must be tired after such a long day. May we have a bit of a chat before supper?”

In the many years I have known him, I have seldom seen Sherlock Holmes at a loss for words. He was, however, struck dumb and sat down slowly, as did I, whilst staring in disbelief at Violet Hunter and Alice Fowler. Finally, he recovered his composure enough to state a demand.

“An explanation, please.”

“An understandable request,” said Violet. “Where shall I start?”

“The last we heard of you,” said Holmes, “you had become the head of a private school in Walsall, and you, Mrs. Fowler, and your husband had moved to Mauritius. Kindly start there.”

“Your information is correct, Mr. Holmes. Five years after my unfortunate sojourn in the Copper Beeches and three years after my appointment as the head of Walsall Ladies’ College, I was greeting the

mothers who came to register their daughters as new girls for the coming term. A woman approached me, holding the hand of a beautiful young daughter. What struck both of us immediately was identical color and texture of our hair.”

“I had returned,” said Mrs. Alice Fowler, “from Mauritius after my husband’s five-year posting. He had accepted a new position, a fine promotion, with the Board of Inland Revenue at their offices in Birmingham. We did not wish to live in that unpleasant city for reasons I am sure you can appreciate, but we were thrilled to find a lovely home and property in Walsall. There is a train every half-hour from there directly to the New Street station. I set out to find a good school for Emily, my daughter, and was directed to Miss Hunter’s. All the mothers in my neighborhood held it in the highest regard.”

“As you can imagine,” said Violet Hunter, “having started to chat as a result of our similar appearances—well, you probably cannot imagine that, being as you are a man and such immediate bonding is unknown to your half of the species—we soon discovered that the fates that had kept us within a few hours of meeting each other many years ago had now conspired to bring us together and we have become rather close friends.”

Mrs. Fowler now took over the narrative.

“One of the secrets of our souls we bared to each other regarded my brother.”

“Edward?” said Holmes, more than somewhat surprised.

“Yes, Mr. Holmes, my little brother. As a man who has never had a family, I would not expect you to understand the depths of love and compassion any older sister has for her little brother. He was constantly in my life every day for the first six years of his existence. When I was in Mauritius, we wrote letters to each other every week. After I returned to England, I visited him at his schools and, for the past three years, I have trekked down to Reading once a month to spend time with him at Broadmoor. I am fully aware of all the horrible things he has done, but he has never been anything other than loving and cheerful when we are together.”

“But you,” said Holmes, turning to Violet Hunter. “I distinctly recall your seeing him as a spoiled ill-natured creature and found him most unpleasant.”

“Yes, I did,” she replied. “But I came to understand that it was not of his own making. I have handled my share since then of troubled children. If they are malicious and show signs of madness before the age of seven, then either their parents are to blame, or they have been born with unbalanced minds. I started to change my memory of Edward and to see him in that light. It helped that I accompanied my friend, Alice, on several of her visits and found Edward happy to see me and utterly charming to spend time with. His mind, whilst it may be stricken, is otherwise brilliant.”

“Am I to gather,” said Holmes, “that you are suggesting that he used his brilliance to escape from Broadmoor, and you agreed to meet him here on the occasion of his birthday?”

The two women exchanged glances and shrugged ever so slightly.

“Not entirely, Mr. Holmes,” said Mrs. Fowler. “it would be more accurate to say that we helped him escape and brought him here.”

“You what!?” shouted Holmes. “That is a serious criminal offense. What were you thinking? How could you possibly have smuggled him out of that prison hospital?”

“Oh, it was not all that difficult,” said Mrs. Fowler. “We paid him a visit there a fortnight ago, and he begged us, very sincerely, to take him to his mother and father for his birthday. We agreed to but only if he promised to return on the Tuesday following. I procured a long ladder in Reading and, as you

know, I have had some experience in using one. At midnight this past Thursday, we took it to a darkened back corner of the grounds. Violet held it steady against the hospital wall whilst I climbed it. I sat straddling the wall, and with Violet shoving and my lifting, we hauled it up and over and slid it down the other side, where Edward was waiting. He then climbed up, we flipped the ladder back over and made our escape. On Friday, we took him to the Copper Beeches where he was able to spend his birthday with his parents.”

“I remained in Winchester,” said Miss Hunter. “As much as I was happy to assist my friend, I had no interest in ever seeing her father again.”

“Our plan,” said Mrs. Fowler, “had been to return to Broadmoor on Tuesday night and slip Edward back into the grounds the same way he escaped. He would then have found his way back into his room and been there on Wednesday morning and would pretend that he had never been gone. It might have driven the staff to distraction, but they are used to that happening. Mad people have a way of being deviously clever, do they not, Doctor?”

Holmes leaned back in his chair and looked back and forth at the two of them.

“Events,” he said, “did not transpire as you had expected,” he said. “and now a man is dead and Edward has confessed to killing him.”

“And that, Mr. Holmes,” said Edward’s sister, “is why we are here and speaking to you. We both are convinced in our hearts that Edward could not possibly have killed Mr. Toller. We are hoping, beyond praying perhaps, that you will help to prove his innocence.”

“And what possible reason do you have for believing as you do? The feelings in your heart are not of interest to me.”

“Since being confined to the hospital,” she continued, “he has not harmed a single person. He has been a model patient. That is a sign that he is on his way to overcoming his mental anguish.”

“Is it? I suspect that when one is housed with a hundred or more other people who are every bit as murderous or more so than you, one would be very careful not to offend any of them for fear of immediate and violent retribution.”

“You may be right, Mr. Holmes,” said Violet Hunter, “but all we can do is implore you to keep going with your investigation. I cannot forget the way you responded to my unproven feelings and intuitions when you raced to my succor. Please, Mr. Holmes.”

Whilst Sherlock Holmes may have trumpeted his reliance on reason alone, I had seen him respond to a woman’s intuition on numerous occasions. He now did so again.

“I can promise nothing. Things look dark for your brother. Unless tomorrow morning the coroner claims a different cause of death, Edward will be sent back to Broadmoor for decades to come. However, I will agree to stay here in Winchester and to continue my investigation for up to two more days. That is the best I can do.”

The women departed, and Holmes and I finally were able to take our dinner. Several times in between his desultory mouthfuls, he shook his head in disbelief.

“In the name of all that’s holy, Watson, what could possibly possess an otherwise intelligent woman to put her reputation, her marriage, her future ... everything, at risk and commit a serious criminal act? If you were to ask me, that behavior is utter madness.”

“Other people have called it familial love and loyalty,” I said. “Fortunately, it has been a known form of irrational behavior since the dawn of time.”

On the morrow, Holmes stayed in his room whilst I observed and assisted at the autopsy of Mr. Toller. We agreed to meet for lunch at one of the better restaurants in Winchester and combine whatever data had been gleaned.

“I have spent the morning thinking,” said Holmes. “So kindly let me begin.”

“The floor is yours.”

“The arrow was still protruding from his chest when you began. Correct?”

“Correct.”

“Was there any bruising around the site of the puncture?”

“Surprisingly little.”

“From what I could see, the arrow entered the body between the third and fourth rib, cutting through the pectoral muscle in the place where Americans are taught to place their hand on the heart, although the heart is not in that place.”

“Correct. Had it pierced one of the chambers or a major artery, blood would have spurted all over the place. But the bleeding was limited.”

“Did the arrow miss the heart and aorta all together?”

“Not entirely. It gave a nick to the wall, but it was not penetrated. The man’s heart was severely enlarged, and the walls had thickened.”

“What might have caused that?”

“Years of heavy drinking. It is a result commonly shared with cirrhosis of the liver. A drunkard’s disease.”

“Fatal?”

“Almost always. The local chap and I agreed that Toller was not long for this world.”

“How long?”

“A month or two. Maybe six. Maybe an entire year, but in his remaining few months on earth, he would be invalided, confined to bed, gasping for breath.”

“If the arrow missed the heart and aorta, did it do any damage?”

“Oh, yes. It punctured the lung.”

“And is a wound like that fatal?”

“Often, but not immediately. Death could take anywhere from an hour to a day, or a slow recovery is now possible using the advances of modern medicine.”

“Indeed? Now then, the arrow: did it protrude from the back of the body?”

“No. It stopped before it got that far.”

“Blocked by hitting a rib that was attached to the spinal cord?”

“No. It just stopped.”

“Interesting. Pray, continue, my friend,” he said.

“Nothing more to go in the report,” I said. “The coroner concluded that the puncture to the lung was sufficient to be the cause of death, and that is what he will report to the inquest.”

“Ah, but that was not your conclusion, was it?”

“I took a look into the mouth and down the throat.”

“Did you now? And what did you find?”

“The lips of the mouth and the clothing around the neck smelled distinctly of alcohol. But the mouth itself contained vomit and sputum.”

“And did you observe the contents of the stomach?”

“No. The local chap called an end to the procedure, saying that he was satisfied. It was his show. I was only a guest who he had agreed to join him. He wanted to get home for lunch. So, that was it.”

“Duly noted,” said Holmes, “that only a doctor could work up an appetite during any autopsy, but never mind that. What were your conclusions?”

“I did not share his opinion of the cause of death.”

“Yes. Go on.”

“I suspect that he was poisoned and that an arrow was stuck into his chest after the fact.”

Holmes leaned back and lit a cigarette. “Yes, but by whom and how shall we prove it?”

He then disappeared into his thoughts until the waiter came over and offered us a card with a list of spirits, wines, and digestifs.

“If you gentlemen,” the waiter said, “would enjoy something before your lunch, we have an excellent selection of fine wines, sherries, and spirits.”

I looked the card over and was mildly distressed.

“Merciful heavens. These are all fine brands, but, my goodness, they are charging an arm and a leg.”

“What do they have in stock?” asked Holmes, but I could see his mind was elsewhere.

“The usual fine brands. Macallan and Johnny Walker Blue from Scotland. Mount Gay rum. For Brandy, there’s Hennessy. Belvedere Vodka; ah that is one you do not see often.”

“We saw it yesterday.”

“We did? Where?”

“On the side table in the Toller’s cottage. So were all those others, and a few more.”

His eyes suddenly popped open, and he reached across the table and snatched the menu card out of my hand. For a moment, he glanced up and down it and then looked back at me.

“Watson, my friend, I need your imagination, what there is of it. Suppose for a minute that you are a drunkard.”

“I am no such thing. I might enjoy—,”

“No, no. I need your imagination. Suppose you were a drunkard, and three months back had come into some money and had purchased a large stock of select spirits and wines.”

“Yes.”

“Would you, being a drunkard, have set your purchase aside and not touched it?”

“Of course, not. I would have started straight away to enjoy it.”

“As would I. But would you have completely finished off one type of spirits, one complete bottle, before starting on another?”

“No. No one does that. You enjoy a light wine at lunch, a whiskey in the afternoon, a sherry before dinner, a claret during supper, and a brandy afterward. You might even start on two different brands of whiskey or rum and enjoy them on alternating days. Even a drunkard enjoys some variety in what he consumes.”

He said no more. He put the card down on the table and stood up.

“Come Watson, no time to lose. We need to catch a cab immediately.”

“Where are we going?”

“To the Copper Beeches.”

Once in a cab, Holmes ordered the driver to move as quickly as possible. We arrived at the gate of grounds that now appeared deserted.

“Are we going to the house?” I asked. “The cottage? Where?”

“The midden.”

“Good Lord, Holmes. What for?”

“Manor homes in the country all have one, don’t they? Where is it likely to be?”

“Usually you can follow a path from the kitchen and back into the woods,” I said. “Why are we going there?”

“Please, save your questions. We have no time to waste.”

There was a cart path leading from the kitchen into the forest behind the house. It wound back for about fifty yards until we reached a depression. As it was August, the smell of the waste from the kitchen, the stables, and the lavatories all combined to make the area quite unpleasant. Flies were buzzing everywhere, and I could see at least a dozen rats scurrying over the putrid piles of garbage.

Holmes stood at the edge, gazing into the refuse.

“Ah ha!” he shouted and began to wade into the slough.

“Holmes! What are you doing?”

He ignored me and pushed on. Some four yards in, he bent over and began pulling objects out of the slop. He tucked first one, and then another two under his arm and, grinning triumphantly, waded his way back to me.

“Holmes, those things are filthy. You are ruining your suit.”

“It can be cleaned,” he said, “as can these.”

He walked over to a patch of grass and laid three bottles down on it. One by one, he wiped them off, exposing the labels on what had been bottles of select spirits.

“There were two more,” he said, “but they were broken. These shall suffice.”

In succession, he held the mouth of each bottle to his nose and then handed them over to me.

“Give these a sniff. What do you smell?”

I sniffed each one. “Nothing. They have been rinsed clean.”

“Indeed, they have. Who do you know, Watson, who rinses out a bottle spirits before pitching it in the rubbish?”

“No one. Milk bottles, of course, but whiskey, rum, brandy...they are just tossed out.”

“Precisely. Come now, back to the Copper Beeches before the livery service arrives.”

He ran back down the path and directly to the Toller cottage. A steamer trunk and two large suitcases were on the porch, and the door was open. He walked inside, and I followed.

“Halloa! Mrs. Toller!” he shouted. The lady of the house appeared with a small valise in her hand.

Seeing us, she appeared to be thoroughly unsettled. “What are you doing here?”

“What about you?” Holmes said to her. “Not staying for your husband’s funeral? We have a cab hired. Do you need a ride back to the church?”

“The dead can bury the dead,” she said. “Fifty years of my life are already over. I am not about to spend another day here. Would you?”

“No,” said Holmes, “but then I would not have poisoned my spouse of thirty years before leaving.”

From under his arm, he procured the empty bottles, and one by one stood them up on the coffee table.

“Would you mind answering a question or two? You can, of course, refuse, but you will be subpoenaed for the inquest and have to answer them there anyway.”

She sat down on her sofa and glared at him. He continued.

“I shall repeat the question I asked you yesterday. How and when did you come into some money recently? And how much? If it was a bequest, the answers are a matter of public record.”

“Four months ago. My aunt passed away and left me eight hundred pounds.”

“And for the first time in your life, you were able to enjoy a few moments and items of luxury, were you not?”

“That is what happens when one is left some money.”

“But your husband started immediately to spend it. Not all on himself. He bought you the tea service, but he spent at least a hundred pounds on liquor and new boots and goodness knows what.”

“He did. You already said that yesterday.”

“And you knew that if he kept going, every farthing you had received would soon be gone. Isn’t that right?”

“If you say so.”

“And you knew that if you let it go on, your one chance at having a decent life would go up in smoke, or at least in drink.”

She said nothing. Holmes continued.

“So early yesterday morning, before going to church, you put cyanide into each of the opened bottles of spirits, knowing that he would consume several ounces from at least one of them before you returned. When you got home, you found your dead husband and moved quickly to rinse out all of the bottles and toss them in the midden. Then you took one of Edward’s arrows and pushed it into his heart. And then you sounded the alarm.”

“Three empty bottles,” she said, “will have no standing in a court. Even I know that.”

“I am sure you do, Mrs. Toller. And I know that what you did was not entirely ruthless. Your husband was dying, was he not?”

She nodded.

“You knew, didn’t you, that he would be gone within a few months but not before he had consumed all of the money. So, you hastened him on his way. Spared him his suffering, so to speak.”

“I will admit to nothing, Mr. Holmes. But some people might conclude, a jury perhaps, that anyone who so acted did so out of compassion.”

“Framing young Edward Rucastle for your husband’s murder was hardly an act of compassion. How very convenient that he came to visit for the weekend.”

“Edward was on his way back to Broadmoor regardless,” she said. “What had he to lose?”

“He has been improving and may have had a chance to be released. Now that has been taken away from him.”

She smirked at Holmes.

“I have watched Eddie Rucastle from the day he was born until he was taken away. His mind is not merely mad, Mr. Holmes. He is bad. With enough baths in hot and cold water or whatever they do now to lunatics, they might be able to cure his madness. They will never cure his badness. He will be in Broadmoor until he dies. If anyone has helped to make that certain, then that person has done England a favor. Now, if you will excuse me, I hear my livery service arriving. My address in London is on the kitchen table. You or the police can find me there if you need me to testify. Good day, Mr. Holmes, Doctor Watson.”

She stood up and left the cottage. A livery service loaded her baggage onto a wagon and departed down the driveway, past the clump of copper beeches, and out of sight.

Holmes stood and watched the empty driveway as the dust settled. He slowly took out a cigarette, lit it, and continued to gaze past the beeches.

“You never did get to speak to the boy,” I said. “Do you still want to?”

“No. A man should know his limits and not venture beyond them. I am capable of engaging with the cleverest, the most imaginative and devious of criminal minds. But when it comes to a mind fractured and destroyed by madness, I am beyond my abilities.”

He took several more puffs on his cigarette and then turned to me.

“What do you say, Watson. Has he any hope? Is it true that one can recover from madness but not from badness?”

“Not entirely. Some men finally mature and grow up. An entire Empire has that hope for our new king. There have been some wonderful stories of redemption, divinely ordained and otherwise. But for the great majority of humanity, I fear that evil combined with insanity present in youth extends until death. It has been thus since the dawn of time.”

The Adventure of the Tea-Stained Diamonds

An original new Sherlock Holmes story.



HE WAS NOT MUCH MORE THAN A CHILD. I estimated his age at fourteen. He was a handsome boy, with the raven-black hair and deeply tanned skin color that marks a person who came from the lands under the Raj. His young body was beginning to show the signs of an emerging well-made sportsman. From his place, lying on his back on the pavement, his dark-brown eyes stared up at the morning sky ... lifeless.

Behind his head was a pool of blood, now darkened and congealed.

“Was he one of yours, Holmes?” demanded Inspector Lestrade. “One of your, whatever you call them, *Irresponsibles*?”

“Yes, Inspector. He was one of my Irregulars.”

“What was his name?”

“The other lads called him *Sahib*. He had no other name.”

“What in heaven’s name did you have him doing that ended up with his getting shot in the head?”

“He was engaged in surveillance,” said Holmes.

“Of what?”

“Related to the recent robbery in Hatton Garden.”

“Hatton Garden? We have not called you in to help on that. Who did? The shop owner?”

“No.”

“Then who?”

“No one.”

Lestrade paused his questions and glared at Holmes.

“Holmes, that is beyond belief! You decided to poke your nose into a case for the sole reason to show off how clever you are and show up Scotland Yard. That’s what you did, right?”

I looked at the face of my unusual friend. He had paled and seemed to be biting his lip to restrain any overt emotion.

“The case presented some interesting aspects which I thought to be challenging.”

“Well now, isn’t that just splendid? You want to strut your cleverness and let all of London see your superiority to the police, and what do you have to show for it? A dead child.”

Holmes made no reply. Lestrade continued.

“And you have no idea where we can contact his family?”

“Most of the boys do not live with their families. They are street urchins.”

“Let me enlighten you, Mr. Sherlock Holmes: every one of your boys has a mother somewhere, and when one of them is murdered whilst working for Mr. Sherlock Holmes, the police have to find her and tell her.”

“If I can assist you in that matter, I shall do so.”

“No, Holmes, you cannot. But I will tell you what you can do. You can stop sending children out in the night and having them turn up dead in the morning. And here’s something else you can do. You can drop everything you are doing and report to Scotland Yard whatever you have learned about that robbery. And do not expect a farthing from us for doing so.”

Lestrade turned abruptly from us and motioned to the ambulance workers to lift the boy’s body into their wagon. Two constables came forward with a bucket of water and a scrub brush and did their best to remove the blood from the pavement.

Holmes did not move. He stood frozen in place until the police had departed, and the gaggle of curious onlookers dispersed. Then he turned to me, his face was ashen, and his lower lip trembling.

“When you looked at the body, was it clear what had happened?”

“It was. He had been shot in the back of his head by a revolver held against his skull.”

“He must have seen something.”

We had been standing on the pavement of Bloomsbury Way, adjacent to the garden, and we hailed a cab to take us back to Baker Street. Holmes was silent as we made our way through Fitzrovia and up to Marylebone Road. As it was early on a Saturday morning in August, the traffic was light and pedestrians few. The newsboys were out, and the posters carried the headline: *£1000 Diamonds Stolen from Hatton Garden. No sign of thieves!* The brazen robbery of two days ago was being talked about everywhere. Lacking much clear evidence, the police had hypothesized that sometime during the night of Saturday, 22 August 1885, an agile robber had scaled the back wall of a building in Hatton Garden, north of St. Cross Street, skillfully opened a section of the roof, descended into the shop of a select jeweler and collected a sack of uncut diamonds. He then must have covered his tracks and escaped back through the roof. There were no witnesses, and Scotland Yard seemed to be utterly befuddled.

Holmes reasoned that if a particular method worked for a thief once, he might try it again. So, he had dispatched his Irregulars to spend the warm summer nights spread out across the rooftops of both sides of Hatton Garden, from Clerkenwell Road to Grenville Street. All except one had returned with nothing to report.

On arriving at Baker Street, Holmes got out of the cab and blew a few blasts on his whistle. Moments later, a small collection of street urchins had gathered around him, listened to whatever he had to say to them, and scampered off.

“I told them,” he said, as we climbed the stairs to 221B, “to bring Wiggins to me. I have to learn about this boy, this *Sahib*.”

Within ten minutes, a tall, scrawny boy with a dirty face, appeared. He touched his forelock and gave a small bow to Holmes, exuding an air of superior insolence.

“You sent for me, Mr. Holmes, sir.”

Holmes told him about the death of the boy they called *Sahib*. The face of the Captain of the Irregulars changed from unsavory to shock, to pain. Tears appeared in his eyes.

“Oh, Mr. Holmes, I am sorry. It was my fault. I should never have let him join your force, sir. He did not belong. He wasn’t one of us. He knew nothing about living by his wits, sir.”

“Who was he and where did he come from?”

“He showed up at the end of June and said that his Summer Half term had ended, and he wanted to join Sherlock Holmes’s Irregulars.”

“His term? He attended a school?”

“He did, Mr. Holmes, sir. That is why we called him *Sahib*. He was Indian, sir, but he was a right proper little toff, he was, sir.”

“What school?”

“He said it was something like *eating*, sir.”

“And he came and lived on the street with you and the rest of the boys all summer?”

“Well, yes and no, Mr. Holmes, sir. Just during the week, sir. On Sundays, he had to go home for dinner with his gran, and then on Monday morning, he would come back, all cleaned up and such, sir.”

“Where did he live? Do you know? And what was his true name?”

“Somewhere past Hyde Park, sir, where all the toff families live. His name was something like *taming*, like what they do to horses, Mr. Holmes, sir.”

“Where was he stationed last night?”

“It was for two nights, sir. At the corner of Clerkenwell and Hatton Garden, sir. North end of the street. The south-east corner. There was a dozen of us, Mr. Holmes, sir. We had one of us on every third roof so we could cover the entire street for you, sir.”

Holmes gave his young captain a shilling, dismissed him, and slowly collapsed into his armchair.

“I shall send a note to Lestrade. *Tamang* is a common name of well-to-do Indian families who have homes in Belgravia. That should be enough to go on to find his family. Perhaps, Watson, you could do that for me. Would you mind?”

He looked and sounded low, and I readily agreed to his request. As I was leaving the room to find a local page boy, I watched him lean forward in his chair and bury his head in his hands.

It was approaching ten o’clock in the morning, and the streets were now alive with people and vehicles. Whilst I was out on Baker Street, a newsboy was shouting the most recent headline: *Second robbery in Hatton Garden! Second diamond robbery! Thieves get away with a fortune in diamonds and jewels!*

I purchased a copy, ran back up the stairs, and thrust it in front of Holmes. He looked up, scanned the headline, and stood up.

“It says that the second shop to be robbed was at the intersection of Clerkenwell and Hatton Garden. That is beyond coincidence. If you can spare the time, Watson, would you mind accompanying me there?”

Two police wagons were already standing at the curb beside the intersection. Constables guarded the front doors of several of the shops, not permitting customers to enter. The shop facing Hatton Garden bore signage showing that it belonged to *Simon Shapiro, Gold and Diamonds*. Beside it was a small café offering Kosher lunches. Facing Clerkenwell Road, the nearest shop bore the address of *Hiram Maxim, Useful Household Devices*, and the one beside it was a small bank offering currency exchange at good rates.

Holmes approached a constable who appeared to be in charge of the brigade and identified himself.

“Right, Mr. Holmes. We were expecting you. The Inspector told us that you had better show up, and if you didn’t, we were to go and fetch you and tell you to get to work.”

“Did he? Well, now I am here. Could you tell me, sir, what happened last night?”

“There’s no mystery, Mr. Holmes. The two skylights were still open this morning. Some acrobatic fellow comes up out of the shop of the inventor fellow on Clerkenwell, and being a bit of a billy-goat, he works his way across to the neighbor’s roof—that would be the roof of the diamond shop—opens the skylight, and lets himself down. Whilst inside, he removes a whole sack of fine jewelry, and then he climbs back up and across the roof and over into the other skylight and must have hidden inside that shop until the owner comes along this morning and opens the door and he waits until the owner isn’t looking and lets himself out and Bob’s your uncle.”

The constable opened the door of the diamond merchant’s shop and let us in. The interior was modest, bordering on dull. Rows of display cases filled the room, most with glass that was cleaned and polished. None of those near the front of the store had been disturbed. Two in the back corner had their tops open and were empty.

In addition to two constables, I counted five people in the store, all of whom appeared to be from the same family. Behind the counter, an elderly man with a kippah on his head and a prayer shawl draped over his shoulders, sat in a chair. Quietly, he rocked back and forth, and when he leaned back, I could see that his lips were moving slowly and silently.

Of the remaining four, three were men and one a young woman. Two of the men were young, not more than twenty-five. The older was middle-aged and, judging from the obvious family resemblance, it appeared that he was the father of one of the young men and the young woman. All three of the younger people were tall, slender, and attractive, and dressed in a fashionable way as one might expect of salespeople in a shop that caters to Londoners of significant wealth.

Holmes walked over to the elderly man and dropped to one knee beside him. Laying a hand on the old fellow’s shoulder, he spoke to him quietly.

“Mr. Simon Shapiro. My name is Sherlock Holmes. I am terribly sorry for what has happened to you, but I give you my word; I will work without ceasing until I catch whoever did this to you and, Lord willing, return your missing property.”

The old man stopped rocking, opened his eyes, and looked at Holmes.

“*Adank*,” he said, and closed his eyes and returned to his prayers.

“Thank you, sir,” said the middle-aged man to Holmes. “I am Lemuel Shapiro. That was very kind of you. My father opened this business forty years ago when he came to England from Leipzig. He has built a good business and is trusted by all who have dealt with him. This is the first time anything like this has happened, and he is very distressed.”

“And understandably so,” said Holmes. “Forgive me for asking, but is your business insured against this type of loss?”

“In part. But what was stolen was from our most expensive cases, we do not yet know the exact value. It was well over three thousand pounds. It is far beyond the limit of our insurance.”

“I am sorry to have to ask blunt questions, but why were those pieces not securely locked away?”

“They were, Mr. Holmes. These display cases have been specially made. They have strong metal plates that close to cover the glass and are secured to the floor. The locks are the best that can be provided by Chubb. Whoever picked the locks was a highly skilled thief. You can see for yourself.”

Holmes took a cursory look at the open cases and then turned back to Lemuel Shapiro.

“Will your shop stay open?”

“Yes, it will. Such wealth as our family once had is gone. But my father built his business once; he will do it again. This time my son and daughter and nephew and I will be there to help. If God grants my father another decade on the earth, he will again see his business prosper and his family secure, and he can die in peace.”

“May God grant your family that blessing,” said Holmes. “With your permission, Mr. Shapiro, I shall inspect the premises and then take myself up to your roof.”

Holmes took his glass from his pocket and began a methodical inspection of the shop, taking time to note the scratches on the locks and on the woodwork beside them. He posed several questions to the son and daughter, Saul and Malka, and to the nephew, Helmut.

The son and daughter had grown up in the business. The nephew had moved to London recently from Leipzig and was learning the trade of the diamond merchant. All of them seemed utterly despondent and worried about their beloved grandfather, but they could offer no insight concerning the theft.

From the ground floor, we ascended the stairs to the third floor, and then up a ladder to the skylight.

As soon as we were on the roof, Holmes walked over to the central chimney at the south-east corner of the building.

“This unfortunate boy, Sahib,” he said, “must have hidden behind this chimney and watched as the neighbor’s skylight opened. He would have observed the thief climb up from the neighbor’s side, cross over to this building, open the Shapiro glass and descend.”

“And come back,” I said, “soon after with a sack of jewels. But then he must have spotted Sahib and decided that he could not leave any witnesses alive. His first robbery went off like clockwork, but this one went off the rails. Something like that, eh, Holmes?”

“No, my dear Watson, not like that. Not at all.”

He then turned and started back to the skylight.

“Holmes, are you not going to look in the other shop, the neighbor’s?”

“Why would I want to do that? The way across to his portion of the roof is treacherous,” he said and climbed back onto the ladder leading into the diamond merchant’s.

For a few minutes whilst we were examining the premises where the second theft had taken place, Holmes’s spirits seemed to lighten, but once up on the roof and observing where young Sahib must have been hiding, he lapsed back into despondency. His mood did not improve on the drive back across London to Baker Street, and it was a half-hour after we returned to our parlor that I finally poured two glasses of brandy and held one in front of him.

“Holmes,” I said, “you are my friend, and I sympathize with your sorrow over Sahib. But if you want me to help, you must tell me what you observed.”

He rolled his eyes up at me and sighed. “Oh, very well then, what do you want to know? I should have thought everything was obvious.”

“To you, maybe. But not to me. I could see nothing other than what the constable explained, and we know about Sahib. A skilled thief pulled off two robberies, and during the second one saw the boy watching him and killed him.”

“There were two thieves. The first was a skilled professional. He will have to wait for a few days until we confront the second, the amateur imitator, and return the jewels to the old man.”

“How do you know there were two?”

“Elementary, my friend. A skilled thief does not advertise his methods. In the first robbery, the police are not at all certain how he gained access to the shop. They are theorizing that he came through the roof, as they see no other possible way. In the Shapiro case, the thief flaunted his method, leaving the skylights wide open, a sure sign of an amateur.”

“But he picked those Chubb locks, and you acknowledged that they are the best available.”

“How do you know he picked them?”

“From the scratches. You saw them. I saw you looking at them.”

“Honestly, Watson. Any thief who is sufficiently skilled to pick one of those locks is not so clumsy as to leave scratches on the lock and the wood up to an inch away. They were deliberately put there by one not particularly bright man to deceive a similar man into believing that the locks were picked.”

I did not appreciate the sub-text of his comment but was more concerned with the logic that I was obviously missing.

“But he knew what to take. He ignored the standard pieces and went straight for the expensive ones.”

“Another mark of someone who does not know what he is doing.”

“What?”

“Please, Watson. Let me put it simply, and perhaps it will help you understand. If I were to hold up two paintings in front of you, one by Stubbs and one by El Greco, could you tell them apart?”

“Of course, I could.”

“Brilliant. If I were to hold up two paintings both by El Greco in front of an expert, Mr. John Ruskin, for example, could he tell me if one was a true piece by the artist, and one a skilled forgery?”

“Certainly. He is an expert in European painting. He could detect those small inconsistencies that tell one artist from another.”

“Very good, Watson. There is some hope for you yet. It is the same with cut diamonds and fine gold mountings. There is a small group of master craftsmen throughout Europe, and one or two in America, who can cut and mount diamonds in pieces of jewelry that sell for hundreds of pounds. They all know each other; they all have distinct styles, just as a painter does; and they can identify one of their esteemed colleague’s pieces in a minute. The sole means of selling jewelry of that price and quality is through the store of a master jeweler who has an impeccable reputation, and no respected store would touch such stolen goods. They would run for the police.”

I pondered that one, and then a light went off in my brain.

“Ah ha. So that is why the smart thief knew to take nothing but uncut diamonds.”

“Precisely.”

“But if thief number two was such a dumb ox, how did he get the cases open?”

“With a key.”

“A key? One of the family? No. That seems highly unlikely. They are as thick as—,” I stopped what I was about to say as my metaphor did not seem particularly appropriate.

“Who it was and how they obtained a key is still unknown. Possibly a member of the family; possibly not. It is too early to hypothesize. I will, however, devote my full attention to finding out, as the same person must have killed the boy. Now, if you will excuse me, I have work to do.”

He departed from Baker Street, and I did not see him until the following morning. At seven o’clock, when I came out from my bedroom, he was already at the breakfast table. He stretched out his long arm as I approached, handing me the morning’s newspaper.

“On page three,” was all he said,

I sat down, opened to that page, and read the item about Sahib.

Boy from Belgravia Murdered in Bloomsbury

Scotland Yard reports that a student from Eton College was found shot in the head beside Bloomsbury Garden. The victim has been identified as Master Rajiv Tamang, of the Tamang family of Lowndes Place in Belgravia. No reason was given for his tragic death nor what he was doing so far from his home in the middle of the night.

“It is a terrible loss,” said Inspector G. Lestrade, “and our thoughts and prayers go out to his family. We were even sadder when we learned that the boy’s father, Mr. Parijat Tamang, the respected owner of the Royal Tea Company of Darjeeling, passed away this spring. It has been a very hard year for this wonderful Christian family.”

We expect that Inspector Lestrade and his capable team at Scotland Yard will leave no stone unturned as they seek to bring the perpetrator of this horrendous crime to justice.

The funeral for young Rajiv will take place at 11:00 a.m. on Monday, 31 August at St. Mary’s, Bourne Street. Visiting the family to express condolences is scheduled for Sunday afternoon from two through six o’clock in the church hall.

I placed the newspaper back on the table. “What a devastating year for them. I hope the mother has other family members to support her.”

“They are Indian,” said Holmes. “Their families are all very close and strong. In some ways, that is good. It also means that many people were close to both the father and the boy, and the pain will be felt all the more.”

“Will you go to the funeral?”

“To the visitation, yes. I cannot escape that obligation. However, as I was the one who sent the boy to his death, I fear my presence at the funeral would be a distraction. Might I impose on you, my friend, to accompany me on Sunday afternoon?”

“You know I will do that.”

“I do indeed ... and I thank you.”

The summer of '85 was drawing to a close. The final Saturday of August opened with a warm and sunny morning that brought families out to London's great parks to enjoy a final picnic on the lawns, or to the shops of Oxford and Regent Streets to buy all those new clothes and shoes that children and youth need in order to return to their schools.

I took myself out for a walk from Paddington down to Hyde Park and along the Serpentine, where I stopped, sat on a bench, and read for a glorious hour. Perhaps it was the novel I was reading that brought on an attack of conscience, but it struck me that I should try to drag Holmes out of his tobacco infested study and force some fresh air upon him. With that purpose in mind, I walked back through Marble Arch and over to Baker Street. I was feeling positively chipper as I strode north and stopped to buy a newspaper from the newsagent at the corner of Marylebone. I looked up and down the rack of his offerings, trying to decide which version of the events of the day to read. My eye stopped, and then my heart stopped when I saw the front page of *The Evening Star*. The headline read:

Amateur Detective Uses Child as Bait. Child is Murdered.

I ripped the paper off the rack and read the story. It named Sherlock Holmes as the one who had sent the young Etonian, Master Rajiv Tamang, out at night to spy on criminals. The boy had been shot in the head whilst undertaking his mission. “This amateur detective,” the article opined, “surely has blood on his hands.” It quoted Inspector Lestrade as saying, “Mr. Holmes has some excellent abilities as a detective, but what he did with this boy was unconscionable. Scotland Yard has many trained officers who are capable of carrying out professional surveillance. We would never send a boy to do a man's job.”

My soul groaned, and I plodded the rest of the way to 221B.

“I have seen it,” said Holmes when I came in.

“That was beastly of Lestrade,” I said.

“No Watson, it was honest and fair of him even if hard. The boy was killed on my assignment. There is nothing I can do about that. If you have come to try to cheer me up, please do not bother.”

“Are you still going to go to the visitation tomorrow?”

“I have to. It would be despicably cowardly of me not to. I have no expectation of you, my friend. Feel free not to join me. I, for one, would not want to be seen on the streets with me and would rather do anything than accompany me to the child's casket.”

“Don't be silly, Holmes. I will come by for you at two.”

When I came by the next day with a cab, Holmes was waiting. He climbed inside, his face set like a flint to endure the afternoon. He was silent until we were a block from the church.

“If the mother and the aunts call me every vile name in the book, Watson, do not seek to defend me. If the cousins and uncles beat me black and blue, do not stop them. I deserve whatever punishment they administer. But I do thank you, my friend, for standing by me. There is no doubt in my mind that you are the only man on earth now willing to do so.”

I do not recall in the four years since I had met him that I had ever seen him so despondent. I tried to think of something to say to lighten his mood, but no words came.

The church hall was busy with people, primarily members of London’s Indian community who had departed the land of the Raj to live in the land of the Empress. Some, those of the Hindu faith, were dressed in spotless white; the Christians in black. No one seemed to recognize us, for which I was grateful. We joined a long queue of people standing in line to express their sympathy to the family. An older man, Sahib’s grandfather, I assumed, was the first family member to receive the visitors. Beside him was an attractive middle-aged woman in a dark sari. Even with her coffee-colored complexion, one could see her reddened eyes.

“Good afternoon, Mrs. Tamang,” I said, “I am Dr. John Watson, and this is my friend and colleague, Mr. Sherlock Holmes and—,”

That was as far as I got. The woman lit up like a sunrise and gasped. “Oh, Mr. Holmes, oh, I am so glad you could come. We were all hoping you would so that we could thank you in person for what you did for our poor Rajiv. His time working for you, his last two months on this earth was such a joyful time for him. We miss him so but he died a happy boy. We shall always be grateful.”

I stared at this woman and then turned around and looked at Holmes. He had a look of complete confusion on his face and mumbled a few incoherent words of thanks.

The woman turned and looked down the line of family members and, in a rather loud voice, announced, “This is Mr. Sherlock Holmes.”

Five Indian men in formal suits and five women in dark saris looked up and smiled at him.

“Oh, Mr. Holmes,” continued the mother, “goodness gracious, please do not leave before we have an opportunity to talk. I must greet all these people behind you in the line, else I would keep you here for an hour and talk about Rajiv.”

Then she looked down the line to a man who was of the age of a university student.

“Bimal, son, you will leave the line and talk to Mr. Holmes. Thank you, son.”

The young man, who looked remarkably like the dead boy I had seen lying on the pavement just a few days before, stepped out and greeted us.

“Please, Mr. Holmes, Dr. Watson, come. Some tea and some sweets?”

Holmes looked at me, and I back at him.

“It is so very good to meet you,” the young man said to us. “My brother was so very, very sad when my father died just after Christmas. The school sent us notes that he was failing his tests and that he had dropped off of the cricket team. He was overcome with brain fever. We did not know what to do for him. When he came home at the end of term, my mother was desperate. He would have been moping and crying in his room all summer long if it had not been for you and your Irregulars.”

Holmes had recovered his wits enough to ask, “How did you know about me?”

“Oh, Mr. Holmes, sir, we are Indians. We know things. One Indian man hears about you, and he tells his wife, and she then tells twenty or thirty of her dearest and closest friends, other wives, and soon everyone from India living in London has heard about you. My mother heard these stories, and she said a prayer, and she believes that the Good Lord told her to take Rajiv up to Baker Street and ask if he could join your Irregulars. This was a very very strange idea. No boy from India, especially an Etonian, should be seen with urchins, but he was so terribly sad, and Mother was desperate. Rajiv, too, was very hesitant, but he went with her because he is a good boy, and he found one of your lads, Captain Wiggins he called him, and asked if he could be an Irregular for the summer. He said yes, bless him, and next thing we knew, the black cloud that had been over my brother’s head vanished, and it was as if his soul was on fire. Every time he came home, we could not get him to stop talking. It was, ‘I did this for Mr. Holmes,’ or ‘I did that for Captain Wiggins.’ He stayed out all night at times and slept with his friends along the banks of the Thames. Oh, he had such adventures. It was the finest summer of his life. We miss him terribly, but it has been a very great blessing to us that his last days before going up to Heaven were so filled with happiness. He was thrilled to work for you, Mr. Holmes.”

Sherlock Holmes was nonplussed. The look of utter bewilderment had not left his face, nor mine, for that matter.

“You are very kind,” he said to Bimal. “I am sure you saw what was said about my responsibility for your brother’s death in the newspaper yesterday, and I have come—,”

“Oh, Mr. Holmes, sir. Come, come now. We know that no one can believe what they read in the newspaper. In India, if they print the date correctly without lying, we think that the editor has had an attack of conscience. On, no, Mr. Holmes, we all knew straight away that you and the Irregulars had nothing whatsoever, nothing at all to do with my brother’s death.”

“If I did not, then who did?”

Now a troubled look came over the young man’s face.

“You do not know? Rajiv said nothing?”

“No. Other than seeing him with the other boys, we never spoke directly.”

“Oh, dear me. We all thought by the way he spoke about you that he and you were confidants. Oh my, that was how much he adored you, Mr. Holmes. I am sorry. We should have understood.”

“It is I who does not understand,” said Holmes. “Tell me, who then was responsible for Rajiv’s death if it was not connected to his surveillance in Hatton Garden?”

He was about to respond when the level of chatter in the room suddenly dropped. I looked around to see what had demanded everyone’s attention. Three people stood in the doorway. One was a tall, young Indian woman, clad in an elegant black sari. Behind her were two enormous Lascars. The men waited by the door as the woman, with every eye in the room on her, came forward to speak to the mother. I could not hear what was said, but the reception was perfunctory and obviously cold. The woman now walked directly toward us. She was strikingly beautiful and appeared to be utterly and completely poised and confident.

When she arrived at the spot where we had been chatting with Bimal, she nodded briefly to Holmes and me.

“Forgive me for interrupting, gentlemen,” she said, sounding entirely sure of herself. Then she turned to Bimal.

“Bimal, I am so very sorry.”

“Thank you, Anna,” the young man replied. “It was very brave of you to come.”

“I had to. I wanted you to know—,”

“It is all right, Anna. I know.”

“Thank you, Bimal. I pray God that this has ended. I will see you on Broad Street. Until then.”

“Until then, Anna. Godspeed.”

Every eye in the room then followed the woman as she departed. Once she was gone from sight, the conversation started up again, and people carried on as if nothing had happened.

I knew that both Holmes and I wanted to shout: *What was that all about?!* But it was apparent that we were not going to find out. Bimal turned back to Holmes.

“Regarding your last question, Mr. Holmes, I am very, very sorry, but I cannot say. If you do not know, then I beg you, please do not ask. It is a very private family matter. We thought, from the way Rajiv talked about you that he had confided in you. Now I see that we were mistaken. But it is not for you or anyone beyond the family to know. Now, if you will excuse me, sir, there are other members of my family who would like to meet you and express their gratitude.”

He turned and called out to the other couples who had now finished their time in the receiving line. They came over to us, and one by one expressed their thanks to Holmes for the abundance of thrills and happiness he had brought to the all-too-short life of their cousin, or nephew, or whatever relationship fit the particular relative.

As they were shaking Holmes’s hand or graciously bowing to him, Mrs. Tamang came over and joined them.

“Mr. Holmes, I have brought something with me from Rajiv. I was hoping and praying that you would come this afternoon, so I could give it to you. Rajiv would have wanted me to.”

“Yes, Madam, that is very thoughtful of you.”

She handed Holmes a thick envelope.

“On the night before he died,” she said, “Rajiv came back to the house at two o’clock in the morning. He had run all the way across London from Clerkenwell. I was startled to hear him come in and thought he would be exhausted, but he was on fire. He kept saying that he had such an exciting night and that he had to write his report for Mr. Sherlock Holmes. I made him some cocoa, and he went up to his room and wrote for an hour. I told him that he had to go to bed, but he insisted that he had to return to his post and complete his shift, and so I walked out with him, and we found a cab to take him back. That was the last I saw of my son. This is his report to you, Mr. Holmes. It is the last thing he ever wrote, and he wanted to hand it to you in person, but as he is no longer with us here on earth, I am doing it for him. I think he is up in heaven looking down and thanking me.”

“Thank you,” said Holmes. “I expect it is well written in fine, polished prose.”

To my surprise, she laughed. Many of the people in the room turned and looked at her in wonder.

“Oh, I am sorry. I should not laugh. I fear you will find that my son had a very active imagination. You will have some work to do to separate the fact from the fiction. He loved to read and write, but he had a future as a novelist, not a judge.”

“My dear friend,” said Holmes, looking at me, “writes in exactly the same way. I will read Rajiv’s work and treasure it.”

In the cab on the way home, Holmes was a different man. The intense gloom had departed, and he was as close as he ever came to cheerful.

“Watson,” he said, “I now have two cases to solve, which will double my workload, but I feel as if an enormous burden has been lifted from me. I might even be persuaded to waste what little savings I have and treat the two of us to dinner at Simpson’s. What do you say, old chap?”

“Are you not wanting to spend the evening reading the report that Rajiv, formerly Sahib, sent you?”

“Oh, yes, yes, of course. But that should not take long and is likely of no consequence now that it appears his death was not related to his work as an Irregular. As soon as we get home, you can read it aloud to me whilst I pour the brandy. How about that?”

As soon as we were back up in 221B, Holmes gave me Rajiv’s report, and I settled back in my customary armchair as he attended to the decanter and glasses on the mantle.

“He appears,” I said, “to have written in a hurry but still with a good neat hand. Are you listening, Holmes? Here is what he wrote:

It was a dark and stormy night; the rain fell in torrents, except at occasional intervals, when it was checked by a violent gust of wind which swept up the streets (for it is in London that our scene lies), rattling along the house-tops, and fiercely agitating the scanty flame of the lamps that struggled against the darkness. Through one of the obscurest quarters of London, and among haunts little loved by the gentlemen of the police, a brave boy, evidently of the higher orders, an Etonian, climbed his way up the treacherous bricks and downpipes of the building—the very building in which some horrific, murderous crime might take place that very evening ... on his watch.

“He wrote that?” asked Holmes.

“His mother did say that he had an active imagination and a habit of borrowing. Let me continue.”

He found his hiding place, a desolate niche behind a tall, black chimney, and drew his greatcoat around him as he shivered in the elements.

“It was August,” said Holmes. “The moon and stars were lovely that night.”

“Holmes, please...”

In the distance, he heard the great bells of St. Paul’s ringing out the hours of the night. Eleven, then twelve. He was dog-tired, but this was a critical mission. The future of the Empire was in the balance. As a spy planted behind enemy lines, he knew that he must avoid capture at all costs, and if he were to be discovered ... no, he could not think about that.

A few seconds after midnight, in the depths of the night, he heard it. First, it was only a few faint thumps, but then a low groan, and then a creaking sound. It sent shivers up and down his young spine. The sound was coming from his left, but there was nothing there. Was it a ghoul? A spirit sent by the evil lord of the enemy? Then he saw it. A skylight was moving, slowly, slowly upward. The moonlight danced off the glass—,

“The storm had cleared?” said Holmes. “How convenient.”

“Holmes, enough.”

The skylight continued its arc until it was fully extended, and then a pale hand emerged from the abyss below. At first, the courageous boy thought the hand was floating, detached from any human form, like the fingers of Nebuchadnezzar’s feast—,

“Wasn’t it Belshazzar’s?”

“Yes, Holmes, it was. I doubt it matters.”

Behind the pale, ghostly hand came an arm, hidden in the pitch darkness, and then a body, a long, lean body. Spider-like, it crept out of the abyss below the skylight until it was standing on the roof. For a few seconds, it peered out over the rooftops of London, contemplating its evil plot. Then it started to move. With inhuman skill, it clawed across the opening, working its way to the roof of the adjacent building on the brave boy's right. Once there, it knelt down and slowly, deliberately, lifted the skylight of that roof and, like a ghostly ghoul, descended.

The boy was fighting the terror in his soul. Should he run now and report to his Captain? No. He would remain at his post. The ghoul would reappear. He knew it in his heart. An hour passed, then another. He heard the great bells of St. Paul's ring out twice. He summoned his courage and stayed at his post. A few fearful minutes later, he heard the sound again. First, the specter of the hand, then the arm, and once again the long, lithe spider-like body slithered out of the skylight to his right. It stood, again looking out over the great metropolis of London as if savoring its success. Underneath its arm, a portfolio case was tucked. What was in it? No doubt, the plans for the attack the defenders of the faith would launch against the evil enemy at dawn. The human arachnid scampered back across the divide between the buildings, returned to the skylight on the boy's left from which it had first emerged, and disappeared back into its hole. Now the boy must act. Now, before it was too late. He worked his way back down the loose downpipe; any misstep would send him tumbling to the pavement far below. But he had to get back to his camp, write his report, and submit it to his captain, knowing that he, in turn, would take it to the noble Emperor. He had done his duty.

"That's it," I said. "Quite that budding young novelist, wouldn't you agree, Holmes?"

He did not reply. He took the report from my hands and read it through again.

"Get your hat and stick, Watson. And your service revolver. Come, now, please."

There was an urgent tone in his voice, and I hurried to my room to get my gun. By the time I returned to our parlor, he was already on his way down the stairs. I caught up to him on the pavement of Baker Street when he was shouting for a cab.

"Spitalfields!" he shouted to the driver.

"Who lives there?"

"The spider."

The cab rattled and bumped along Marylebone, then Euston, then Pentonville. He refused to say anything else until we were working our way south on City Road, and I demanded that he explain what we were doing.

"Did you not listen to what you were reading?"

"Of course, I listened. What did I miss?"

"Where was he hiding?"

"Behind the chimney."

"You were up on that roof. In what corner was the chimney?"

"The ... the south-east."

"There were two skylights. Which one did the thief climb out of?"

"He said it was the one on his left, and he scampered over to the building on the right."

"Precisely. Now, please, Watson, do try to think."

I was confused, but I forced myself to concentrate and remember my visit to the roof. I put myself mentally behind the chimney and imagined looking to my left to the skylight—

"He came out of the wrong building!"

“Excellent, Watson. The police assumed that the thief had been hiding inside the neighbor’s shop, climbed out, crossed over, and descended into the old man’s diamond store. As I should have expected, the police got it backward. He came from the jewelry shop and robbed the neighbor.”

“But what about the jewels that were taken.”

“A blind. I expect that we shall recover them soon.”

Once we reached the Spitalfields Market, Holmes shouted an address on Brick Lane to the driver. The cab stopped in front of one of those large terrace houses that had been divided into rooms for the refugees, primary those of the Hebrew faith, who had been moving from the Continent to London over the past few decades. I followed him up the steps and into the small vestibule.

“Who lives here?” I asked.

“Helmut Shapiro.”

“The nephew?”

“Is there another Helmut Shapiro? His suite of rooms is on the third floor. Have your revolver out when I knock. If he is in, we will rush past and into his suite. You will keep him at bay whilst I search the premises.”

“What if he is not there?”

“I shall pick the lock, and then I will search.”

There was no response to our knock on the door. Holmes gave me his hat and stick to hold whilst he dropped to his knees, and, holding the tools of the locksmith in each hand, he opened the door in a matter of seconds. He stood up, smiling, smugly.

“Compared to the locks his grandfather had on the jewel cases, this was child’s play. Come. We need to find a sack of precious jewelry and a file folder with pages of technical drawings.”

“Of what?”

“The secret plans of his neighbor’s invention.”

“Of what?”

“The Maxim gun.”

Once inside, it took Holmes no more than a minute. Both the cloth sack with the fortune in perfectly cut and polished diamonds, beautifully set in gold, and the file were in the top drawer of a small desk. Holmes tossed me the sack, put the file under his arm, and turned toward the door. As he did, we heard footsteps coming up the stairs. Holmes motioned me to move back into the hallway where we could not be seen.

The footsteps stopped outside the door, and we heard the key enter the lock. It was followed by a loud cry as it had become apparent that the door was unlocked. It crashed open, and a tall, young man rushed in. He immediately ran to his desk and threw open the top drawer. Then he froze, staring at the empty drawer. Then came a long, low groan of agony as the fellow leaned on the desk and then collapsed into the chair beside it.

“How much,” said Holmes, quite loudly, “did Kaiser Bill offer for these?”

Helmut Shapiro jerked around and stared at the two of us. I had my revolver out and pointing directly at him.

“Young man,” I said, “do not move, or I will have to shoot you.”

Terror and panic were written across his face. His hands were trembling. "You... you," he sputtered. "You have to give those back to me."

"So, you can deliver them to the German generals in Berlin?" said Holmes. "I am afraid not."

"No, no. Not the plans. The jewels. Please, I beg you. You cannot take them."

"I have no use for them. I will take them directly to Scotland Yard."

The young fellow groaned, and I could see tears in his eyes.

"Please, I was going to put them back in their cases tonight. I would never steal from my family. It will kill my grandfather if he learns that I stole from him. I don't want them. I never wanted them. Please, let me return them."

"They were a ruse?"

"Yes, that's all. I swear. I have to put them back."

"And you used them to make it appear as if a thief had come from Mr. Maxim's shop and into yours. And when the police then sealed off his shop, it allowed you to come and go for two more nights to complete your work of copying the plans."

The miserable fellow looked up at Holmes and uttered a feeble, "Yes. Please, keep the plans. I failed. But let me put the jewels back. They do not have to know it was me. Then you can arrest me, put me in prison, or just shoot me."

"I have no interest in shooting you, Mr. Shapiro. But you must tell me why you would do something so foolish? Why risk your family, your future?"

He looked up at Holmes and then sat up straight and glared at him.

"Do you know, Mr. Holmes, what a Maxim gun is?"

"Yes, of course, I do."

"Do you know what the much-improved model, the Maxim-Vickers, can do? No? Well, let me tell you. It can fire off nearly one thousand rounds in sixty seconds. Mr. Holmes, I am a loyal citizen of Germany. If any country were to go to war against Germany, my countrymen would be cut to ribbons. Whatever happens, the English have got the Maxim gun, and we have not. Would your English generals hesitate to use such a weapon against us? *Nein*. Not for one second would they do that. I was not paid a single Mark to copy the plans. I have acted for the protection of my homeland."

"The agents of the Kaiser approached you?"

"Yes. They knew about the new gun. They learned that my grandfather's shop was the neighbor to Hiram Maxim. They came and asked me if I would go to England to help him and, when the opportunity arose, copy the plans. The idea of using the jewels for a ruse was mine. It almost worked. How did you know?"

"One of my Irregulars, a courageous boy if I do say, was stationed on the roof. He watched you and reported."

"Working for you? I read about that in the newspaper. The boy who was murdered?"

"Yes. And if you are revealed as the thief, I am quite sure that Scotland Yard will immediately arrest you and charge you with his murder."

"But ... but I did not do it. I would never murder a child. What sort of monster would do something like that? You cannot let them arrest me for such a crime. It would bring shame to my entire family, here and in Leipzig. It would be so much worse than even being a jewel thief."

“It would take some time, but you would be exonerated eventually, and then sent to prison for the theft.”

“That would destroy my family. My grandfather would die of humiliation. I cannot let that happen. Do whatever you want to me, Mr. Holmes, but do not destroy my family.”

“You might have thought of such consequences before you agreed to be the Kaiser’s spy.”

“I thought I would succeed. I was sure I would succeed.”

Holmes said nothing and closed his eyes. Helmut Shapiro looked at him and then at me. I gestured for him to be patient.

Holmes opened his eyes. “Is your grandfather’s shop still open at this hour?”

“Today is Saturday. It is closed all day.”

“Excellent. Pack your bags. Pack up everything you have in these rooms. You have ten minutes. We shall return the jewels, and then you will leave England. And do not even think about returning. Move. Now.”

Fifteen minutes later, Helmut Shapiro, Holmes, and I were in a cab that took us from Brick Road back to Hatton Garden. We stopped at the intersection of Clerkenwell and descended.

“Open the door,” said Holmes, “and then give me your key.”

The young thief did as ordered.

“Now open the cases from which you took the jewels and give me those keys.”

“Let me put them back,” said Helmut. “They were all in order. I will put them back the way they were.”

As Holmes and I stood over him, he put all the stolen pieces back in the case. Holmes closed it and locked it. We departed the shop, and Holmes locked the door.

“If you take a cab straight away to Saint P., you can catch the Southeastern to Dover in time for the night crossing to Calais. Goodbye, young man. I expect that I shall never see you again.”

Helmut vanished into the first cab to come by.

“Holmes,” I said. “Surely, you are not going to let him get away with what he did.”

“I will file a report with the German Embassy exposing his failures and excoriating him. The Kaiser’s men will be waiting for him when he returns.”

“That could be harsh, but appropriate.”

“I agree. Now then, my friend, Simpson’s will still be open.”

Holmes managed to relax and enjoy our dinner, but by the time the dessert course was served, he was off again.

“The second jewel theft has now been solved. Whoever killed the boy is still at large. Finding him and bringing him to justice comes next. I will start tomorrow to devote my attention to that. Somebody knows something.”

“Tomorrow is Sunday, Holmes. You are entitled not to work on the Sabbath.”

He leaned back and lit his pipe. “My ox has fallen into a pit. Please finish your dessert. I have work to do.”

I saw nothing of Holmes the following day, nor during the day on the Monday. He arrived back on Baker Street that evening and seemed chipper enough as he consumed what had once been a hot supper.

“Speak up, man,” I said to him. “Where have you been? What have you learned?”

“I have spent all day in The City, mostly at the Stock Exchange. What do you know about Darjeeling tea companies, Watson?”

“Not much at all. There’s Royal Darjeeling Tea and Empire Darjeeling Tea, and that is all I know.”

“Well then, would you like to hear a story?”

“As long as you keep to scientific reason and avoid being sensational, pray, go ahead.”

In between mouthfuls, he recounted a tale.

“Once upon a time, well, to be more specific, in the 1840s, a fellow named Archibald Campbell—,”

“I know who he was,” I interrupted. “My *confrère*. He was an army surgeon.”

“The very one. He started planting tea in the hills of Darjeeling, quite successfully. A decade later, the British land agents, in their infinite wisdom, granted large tracts of land to some Indian farmers to plant tea gardens. Of course, being British, they gave the best plots to Anglo-Indians, respected Christian families. But not wanting to appear discriminatory, they gave equal shares to those families who were Roman Catholic and to those who adhered to the Church of England. One of the Anglican families was the Tamangs.”

“I now know that name as well.”

“As do I. They received grants for gardens south of the townsite and became singularly successful. A Catholic family by the name of Gurung received plots north of the town. They became equally successful.”

“Go on,” I said, refraining from reminding him that it is impossible to be both singular and equal.

“The two families became first intense and subsequently fierce rivals. In 1867, something happened, some tragic event that ended with one of the family members from the Gurungs being killed. No one was arrested or charged, but the finger of blame was pointed at a young man, one of the Tamangs. A month later, that man was found behind a restaurant in Darjeeling with his throat cut. Since that day, they have fought their version of the Wars of the Roses with a revenge killing after revenge killing.”

“But they are in England now. Surely that type of barbaric behavior can be stopped.”

“No, it cannot. Ten years ago, both families realized that the profits from tea were made not in the growing and processing, but in the packaging, distributing, and selling. Those latter processes take place in England and abroad, not in the hill country of India. Both families moved their headquarters here from India and have become even more successful and much wealthier. Every year or so, a member is murdered or disappears and is assumed to have been done in. No one expected that a child, the boy, would be targeted, but he was. The hatred and obsession with vengeance has not abated.”

“Can you find who killed Rajiv?”

“Possibly, but even if I do, it will not end the killing. I have to break the cycle.”

“How?”

“I do not yet know, but I will find a way. Providence, it would seem, has landed me in the midst of this, and I have no choice but to succeed. And for today, my friend, that is the end of my story.”

“No, Holmes, it is not.”

“What do you mean?”

I went over to the stack of newspapers that had arrived that day and extracted the pink one, The Financial Times.

“First page. Lower right,” I said.

Tea Mogul Dies in his Sleep

The City learned this morning of the death last night, apparently from natural causes, of Mr. Prashant Gurung, the Managing Director of the Empire Tea Company. Further details have not yet been released by the family, but the reaction on the London Stock Exchange was immediate. It came as a surprise only to those not familiar with the world tea industry that the share price of Empire Tea rose by one pound six upon the trading floor’s hearing the news. The reason, of course, is that traders all know that control of the vast company now passes to Miss Anna Gurung, the younger sister of Mr. Prashant. Although she is still a student at Somerville College, Oxford, it is suspected that she has been the true genius behind the company for the past two years. Mr. Gurung has led the company with a steady hand since assuming control six years ago after his father died, but he has been far from imaginative and has been criticized by some as highly risk-averse. Miss Anna Gurung is said to be the opposite. Further details on this story, sad for the family but with a silver lining for shareholders, will be made available by this newspaper as they become known.

Holmes shook his head. “That did not take long.”

“Poison?”

“Quite probable.”

Throughout the entire month of September, Holmes came and went from 221B and chatted amiably about the weather, the Labouchere Amendment, the Blackpool tramway, and whatever else came to his mind. He had not taken on any new cases, or at least none that he deigned to speak about with me, although he did seem to be spending an unusual amount of time out on Baker Street conversing with his beloved Irregulars. All that changed on the first of October.

“The Michaelmas term begins next week, does it not?” he asked.

“Yes, why?”

“Might you be free to join me for a brief visit to Oxford?”

“When?”

“This weekend. You are not booked with patients, are you?”

Early on the morning of Saturday, 3 October, we caught the train from Marylebone to Oxford. By nine in the morning, we were sitting in the cozy front room of the Randolph Hotel, enjoying tea and scones.

“Are they both here?” I asked Holmes.

“Bimal is meeting us in front of the King’s Arms in half an hour.”

“Is he aware of your plan?”

“Not a clue.”

“And Anna?”

“Even less.”

“And you are sure it will work?”

“Not at all. But if I do not do something, another half dozen or more good people will be dead within the next three years.”

We walked the several blocks from the hotel past Balliol and Trinity to the pub. It was serving breakfast to those students who had arrived two days before the official start of classes. The air was electric with the sense of anticipation that accompanies any opening weekend of a new school year. Students and professors alike were pedaling carelessly along the streets, their robes flowing out behind them. Young men were greeting friends they had not seen since the end of Trinity. A much smaller number of young women from Somerville and Lady Margaret were poking into the shops and trying to ignore the clumsy efforts of the male students to impress them.

We waited outside the pub, and on the stroke of nine-thirty, Master Bimal Tamang came walking across the intersection of Broad and Parks.

“I received your message, Mr. Holmes. You said it was imperative that we meet. Would you mind telling me what this is all about?”

“Please, Mr. Tamang, come inside and sit down. I assure you that it is of pressing importance and cannot be postponed. Please, sir. Follow me.”

Holmes spoke with a tone of authority, and the exceptionally wealthy managing director of an exceptionally large firm followed him. Holmes walked to a table in the back where a young woman was sitting and poring over several books of ledgers. Miss Anna Gurung looked up when Holmes was standing beside her. She appeared shocked and not a little offended.

“You will have to excuse my lack of etiquette in not apprising you of this meeting, Miss Gurung, but it will not take long, and I promise that it is in your best interest. Mr. Tamang, kindly be seated.”

The young fellow sat slowly and hesitantly. He looked over at the young woman and shrugged.

“Anna, I have no idea—,”

“Then I shall explain,” said Holmes. “For the past month, I have been gathering data on your families and your firms. The barbaric cycle of revenge murders that has gone on now for twenty years has to come to an end. If it does not, then the information I have assembled indicates that it will not only continue but is bound to escalate beginning this fall. The two of you now control your respective firms. You have the power to make it stop. I ask that you listen to my recommendation. If you choose to reject it, we shall part company. Will you agree to that?”

“Mr. Holmes,” said Anna, “I know who you are, and I do not question your good intentions. However, I am not at all comfortable with your aggressive demands. You are being rude, and I do not like this at all.”

“I did not expect you would, Miss Gurung. Nevertheless, please listen for just one minute. I will read off a list of five names, and I simply ask that you tell me if you know who these people are.”

Without waiting for an answer, Holmes unfolded a piece of paper and began to read.

“Dibya Gurung, Bulu Gurung, Jamling Gurung, Amar Gurung, and Tripti Gurung. Do you know these men?”

“Of course, I know them. They are my uncles and cousins.”

“And Bimal, do you know these men? Dinesh Tamang, Binay Tamang, Navneet Tamang, and Raju Tamang.”

“Yes. They are my uncles and cousins. What is the meaning of this?”

“My surveillance of your homes, offices, and factories over the past month has revealed that these five names of the Tamang family are on a list within the Gurung family as targets for being killed in the next round of revenge murders. The names on the list I read to you, Miss Gurung, came from the homes, offices, and factories of the Tamang family and have been decided upon for the same purpose.”

“Mr. Holmes,” said Anna, “this is an outrage. Surely you do not expect me to believe that. How could you possibly know what was being talked about within our walls? Either you prove what you are saying now or leave.”

“Over the past month, you have hired twenty-four of either my fine army of Irregular boys or their sisters. They have worked for you as chambermaids, office boys, scullery maids, assistant grooms, gardeners’ peons, housekeepers, nursemaids, pages, and houseboys. You consented to hire these young workers because they agreed to work for you for a wage well below the going rate. They did so because I supplemented their income to a level above the market as well as providing them with clean clothes and soap. They have kept their eyes and ears open and have reported faithfully to me concerning all aspects of your personal and corporate lives. I assure you, the list of names targeted for death is accurate.”

“You ... you have been spying on us,” sputtered Bimal, turning red with anger. “Get out of here!”

“I will, but before I do, I omitted one name from each list. Would you like to know?”

“Fine,” said Anna, loud enough for most of the pub to hear. “Tell us and be gone.”

Holmes looked first at Bimal and then at Anna.

“Yours. Both of you.”

For the average Englishman, it is difficult to know when a man or woman from India is turning pale with fear, given their darker complexion. But widening of the eyes and involuntary dropping of the lower jaw are usually good indicators. These changes happened in the faces of both of the young people sitting at the table. Holmes continued.

“I have done nothing over the past month but study your situation. I can see only one way to bring this senseless cycle to an immediate end. It requires, however, a radical solution.”

He paused.

“Go on,” said Anna, speaking just above a whisper.

“You must agree to merge the two firms and announce the same straight away.”

Both of them looked stunned. Holmes started to say more, but Bimal held his hand up.

“Please, Mr. Holmes. This is between Anna and me.” And then the two of them just sat and looked at each other, their intense gaze into each other’s eyes interrupted by the occasional small nod. Anna spoke first.

“The share value would jump immediately by at least twenty percent.”

“Maybe twenty-five by the end of October.”

“We could organize an additional share offering in November. The new shares could be floated at three pounds six. Would that work?”

“We could offer two lakh of new shares,” said Bimal.

“Three, as long as they have limited voting rights. That would bring in over one million pounds in capital.”

“We could use that to buy the Marybong and Pussimbing gardens in the East.”

“And the Happy Valley and Rungneet gardens in the West,” said Anna. “The administrative staff could be combined and reduced by a third. The factories reduced by half, and 1886 could be the most profitable year yet.”

Bimal nodded his agreement. “If you would not mind taking care of all of the importing, packaging, distribution, and sales here, on the continent, and in America, I could look after the property management, production, and processing.”

“That would be good. Your drying ovens are newer than ours. We will close our plant and use yours,” said Anna. “What about the packaging plants?”

“Yours are better. Should we eliminate one of the brands and just have either Empire or Royal?”

“No, no. Keep both. One can be put on sale one month and the other the next. The tea is the same, and the English think that they are connoisseurs and like to fight over their favorite even if there is no difference.”

“What about America?” said Bimal.

“We just put the dust off the floor into their teabags. What do you do?”

“The same. Even one hundred years later, they are likely to throw it into the Boston harbor.”

“Anything else come to mind?” asked Anna.

“Not now. The details we can work out later.”

The two of them reached across the table and shook hands. Then they turned to Holmes.

“We have an agreement, Mr. Holmes,” said Bimal. “Anna and I will announce our engagement tomorrow, and we will be married before Christmas.”

Now it was Holmes’s turn, and mine, to be shocked beyond belief.

“What! No, no, no, no,” he sputtered back. “No. I am not suggesting that the two of you get married, only that you merge the firms.”

Now it was their turn, young though they were, to look at Holmes as if he were marginally above the level of imbecile.

“Mr. Holmes,” said Anna in a highly condescending tone. “We are Indian. A firm is a fiction. The only thing that matters is family. Firms and companies are created to limit a family’s liability. Bimal and I each have controlling shares of our family’s assets. We are the firms. There is one way and one way only for your suggestion to work and that is for us to marry.”

Here, I felt compelled to intercede.

“But surely, you ... you should ... you will want to get to know each other and fall in love before you think about marriage.”

“Dr. Watson,” said Bimal. “Since the dawn of time, a man and a woman have married based on the mutual benefit they will bring to their families and their villages. It has only been in the past century in England, America, and Europe that people have become so foolish that they decide to base the fundamental unit of society on something so fickle, so inconsistent as romantic love. India has retained its common sense. Marriages are decided by families and, if all goes well, as it usually does, you build a life together and fall in love along the way.”

“Now look, the two of you. I am going to speak to you as a medical doctor. Marriages need more than sensible business arrangements. What about your families? Will they be happy with this ... this merger?”

“My dear Doctor,” said Anna, “whether we like it or not, we are now the heads of our families. We pay respect to all of our elders, but we own by far the majority of shares in the family enterprises. We do not need to seek permission. We give it to ourselves.”

“Fine,” I said. “All well and good. Now, I do not wish to be indelicate or embarrass anyone, but good marriages also need a generous amount of physical affection. Are you sure that the two of you are compatible in that regard?”

Now it was my turn to be embarrassed. The two of them gazed at each other and ran their eyes up and down each other’s torsos.

“Doctor,” said Anna, “there will be no worries in that department.”

On Monday, 12 October, in the year of our Lord, 1885, the announcement of the merger of the two tea companies, to be known henceforth as the Royal and Empire Tea Company Limited, appeared in the financial sections of all of England’s newspapers. The announcement of the engagement of Miss Anna Gurung and Mr. Bimal Tamang appeared the same day in the social pages. The shares of both companies increased in value by thirty percent.

The wedding was scheduled for mid-December, at the end of the Michaelmas term. It would be a stellar event.

There were no more murders. It became known that any employee who did not demonstrate complete loyalty to the new company and its owners was in danger of having his path of promotion blocked and his Christmas bonus denied. Those whom Holmes strongly suspected of having been involved in past murders were either sacked or transferred to an insignificant company warehouse in New Jersey.

On the day after the wedding, Holmes and I sat by the hearth in 221B, still feeling overfed by the wedding meal and passably satisfied by the way this case had concluded.

As we sat there, he handed me a note. It was from Lestrade at Scotland Yard and informed Holmes that the thief from the very first robbery in Hatton Garden still had not been apprehended and asking if the Yard might contract for the services of Mr. Sherlock Holmes to assist them in their quest.

“What do you think, Watson? Should I take it on?” he asked.



Notes for *The Adventure of the Tea-Stained Diamonds*.

The story was inspired by the report of the safe deposit robbery in Hatton Garden that took place in April 2015. See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hatton_Garden_safe_deposit_burglary. Six British chaps, senior citizens all of them, spent Easter Weekend drilling into a vault in Hatton Garden and made off with an estimated £200 million in gold, diamonds, and jewelry.

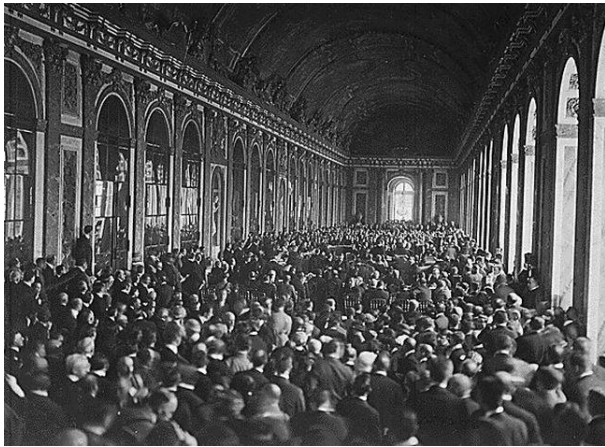
On reading about the robbery, I learned that during the 1880s, Sir Hiram Maxim had a small factory at the corner of Hatton Garden and Clerkenwell Road. It was there that he invented the Maxim gun, the first fully automatic machine gun. It was subsequently improved as the Maxim-Vickers model and became the incomparable weapon of British Imperialism. Variations of its design were used by all sides during the First World War.

Dr. Archibald Campbell, an army surgeon in the Indian Army, first planted tea seeds in Darjeeling in the 1840s. The results were highly successful, and many tea gardens opened in the years following. Darjeeling tea is still among the most prized of all the tea of the world. I had the opportunity to visit Darjeeling and Kalimpong several times during the 1980s and returned to Canada bearing numerous packages of tea that were given to me by friends there.

One of my friends in India described the 25 million Anglo-Indians, of which he was a member, as “an everlasting monument to the adultery of the British Raj.” Many of them now live in London, other parts of the UK, and all over the earth.



The Adventure of the Suicidal Sister



ON EASTER SUNDAY OF 1919, Lady Lillian Assherton attempted to take her own life, a second time.

Her first attempt was in the fall of 1917 when Her Ladyship, recently widowed, received news that both of her sons, officers in the Loyal North Lancashire Regiment, died at Passchendaele.

On that occasion, she had put a noose around her neck, tied the rope to a chandelier, and tried to hang herself. The chandelier became detached from the ceiling and crashed down upon her, rendering her unconscious and inflicting numerous cuts and injuries.

Her household staff rushed her to Barts, and she slowly and painfully recovered. Along the way, she decided that the Good Lord had intervened and that it was not yet her time to depart from this veil of tears. Her mills in Lancashire were critical to the war effort, and, after the death of her husband, she had been left to manage them, a task she undertook with locomotive energy. She would just have to carry on.

For over a quarter of a century, I had been her personal physician. She first came to my office in her late teens when she completed her schooling. Although not of aristocratic lineage, she came out during the season and, by dint of her beauty and charm, was immediately the recipient of several marriage proposals. She chose the handsome and wealthy Enoch Assherton, Lord Cliffside, of the ancient family seat of Prestwick. They divided their time between the estate and the surging metropolis of London.

I had assisted in the birth of her two sons, Edward and Roland, and had attended to their few medical needs as they progressed through Eton. By the time they moved on to Oxford, I had retired from my medical practice, but, like so many Barts Old Boys, I had been called back to service once the war broke out. Our young doctors had been sent off to the front to attend to the needs of our soldiers, much as I had done nearly forty years earlier in the Second Afghan War.

I stayed on at Barts after the Armistice. Britain was short of everything, including doctors. Scores who had served in the war had died or were grievously injured. Others were so severely diminished by shell-shock that they could no longer function as physicians. New recruits from our medical schools had dried up, and it would be several years before our ranks could be replenished.

Upon learning that Her Ladyship had been admitted to hospital, I informed the administration that, as her former physician, I would accept responsibility for her care. I hurried up to the room in which she

had been placed, only to find her unconscious from heavy sedation. The note on her chart was brief and read:

Patient ingested mixture of strychnine and gin. Stomach rejected and wretched. Butler and maid forced additional vomiting. Full physical recovery expected. Placed on suicide watch.

I asked the duty-nurses to have me alerted when she became conscious and coherent. They did so, and seven o'clock on the morning of 22 April, I entered her room and approached her bed.

"Good morning, Your Ladyship," I said. "Such a pleasant surprise to find an old friend on a sunny morning."

She turned and looked at me. In her youth, she had been a vision of feminine loveliness. As a mature woman, she was described in the society pages as 'elegant and stately.' On that morning, she was wan and weary. Her eyes were bloodshot, and her hair, previously always coiffed and raven-black, was now disheveled and streaked with grey.

"Well, if it isn't my dear old doctor," she said. Then, giving me a look up and down, added, "My old, *old*, doctor. I suppose if I have to submit to anyone here, it is best an old fogey who has poked and prodded every corner of my body already. How are you, Doctor?"

"Well, I am just fine, thank you, considering the ravages of age. More important, is how are you, Your Ladyship?"

"Oh, don't call me that. All that was part of life before the war. Now, that whole world has vanished. It's all gone. My husband, my two boys ... everything. I'm rich, but what good is that? I've lost everything I held dear. These days, I may as well be just plain old Lilly... So, here we are, old Lilly and even older, John. If you want to be useful, you can inject me with cyanide."

"That, my dear, is not going to happen. You pulled through after you lost Lord Cliffside and Eddie and Rolly. You can keep going. We all have to. The war is over. No more trying to do yourself in. That just won't do. Your country still needs you."

"No, John, my country does not need me. My country does not want me. My country is intent on hanging me."

For a moment, I was speechless.

"What do you mean, hang you?"

"I've been accused of having committed treason during the war. There is a boatload of evidence against me. My barrister looked at everything and told me I had no choice but to throw myself on the mercy of the court. Plead madness brought on by the death of my sons. Then maybe I could escape the gallows and spend the rest of my life in prison. That's what my country wants to do with me, John. So, if you want to be useful, help them out. Go and fetch the cyanide."

"But ... but that's impossible. You could no more commit treason than fly. You're innocent. I am certain you are. What in the world happened?"

"Of course, I'm innocent. I have been diabolically set up. But what does it matter now? I can afford a dozen lawyers. But the evidence against me is insurmountable. If you will just give me an injection of cyanide, I promise I won't vomit all over the bedsheets. That's what you can do for me."

I took her hand in both of mine.

"I have a better idea."

"Not likely, but what is it?"

“I know someone.”

As soon as I had a break in my shift, I went to the administration office and begged the use of their phone.

I called Sherlock Holmes.

After his sojourn in America and his success in smashing the Von Bork ring of spies, Holmes had been conscripted—Mycroft had something to do with it—to serve the British government as needed for the duration of the war. I ran into him from time to time and, in response to my asking what he was up to, he answered vaguely that he was doing a spot of work for Section Five of the Directorate of Military Intelligence, or for another unnamed section, or for Scotland Yard, or for the Directorate of Intelligence, or for any combination of them. It was all hush-hush, and he gave no details.

The Armistice was signed at eleven o’clock on the eleventh of November, 1918, and by ten minutes after eleven, Holmes had departed Whitehall, made his way to Victoria, and from there to his property near Pulborough where his long-neglected beehives had been sitting, feral, for four years.

I had neither seen nor talked to him since the end of the war as he had made it clear to me that he was intent on spending the remainder of his days caring for his bees and not caring whatsoever about the sordid activities of the criminal classes of London.

It was my good fortune that when I called him, he happened to be in his cottage and answered the phone. At first, he was all pleasant chit-chat and friendly inquiries about my health, my wife, and the prospect of my long-delayed retirement. That attitude changed when I came right out and asked for his help with a case of Lady Lilly Assherton.

“My dear, Watson,” he sighed. “I was a detective for many years. I no longer am. I am now a beekeeper. Surely, there is someone else you can ask for help to solve a crime.”

“It is not merely a crime, Holmes. It is an accusation of espionage and treason, and you remain the nation’s most capable agent in dealing with such matters.”

“That may very well be and, if there is anything I learned in four years of sully myself in the world of spies, counter-spies, and diplomats, it is that they all tell lies. Can you be certain that this patient of yours is telling you the truth? In the overwhelming number of cases where the evidence all points to one and only one conclusion, that conclusion is correct.”

“Holmes,” I responded, “as you have said, a man may lie to his wife, to his children, to his lawyer, to the police, to his neighbor, to his employer, and even to *his mother*, but he cannot lie to his bank book, and he has nothing at all to gain by lying to his doctor. The same goes for a woman.”

I then proceeded to browbeat him over our years of friendship, reminding him of all the times when I had come to his assistance, always ready to abandon my patients and surgery.

I imagined I could hear him sigh all the way from Sussex.

“Very well, Watson. Fair is fair, I suppose. I will take the afternoon train up to London. Meet me for supper at Simpson’s and bring all the data you can lay your hands on by that time. Six o’clock. Until then.”

He hung up.

“Here is everything I’ve learned, Holmes,” I said as we sat in Simpson’s and waited as the trolley arrived with the enormous section of roast beef. “I had time to make a few calls. I do know a few of the chaps in the intelligence service. Bob Pollack was a patient of mine years ago, and he was quite forthcoming.”

“Excellent, Watson. He must trust you, seeing as matters of treason and espionage are invariably confidential. I hope you did not expose the fellow to reprimand, termination, or worse.”

“Well, now, that was the odd thing about it. He told me that even though the matter should be kept secret, it seems everyone who is anyone in any of those agencies you used to do work for, knew all about it.”

“Indeed? Yes, that is odd. Very well, then, what did he tell you?”

“As you know, Lady Assherton owns all those mills up in Lancashire. She ended up having to run them after her husband, Enoch, died unexpectedly back in 1913. All of the cotton they use comes from either the American South or Egypt. Once the Germans began sinking supply ships in the Atlantic, the cargo from America dried up. Some of the mills across England were facing closure and putting thousands of men out of work. The government stepped in and re-organized the supply that was still coming from Egypt, regardless of which firm had ordered it, and divvied it up amongst all of the mills, so all could keep running.”

“Yes, Watson. I am fully aware of that. What happened?”

“Almost all of Lady Assherton’s supply came from Egypt, so she was high and dry, so to speak. Many of her shipments were commandeered either by the War Office or the Home Office and sent to other mills. That cut into her profits, but the dear lady has more money than God and did not object. It was her bit for the war effort.”

“Your beef is getting cold, Watson. Get on with it.”

“After the Italians finally made up their minds whose side they were on, a number of her shipments were diverted to Genoa for use in Italian mills so their soldiers could have new shirts and underwear.”

“Entirely sensible. Italian soldiers may fight, but not if they are poorly dressed.”

“I suppose so. Well, some of her shipments landed in Genoa but were then diverted by persons unknown up to Switzerland. From there, they were secretly sent up to Germany. Her cotton was keeping *the enemy* in shirts and underwear. She was accused of violating embargoes and giving succor to the Boche. That is considered treason and subject to hanging if convicted. That is what she was accused of, and they appear to have copies of all of the documents proving it.”

“But they have not yet arrested her, have they?”

“No. Not as far as I know.”

For the next ten minutes, Holmes slowly devoured his supper in silence. If I tried to say anything, he held up his hand and bade me keep silent. He finally swallowed his last mouthful of Yorkshire pudding and laid down his utensils.

“A fascinating case, Watson.”

“How so?”

“I was in Switzerland several times during the war. It was an incestuous hive of spies and counter-spies, diplomats, importers and exporters, Germans, French, English, Turks, and far too many Italians. Shipments of arms, chemicals, steel, aluminum, wool, cotton, every conceivable foodstuff, and more were

traded, diverted, trans-shipped, and forwarded. Much of what took place violated the laws of both the Central and the Allied Powers. The Swiss, being Swiss, arrogantly ignored such minor concerns and made all the arrangements. And they were devious enough to never put everything in writing. All deals were done on a handshake, and funds transferred through Swiss banks. And if you did not honor your financial or commodity obligations, they simply stopped doing business with you.”

“But there are written records of her shipments,” I said.

“Highly likely that they were forged. And that means that someone has done an extensive amount of work to frame her.”

“But why?”

“Precisely, Watson. Why concoct the scheme, and why pin it on this particular wealthy widow?”

“But she could hang for it.”

“Highly unlikely. I can name a score of firms and agents who violated the embargoes and sanctions, who were found out, and, as long as they were still needed by British industry during the war and now, were punished by anything from a slap on the wrist to a stiff fine.”

“Well, somebody,” I said, “told her that she was a traitor and faced the gallows.”

“Precisely. And that is where we must start.”

“Shall we begin tomorrow morning? You could meet me at Barts first thing.”

“No, Watson. Time is of the essence. We shall start this evening. You do have her address, do you not? We will start with her staff. They always know something.”

By eight o’clock in the evening in late April, London has descended into chilly twilight. On a Tuesday evening, two days after Easter, Chequer Street, just north of the Barbican, was deserted and damp. Lady Assherton’s town home—as much of it as we could see in the dim, flickering light from the recently-installed electric streetlamps—was a substantial terraced house that was a long way from the ostentation of Mayfair and Belgravia.

A knock on the door brought a tall, slender young man who was understandably surprised to find two no-longer-young men calling at such an hour in the evening.

He must have been Lady Assherton’s butler but was dressed casually with no jacket and his fine linen shirt open at the neck. He had a cane in his left hand and was somewhat leaning on it. However, even in this condition, with his military bearing, he had British army written all over him, from his neatly trimmed mustache down to his gleaming shoes.

“Good evening, gentlemen,” he said. “I’m sorry, but Lady Assherton is not home this evening and may be away for a few days. If you will give me your names and telephone numbers, I will let her know that you called on her, and I am sure she will call you back when she returns.”

I stepped forward.

“I am Dr. John Watson, Lady Assherton’s physician. I have been attending to her throughout the day, and I need to speak to you and the other members of the house staff to determine precisely what happened to her and how best to help her recover. Perhaps we could chat with you for a few moments in the parlor?”

I took another step forward as I spoke, and the butler moved back, noticeably hobbling and using his cane for support.

“Oh, of course, Dr. Watson,” he said, with a note of unfeigned sincerity. “We were so relieved when we heard that you were looking after her. Please come in.”

I wiped my wet shoes on the entry-way mat. Holmes followed me in and did likewise. The butler stared at him.

“Are you ... Sherlock Holmes?” he said.

“I am.”

“Then permit me, gentlemen, to deduce that your visit concerns much more than Her Ladyship’s health.”

“It does,” said Holmes as he walked into the parlor, tossed his overcoat on one of the chairs, and sat down. I did the same.

The butler seated himself across from us, deftly lowering his body into the chair whilst balancing himself on one of the chair’s arms and his cane. Once in place, he sat bolt upright, his right leg bent, and his long, left leg sticking straight out into the room.

Holmes gave an obvious look to the leg and then at the butler.

“Ypres?” asked Holmes.

“The Somme.”

“We are,” I said, “grateful for your sacrifice. I took one forty years ago in Afghanistan, but I got off lightly compared to you. How are you managing?”

He smiled back at me. “Better than many of my unit, Doctor. I’m alive. Not yet facing decrepitude. With the scaffolding around my leg, I can still walk. My lungs are clean, and my cerebrum, cerebellum and even my hippocampus all still work, or at least I like to think they do, but I leave that for others to judge.”

“Ah,” I said, “that’s the British spirit. Stiff upper lip all the way. Well done, soldier. What happened?”

“I blocked a shot on our goal. But the other team was shooting with grapeshot. Most unsporting of them.”

I laughed. There is an immediate camaraderie between men who have served under fire and particularly with those who have come close to death and made it through. I might have carried on the friendly chat with a fellow veteran, but Holmes was not interested.

“What is your name, please, sir?” he asked.

“George Nichol, Mr. Holmes. A few years back, it was Captain George Nichol, but now I am just George-the-Butler.”

“It is obvious that you are not from a family who were in service. How came you by this position?”

“Before the war, I was an electrical engineer, an inspector of lines and poles and transformers and such. You can’t do that with a bum leg. After I was shot up, Eddy and Rolly Assherton, Lady Assherton’s sons, told me to call on their mum, and they sent her a note asking her to give me a position.”

“They were your friends?”

“My brothers-in-arms. I was invalided-out early on, and it looked like they were going to come through *arte et marte* without a scratch. It took me a year to get back on my feet, and Her Ladyship hired me on the spot when I showed up at her door. *Ad libitum* and not full-time, mind you. No need for that.

With my small pension, I did not require much more, and, honestly, I am grateful she had proper work for me. I started just a week before the telegram came to her about her boys. It was a hard time.”

“You were here then,” said Holmes, “the first time she attempted suicide.”

“I was. She was horribly despondent, and a week after the telegram, she tried to hang herself but the chandelier came down on top of her when she stepped off of the table. Claire heard the crash, rushed in, and shouted for me.”

“Claire?”

“Her previous maid. She was here throughout the war, but the young man she waited for and prayed for every night survived and was demobbed in December of last year. After a short contretemps, they sorted things out and were married straight away and moved to Liverpool.”

“Who replaced her?”

“Miss Hope. Hope Leighton. She was a nurse on the front during the war, and Lady Assherton hired her immediately after Claire gave her notice.”

“And how was she selected?”

“I am not entirely certain, Mr. Holmes. But she is up in her room now. Shall I have her come down?”

“In a minute, if you do not mind. Another question or two for you, please.”

“Fire at will,” said the captain.

“What do you know about the accusations that led to Lady Assherton’s second attempt to take her life?”

Mr. Nichol looked quite uncomfortable and seemed to be composing his answer before offering it.

“The day after the men came to visit—,”

“What men, please? From where?”

“I honestly cannot say, sir. I had never seen them before. Never. Two men who looked like the type you see all over the pavement down by Whitehall, if you know the type I mean.”

“I do. Go on.”

“They met with her in private, behind the door of the library, and then they left. Her Ladyship called Hope and me in after and told us that she had been accused of treason related to some of her cotton shipments, but that it was preposterous—imbecilic, was the word she used—and that we should ignore any such nonsense.”

“She confided in you, her staff?”

“We had become the closest thing to family she had. After all we had gone through during the war, there was not much reason to keep up the rules that segregate the classes.”

“And was that all?”

“No. A week later, the day before Easter, the men came back again and talked with her, and this time she was terribly upset.”

“What did they talk about?” asked Holmes.

Mr. Nichol did not answer. For nearly a minute, he fixed his gaze on the shoe of his outstretched leg and shook his head, but only by a degree or two.

“Mr. Holmes, I know that you are here as a friend, and your purpose is only to help her, but it was a deeply personal matter, and I am still a member of her staff and bound by a pledge of confidence. I regret I cannot answer your question and, I request your understanding on that matter.”

“Mr. Nichol, her life remains at risk. If whatever took place is not sorted out, she may very well attempt to kill herself again. Surely, you know that.”

“I do, Mr. Holmes, I do. But I took an oath. I made a promise. I did the same when I enlisted in the army. I do not violate my oaths, sir. But, if it is of any help to you, Hope visited Lady Assherton this afternoon and reported that whilst very weak, she was conscious and coherent. May I suggest, sir, that you pay the lady a visit yourself tomorrow morning and ask her what happened. If she wants it to be known, she’ll tell you. But I will not.”

The two men stared at each other for an uncomfortable half-a-minute. Sherlock Holmes did not react patiently when his investigations were obstructed and had, during the war, I suspected, carried out countless intense interrogations on behalf of His Majesty. Across from him, however, was an army captain who had been through hell and back and was not about to be cowed by an aging detective. The captain won the duel. Holmes relaxed into a smile.

“An excellent suggestion, Captain. I will do that. Now, would you mind calling Miss Hope and ask if we could have a word with her?”

We waited for several minutes after Mr. Nichol departed, affording me an opportunity to look around the room. It was tastefully decorated with paintings of Lancashire, photographs of her husband and sons, and a plaque bearing the popular poem *If*, all illuminated by the latest, flickering electric lamps.

Miss Hope Leighton entered the parlor and, without saying anything, marched across the room and sat in the chair vacated by the butler.

I do not wish to be unkind in my description of her, but the immediate words that came to my mind on meeting her were ‘Sergeant Major.’ She was a solidly built woman whose complexion was etched by what must have been endless days and nights of demanding work. Before either Holmes or I could say anything, she gave us a hard look.

“Well, what is it you two old blokes want to know?”

“Madam,” said Holmes, “if you count yourself a friend of Lady Assherton, I assure you, we are on the same side.”

“Of course, you are. If I thought you weren’t, I wouldn’t be bothered coming down to talk to you. What do you want?”

“You were not employed in service before the war,” said Holmes. “How came you by the position you now have?”

“I came to chat with Lady Assherton, and she hired me.”

“Would you mind being just a little more explicit?” said Holmes.

“Fine. I was a nurse in the ward that Eddy and Rolly were brought to after they got shot up. I dressed their wounds and did all those things a nurse has to do until they died. They asked me to pay a visit to their mum, and I promised I would.”

“Just a visit? Was that all?” said Holmes.

“No. They both knew they were not long for this world, and they asked me to help them write a note in their New Testaments—just ‘Thank you, Mum. Love you.’ that was all—and take them to their

mum when the war was over. I got about thirty such requests like that from young lads before I pulled the sheets up over them. Kept me busy for a month or more after I got back to England in December. Lady Assherton was one of my last calls. Her other maid, Claire, had just given notice, and when I told her about being with her boys at the end, she gave me a hug and offered me employment.”

“You must have had other opportunities for a better-paying position as a nurse,” said Holmes.

“All over the country. But after ten years in a hospital before the war and four years in the QAIMNS, I was ready for a change. You may not understand that, Mr. Holmes, but I’ll wager you do, don’t you, Dr. Watson?”

“Completely,” I said. “If I had been offered a position as a butler in Knightsbridge after my time in battle, I might very well have taken it.”

“Well, I was offered, and I took it on the spot. A fine home, three meals and tea, a comfortable bed, clean sheets, my own bath, regular hours, and a good wage. I said ‘yes’ there and then.”

“And I understand,” said Holmes, “that you were on duty when she attempted to poison herself. Would you be so kind as to tell me what happened?”

“Be so kind? Sure, if that’s what you want to call it. Yes, it was Easter. Me and George and Lilly—that’s what she told us to call her—only had each other as family, so I had ordered in a fine Easter breakfast and had it all set out. George and I tried to be cheerful, but she hardly said a word. After we finished, she said she had to pay a visit to the garden shed out back to get something she wanted to work on. That was odd as it was still chilly, and the shed would still be there after the day warmed. I was a bit concerned, but it was a bright, sunny day, and I thought the time outside might lift her spirits. It was not long after she returned that when I heard her shout in pain, and I rushed into here, the parlor. I saw a bottle of gin on the side table, and what I guessed was some sort of pesticide beside it, and a glass on the floor. I knew right off what had happened, and I screamed for George, and he came hopping, and I told him to hold her arms back, and I forced her jaw open and pushed my fingers down her throat until she vomited, and I kept it up until there was nothing left. And then I forced a glass or two of water down her throat and made her vomit some more. Then she passed out, and, by the grace of God, we found a taxi on Easter Sunday and took her to Barts. And you know the rest, Doctor.”

“Allow me to commend you for your prompt and selfless action,” said Holmes. “It must not have been a pleasant experience.”

Miss Hope shrugged. “It wasn’t the first time someone had hurled their breakfast in my face and all over my uniform. It wasn’t even the fifty-first. I’m a nurse. You don’t think about it. You do what you have to do. Isn’t that right, Doctor?”

“It is. It goes with the calling,” I said.

“Yes, of course,” said Holmes. “And did you also know what it was that led to Lady Assherton’s desire to end her life?”

“You already asked George that same question. Right? My answer is the same. Go and ask her yourself. I’ll be back to see her at the hospital first thing tomorrow morning. If you’re there, I’ll do what I can to encourage her to talk to you, but that’s the best I can do.”

“That is more than I can ask for. We shall see you tomorrow.”

“Your thoughts, Watson?” Holmes asked me once we were in a motored taxi and on our way back to the Savoy, where he had booked a room.

“I admit that I have a soft spot in my heart for nurses who have served on the battlefield. She is just like so many of those I worked with years ago. No nonsense. And absolute integrity.”

“And the captain?” he asked.

“He’s a fine man. I trust him. He was visibly upset by what had happened, more so than the nurse. Mind you, I suspect he knows more than he’s letting on. And, well, he came right out and said so, didn’t he?”

“He did indeed. Perhaps we shall learn more tomorrow morning. Do you expect that Lady Lilly will open up to us?”

“I expect that between Miss Hope and me, we should be able to instill enough trust and encouragement to let her disclose whatever it is.”

“I hope you will. Otherwise, this case could take much longer to solve,” said Holmes.

At seven o’clock in the morning in late April, London is gloomy and damp. Motorized taxicabs offer somewhat more protection from the elements than the horse-drawn Hansoms we used for years. Even though no improvements have taken place since the start of the war, the warm air from the engine takes the edge off the cold, the mixture with fumes notwithstanding.

I hailed a taxi, picked Holmes up at the Savoy, and then the two of us continued on the short distance to Barts. When we entered her room, Lady Assherton was sitting up and, whilst still pale, was looking much better than the morning before. Miss Leighton was already there and must have brushed her hair and put it up.

“Good morning, Lilly,” I chirped. “I’ve brought you a belated Easter present.”

“Oh, good morning, John. It is not necessary to be quite so cheerful. What did you bring me?”

“Not *what*, Lilly. *Who*. Allow me to introduce my old friend, Mr. Sherlock Holmes. Between us, we are going to get things sorted and let you get back to as normal a life as one can have these days.”

She gave Holmes the once over and rolled her eyes. “Good morning, Mr. Sherlock Holmes. I did not know that you were still alive. Didn’t you die in Switzerland thirty years ago?”

“I came back from the dead,” said Holmes forcing a smile. “And I plan to be alive for a few more years yet—the same as you will.”

“That will be the day. Can you give me a good reason?”

“For England, my dear lady, for England. And before you can make a cynical reply to that, allow me to inform you what is patently obvious to me. You are unquestionably innocent and have been set up and framed by some traitorous people operating within the British Intelligence agencies. We do not yet know their motives, but they are intent on dismantling all the efforts of the past year and those still taking place that are bringing the world back to peace. I am intent on discovering who is behind these nefarious actions. To do so, Dr. Watson and I shall need the utmost cooperation not only from you but also from your loyal household staff.”

He then turned to Miss Leighton. “May I count on your help, Miss Leighton, in exposing those who have done such harm to Lady Assherton?”

The fearsome nurse looked defiantly back at Holmes. “I’ll help you all right. If you can find the blackguards behind all this, I will bloody well cut off their—,

“Thank you, Miss Leighton. Seeing them hanged will be sufficient. And now you, my lady. May I appeal to your patriotism, your love of country, which I know you have in abundance. You have already sacrificed your two sons. Asking you to assist in bringing vile spies to justice is a paltry additional request. I would hope that you are still sufficiently loyal and committed to England to take on one more assignment.”

In a trice, the glaze of hopeless despair vanished from her eyes. She was glaring at Holmes and, to my great relief, was jolly good and angry with him.

“How dare you question my loyalty to King and country. If you are as good as you appear to think you are and can bring those rotters to justice, then you can be sure that I will be right behind you, kicking your arse to get the job done.”

“And John,” she said, turning to me. “Get me out of this horrible place and back to my home. Hope, order in a few decent meals. The food here isn’t fit for horses.”

“Not quite so fast, my lady,” said Holmes. “There is one condition that I must set before we begin.”

“Then set it.”

“You know perfectly well that the reason you gave Dr. Watson for the accusations against you—the pirating of a few of your cotton shipments—was utter nonsense and could have been easily dismissed. What else did they accuse you of?”

Her body sagged. She gave a pleading look to her nurse.

“Do I have to tell them, Hope?” she asked.

“You have to, Lilly.”

For a minute, her face went blank. She shrugged and looked at Holmes.

“Very well, then. If I have to, I have to. You see, Mr. Holmes, throughout the war, I carried on a constant exchange of letters with the enemy.”

Both Holmes and I were struck dumb.

“You WHAT?” sputtered Holmes.

“Does the name Elsbeth Schragmüller mean anything to you, Mr. Holmes?”

“*The Elsbeth Schragmüller? The one they called Fräulein Doktor? The woman who was the mastermind behind German intelligence and trained all their spies?*”

“The very one,” she said.

“In the name of all that is holy, madam, why would you do something so... so—,”

“So *treasonous*, Mr. Holmes? Because Elsbeth is my sister.”

There was an awkward pause in the conversation before Holmes said, “Go on.”

“My mother married a German. It was not uncommon fifty years ago. Several of the Queen’s children did the same thing. I spent my childhood in Schlüsselburg, but my mother sent me to England for my schooling. Whilst I was a student, my mother died, and my father married again. My little sister arrived a year later. We quite adored each other, and I made several visits a year to spend time with her and my father, right up to the start of the war.”

“But surely, you knew who she was, what she had become.”

“Of course, I was so very proud of her, the first woman ever in Germany to receive her doctorate in political science. She was brilliant. But up until August of 1914, neither of us believed that the world

would come to war. Did you? Did anybody? Once all hell broke loose, we agreed that we would only write about personal matters and never say a word about what was going on in the world. We had our letters forwarded through Switzerland and wrote to each other every week. Once the war ended, we were free to carry on as we had before it started. I never expected for a moment that it would come back to haunt me.”

“Your letters must have been intercepted and read. Was there anything in them that could be construed as treasonous?” said Holmes.

“Not a thing, but I was accused of sending her coded information, and not merely some facts about how much cotton cloth I was producing, but some message that led directly to the arrest, conviction, and execution of Edith Cavell.”

I gasped. In violation of the Geneva Convention demanding that medical personnel be protected in times of war, Miss Edith Cavell had been arrested by the Germans and charged with treason. As a nurse, she had treated German, English, Austrian, and Dutch soldiers alike with no regard as to which of the belligerents they belonged. However, in 1915, she had also aided in the escape of several hundred English and Dutch troops who were caught behind enemy lines in Belgium. The Germans considered this action a crime and, in spite of worldwide protest, had executed her in front of a firing squad.

She became an immediate, sainted martyr, and throughout the English-speaking world, monuments had been erected in her honor and streets, parks, wings of hospitals, government buildings, and schools had been named or re-named in her memory. Somewhere in Western Canada, a massive, snow-covered mountain was given the name of Mount Edith Cavell.

Lady Assherton had seen the look on my face and hastened to say, “Had I done any such thing, I would deserve to be hanged. But I did not. It was entirely a confection.”

“These men,” said Holmes, “who informed you of these accusations—did they say which branch of the government they worked for.”

“Scotland Yard.”

“Did they give you their names?”

“No.”

“Can you describe them?”

She exhaled an exasperation. “They were typically English-looking blokes with average height and chubby faces. Grey coats, grey hats, grey suits. They did not stay long, and they did not leave their cards.”

“Thank you, madam, for being so forthcoming. I will find these men,” said Holmes, “and discover what has been happening to you.”

“How are you going to do that, Mr. Holmes?” she asked.

“I need to review all of the letters you received from your sister during the past five years,” said Holmes.

“Fine. Hope can give them to you. She knows where they are. You can read to your heart’s content about flowers and birds and nieces and nephews and recipes. How do you imagine that is going to do you any good?”

“I know someone.”

The man sitting beside Holmes that evening in a café on Temple Square appeared to be around seventy-five years old. He was a small fellow with white hair and a well-lined countenance, but the rat-like face and sallow hue of his complexion were unmistakable.

“Why, hello, Inspector Lestrade,” I said as I approached their table. “It’s been a year or two. Good to see you.”

“More like ten years, Dr. Watson. And good to see you as well.”

Inspector Lestrade had not always been on the best terms with Holmes and me in years gone by. But now, with those days far behind us, I found myself happy to see him, much in the same way as I did an aging rugby player who had tackled me mercilessly when I played for Blackheath.

We chatted briefly, chuckling over some of our more outrageous shared adventure in the previous century. I found myself wondering if Sherlock Holmes would ever tell the inspector what really happened to Charles Augustus Milverton, but now was not the time to ask.

Holmes quickly got around to filling Lestrade in on the tragedy that had befallen Lady Assherton and asked if he knew anything about it. Lestrade shook his head.

“I still chat from time to time with some of the fellows I hired or worked with,” he said. “But many of them are now also retired. There is an entire new batch of them there now. Some of them came over from the army. Officers. Clever chaps. But no respect at all for doing things by the book. Willing to bend all sorts of rules. I suppose that’s what helped them get through the war and win their battles. But it is simply not the way to do responsible police work.”

“Are you saying,” asked Holmes, “that you would not be surprised if Lady Assherton was set up? Framed by someone within the Yard or the Directorates?”

“It is certainly possible. We would never risk imperiling the life of an innocent person for any reason. But these chaps are somewhat cavalier about that. I suppose that when you have sent men to their death in battle, hoping that by doing so, you will come out on top and defeat the enemy, the well-being of one widow is not much to worry about. But it is not what we would have done. Wouldn’t think of it.”

“The world has indeed changed,” said Holmes.

“And you, Holmes,” said Lestrade. “You used to break every rule in the book. I tore my hair out many times over your tactics. But the life of an innocent person was sacrosanct.”

“It was. It still is.”

“Right,” said Lestrade. “Now, are you absolutely certain that this woman is innocent?”

Holmes looked toward me for an answer.

“I have known her,” I said, “for thirty years. She was utterly loyal to the Empire. Never a doubt.”

“And you?” said Holmes to Lestrade. “Are you absolutely certain that there could not be traitors lurking in the Yard or any of the Directorates?”

Lestrade laughed.

“I am absolutely certain there are. And I gather that the reason you are buying my supper in my favorite old haunt is your desire to have me go in and smoke them out.”

“Precisely.”

“I’ll see what I can find and let you know. I still have a few friends amongst the old boys. But one condition.”

“Yes?” said Holmes.

Lestrade turned to me. "Now see here, Dr. Watson. If we succeed, and you write up this case, no more calling me a little sallow, rat-faced fellow."

"I wouldn't think of it."

He rolled his eyes at me, stood up, and departed, leaving Holmes and me to chat.

"It is useful," said Holmes, "to have some old colleagues. Twenty years ago, I knew almost every one of the inspectors who came here for lunch. Now they are strangers. Lestrade was right. It is a brave new world."

I had glanced over the patrons of the place whilst we ate. Many of the chaps had a distinct military bearing—former officers, no doubt. What was surprising was how many were disfigured from the war. Some were missing arms, some only hands. Two were wheeled in on bath chairs, several hustled about using canes. At least a third of them bore scars on their faces that had been inflicted by cuts or burns. Four wore patches over one eye but appeared to carry on well enough, happy, I assumed, not to be blind. I kept my eye out for two men with chubby, bland faces, but no such pair appeared.

At two o'clock, lunch having ended, we returned to Lady Assherton's home and met with Miss Leighton. She handed over a packing case of letters, dated weekly beginning in the spring of 1918.

"There are another four cases," she said. "They have been writing to each other for over twenty years."

"This will suffice for now," said Holmes as I carried the case out to the taxi.

Upon returning to his hotel, he bade me come up to his suite and took a bundle of letters from the case.

"These are the most recent," he said. "Let us see if they reveal anything beyond sisterly chit-chat."

He opened the latest to arrive, dated Berlin only a week ago, and handed it over to me whilst he organized the rest of them according to their dates.

"Your thoughts, old friend. Anything suspicious? Seditious?"

I read it over. It ran:

Sister dear: Every day I think about you. Daily, I worry for your well-being. Are you getting on better this week? Not that I doubt your fortitude. Ever and always, you are the strong one.

Right now, I am looking out at my garden. Gardens always bring succor to the soul. Gloriosa are starting to bloom in their beds. Narcissuses are waiving their bright yellow heads. Irises have sprung to life along the verges. Rather a lovely time, do you not agree? Better by far than the dreary winter.

Shall you return this year to visit me? Rainer, your nephew, keep asking about you. Every night, he pesters me about his Aunt Lilly. Very soon, he will be sent off to school. God will watch over him, I pray. Nothing untoward will touch his young life. I ask you to pray for him too. Will you, dear sister?

Later today, I will walk in the park. You would love to see our cherry trees. Right and left, the blossoms are falling. On top of your head, some of them land. Then there are the chestnut trees. All of them are covered with their lovely cones of flowers. Very attractive, also, are the lilacs. And let us never forget the roses.

Last fall, I planted an entire new bed. 8 of them did not survive the winter. 25, however, are growing splendidly.

I can only say that I am enjoying my new position in Berlin. Rigorous work helps one to put the war behind. Fortunately, my studies paid off. Though the past four years were terrible. Now we are all hoping for peace and harmony. Ending war forever is the prayer of us all. God grant that our prayers may be answered. Always, we can hope for a better future. Together, all nations can live in peace.

Egon sends his warm regards. Ever and always. My love and prayers.

I handed it back to him.

"Nothing here," I said. "Meaningless chit-chat between two women. Though, I must say, for a woman who earned her doctorate, even if from a German university, her sentences are surprisingly awkward."

He gave me an odd look, took the letter from me, and took a seat beside the window. He read it and gazed at it for several minutes. Then he paused, lit his pipe, and scrutinized it for another ten minutes.

"AH HA!" he shouted and leapt to his feet. "Here it is, Watson. As I suspected." He was grinning with glee, and he mouthed words whilst reading the letter one more time. Then his expression changed. His mouth opened, and his eyes went wide with fear.

"Dear God," he gasped. "This is a disaster."

He packed the letter back in the case and lugged it toward the door of the room.

"Holmes! What is it? Where are you going?"

"The Diogenes Club. Enjoy room service if you wish. Put it on my tab. I will call you later."

I thought of hurrying to join him, but it was apparent he did not wish my company.

I waited up that evening for his call, but none came. At midnight I crawled into bed beside my wife, who, by that time, was sound asleep.

The phone rang at two o'clock in the morning.

"Sherlock," mumbled my wife, "is the only one who would think of calling at this time."

I stumbled out of bed and down the stairs to the unceasing telephone.

"Holmes?"

"Yes," he answered. "I will come by your house in a car at eight. Kindly be ready."

"I am on duty at the Barts tomorrow morning."

“So, tell them you’re sick. If they need a medical opinion, give them one. Eight o’clock. Regards to your dear wife.”

He hung up.

He was looking highly alert for such an early hour. It was same look I remembered from years ago when he had become a bloodhound about to pounce on its prey. The eyes, now hooded and creased, were once again blazing, eyebrows contracted, and his jaw set.

“Did you sleep at all?” I asked him.

“No, but neither did Mycroft, for which he will be a long time in forgiving me. However, the Savoy has excellent individual baths and strong coffee. Another round and a bite of breakfast will be waiting for us at Lestrade’s café.”

“Whose motorcar is this?” I asked. It was exceptionally comfortable, quiet, and powerful.

“It is owned,” he said, “collectively by the members of the Diogenes Club. I had to promise to have it back by tea time.”

Traffic was light at that early hour, and we sped our way through Kensington, along the Strand and down to the Embankment. As we rode, he had his valise open on his knees and was reading more of Lady Asserton’s letters. He muttered a series of oaths under his breath and kept shaking his head. I tried to ask him what he found so disturbing, but he held up his hand and bade me be quiet.

In the same café on Temple Place, Inspector Lestrade was holding a table for us and had already procured a full carafe of coffee.

“Good morning, Inspector,” said Holmes. “What have you learned?”

“And good morning to you too, Holmes. Sit down and enjoy your coffee. Was it really necessary to get me up at this hour of the morning?”

“Time is pressing. Please. What did you learn?”

“Right” said Lestrade. “Well, I called in a few favors from over a decade ago, but they were still good. You wanted to know who the two men were who called on Lady Assherton and caused her attempt on her own life. Right?”

“Yes. Precisely.”

“Well, their names are John Peterson and Peter Johnson, and no, I am not making them up. You remember how you so unkindly referred to some of my men as unimaginative imbeciles? Well, this time, you might have been right.”

“But who are they? You know what I mean.”

“Well, that’s the problem, Holmes. They are a couple of new boys who were recruited after being demobbed. Low-level entry position on the Force. But I waited for them yesterday until they were off duty and followed them around to the pub and came and sat down beside them.”

“Yes, go on,” said Holmes.

“They had no idea who I was, so I said, ‘Good day there, lads. I am Retired Chief Inspector Lestrade. I have an old friend named Sherlock Holmes, who wants to have a word with you about Lady Assherton.’ Well, they pretty much choked on their ale. Must say, it was the most fun I have had in months.”

“I am sure it was very amusing.”

“They started in straight away, sputtering that they had nothing to do with the case. They were only following orders. They were told they were to make three visits to Lady Assherton, with escalating accusations, and they were free to chat about it with other fellows from the Yard. They felt horrible when they heard about her suicide attempt. No one, it seems, expected her to do that. They were not aware of her previous attempt during the war, and she had the reputation of being something of a battle-ax. Must say, the two blokes seemed honestly distraught over it. Not much good at hiding their emotions. They won’t last long as police officers if they don’t learn how to do that. Frankly, Holmes, I don’t know what the Yard is coming to.”

“You said *three* visits,” said Lestrade.

“Right. I did say that. Well, after the dear lady tried to kill herself following the second visit, the third was called off.”

“What was it going to be about?”

“They could not tell me,” said Lestrade.

“But why? What purpose did it serve?”

“They said that they were told that up at the top of Scotland Yard and the Intelligence Directorate, there had been evidence that somewhere in the Directorates there might be a German agent who was sending secret information back to Berlin. The idea—bloody stupid if you ask me—was to let everyone know that they had found the culprit, and it was not anyone on the inside. It was Lady Assherton who was in secret communication with her sister in Berlin, and her sister is some sort of master spy, if you can believe that.”

“Odd though it may be,” said Holmes, “I can. Now, would these fellows be willing to meet with me?”

“Not on your life,” said Lestrade.

“Why not?”

“Because they have read those stories that the doctor here wrote about you, and they do not want their hero to think of them as complete fools.”

“I would not treat them as *complete* fools, only partial.”

“That’s bad enough. A meeting is out,” said Lestrade.

“Very well, then. Who gave them their instructions? Did you ask them that?”

“Well, yes, Holmes, of course I did. They said that the assignment was given to them by Bramwell Duponte, the Secretary to Sir Basil Thomson. They find this Duponte fellow an arrogant prig, but he zealously guards the gate of access to Thomson.”

“Basil Thomson?” asked Holmes. “Didn’t he run prisons? What’s he doing at Scotland Yard?”

“Somebody in the government thought that if he had been in charge of prisons all over England for twenty years, he might be good on the other side and able to catch felons *before* they were sent to prison. Maybe there is some logic to that, but if there is, I don’t see it. Whatever Scotland Yard is becoming these days—,”

“Yes, Inspector, you were saying.”

“Right. Well, Basil Thomson is now not only the head of the CID, he is also in charge over the Intelligence Directorate.”

“What about Sections Five and the non-existent Section Six?” asked Holmes.

“No,” said the inspector, “they are still run by chaps who know what they are doing. They might cut your throat as soon as look at you, but at least they are competent.”

“Can you arrange for me to meet with this Thomson fellow?”

Lestrade gave Holmes a sideways look.

“Holmes, I am getting the impression that there is something more going on than a failed attempt to abuse a wealthy widow, isn’t there?”

“There is, indeed. Can you arrange such a meeting?”

“I cannot help you on that on, Holmes. Sorry. However, if I remember, I believe you might know someone who can.”

“I do. And I am most grateful for your help, my old friend. I promise to give a full report the next time we meet at this table.”

Lestrade bade us a good day, wished us success, and departed.

Holmes turned to me. “Come, Watson. The game—,”

“Fine. You don’t have to tell me.”

I gulped down a final mouthful of coffee and followed him out to the pavement.

“Back to the Diogenes Club?” I said.

“No. I don’t dare. He will still be asleep and utterly dead to the world. No, we have yet another visit to pay to Lady Assherton’s.”

“But she is still in hospital.”

“Precisely.”

“What are you two old dogs doing back here?” said Miss Hope when she opened the door. “The Lady is still in hospital. Come back after she returns.”

“I need another word with you and Mr. Nichol, if I may, madam,” said Holmes. “I promise it is only in the best interests of her Ladyship. May we come in, and would you mind, please, calling Mr. Nichol?”

“All right. But make things snappy. We’re trying to have the place spotless to welcome her home. I have a charwoman here as well as the two of us, and I’m not about to tell her to stop her cleaning just because Sherlock bleedin’ Holmes needs to have a word.”

Holmes thanked her graciously, and we sat down in the parlor. Holmes looked somewhere between serene and smug. I knew that look.

When George Nichol and Hope Leighton were seated and facing us, Holmes smiled at both of them in turn.

“Miss Hope, I do wish to thank you for your complete cooperation and assistance. The batch of letters you gave us may not have been at all instructive, but they revealed a gentle, domestic side of Lady Assherton in a way that touched my heart and made me all the more determined to help her.”

“You’re welcome. Is that the only reason you came here? If it is, then be on your way. We have a house to get ready.”

“I will not keep you long. However, I would be remiss if I did not offer Mr. Nichol here some basic lessons in the art of espionage. You are not a very good spy, sir.”

The captain's spine stiffened.

"I beg your pardon. Now, look here, Mr. Holmes—,"

"Oh, come, come. No need to get huffy about it. You just need to learn that if you are going to paste on a mustache, try not to use such a cheap one. Anyone who has ever worked in the theatre can spot it a mile away."

The captain involuntarily raised his hand to his upper lip and quickly put it back down in his lap.

Holmes continued, "And do try not to wear shoes and shirts of such fine quality. Yours cost more than two weeks' wages of a part-time butler. And if you are going to pretend to be an electrical engineer, make sure that the lamps in your house flicker only in unison with the street lamps and with the other houses on the block and not independent of them, indicating that the short is inside the home not outside, and therefore could have been fixed by any butler who claims to have been an electrician."

As if on cue, the lamps flickered yet again.

"And learn," said Holmes, "to hobble using at least three different gaits, and not the same way here in the house as in the pub on Temple Square, where you turned around and stumbled out upon seeing me at a table with Inspector Lestrade. There is no doubt that you are a Liverpoolian. That is obvious by your accent, but your vocabulary was tainted by your years in Oxford or Cambridge. And never add 'honestly' to any answer you give. Men who do that are invariably dishonest. And finally, if you are going to impersonate a soldier who was friends with the sons of the lady of the house, do try not to choose one who is dead and buried in a war cemetery in France. George Nichol died at the Somme. You did not. You did act to save the lady's life, and your distress with what happened to her was sincere. We do appear to be on the same side. But now then, who are you, and to whom are you reporting?"

You could have cut the silence in the room with a knife. Finally, Miss Hope burst out with a colorful oath and, looking at the butler, added. "Yes. Who the hell are you, George?"

The butler had sat still and stone-faced throughout Holmes's diatribe. Now, without altering his posture or facial expression, he looked Holmes straight in the eye.

"Allow me to preface my answer by saying that I told them it was an absurd idea. Putting such a fine woman through what they did was unconscionable. But they insisted. So, yes, Mr. Holmes, I was a captain in the LHL but in the communications unit. My leg was injured at the Somme in a motorcycle accident. Upon my recovery, I was recruited by the Intelligence boys. They knew all about Lilly's sister in Belgium and her role in training and overseeing German spies."

"That much I already assumed," said Holmes. "Keep going."

"My task was to get a job as her butler, using a feigned friendship with her sons as an entrée. I was to intercept all the letters coming from Germany, open and re-seal them having made copies. Then take the copies to the Intelligence Directorate. Letters being sent by Lilly were taken not to the post office but to the same office, after which they were sent on to Switzerland. They knew that Lilly was as loyal as they come, but they were looking for anything in the letters from Fräulein Doktor that might be gleaned and give any insight into the enemy's operations. They found nothing."

"Why then the false accusations?"

"There was a reliable report from MI6 that an attack was planned on the meetings in Versailles, killing the leaders of the Allied powers and sending the world back into war. Some fool came up with the cruel scheme that by publicly identifying Lilly as the traitor, the true villain would drop his guard and allow himself to be caught. It failed."

“Who was the fool?”

“That, Mr. Holmes, I honestly ... that, I do not know. I was given my instructions directly from Sir Basil’s office. The plan was approved at the top. I do know that the threats to the meetings in Versailles are being taken quite seriously.”

“You told me last time we met that you take your oaths and promises seriously. I am certain that when you were a boy, you took an oath in Sunday School not to tell lies. I am also sure that the Almighty has not released you from that oath. Now then, who are you?”

“I am Captain Robert Sylvester John Faulknor.”

“Then allow me to bid you good day, Captain Faulknor.”

We rose and departed the parlor. As the front door was closing behind us, I could hear Miss Hope Leighton saying, “And allow *me* to bid you *good-bye*, Captain Faulknor. If you are not out of this house in fifteen minutes, so help me, I will bloody well cut off—,”

I closed the door behind me, not wanting to visualize the threat being made to the already handicapped fellow.

“Our next appointment,” said Holmes as we walked from Chequer Street out to Whitecross in search of a taxi, “is with Sir Basil Thomson. This plot against Versailles demands my attention.”

“You were able to see him so soon?”

“Mycroft made the appointment for me. Somewhere in the vast chasms of his mind, he has stored every detail, sordid and otherwise, of the lives and careers of the entire civil service. He never threatens blackmail. He doesn’t have to. His requests are invariably granted.”

“Splendid. Are we going there now?”

“No. The appointment is not until four o’clock. Between now and then, you may as well return to Barts.”

“I can’t.”

“Why not?”

“Because you already had me call in saying that I was too ill to work. I hacked and sputtered into the phone rather convincingly.”

“Then tell them you recovered. You’re a physician. Heal thyself.”

“It does not work that way, Holmes. We do not let infectious people wander around hospitals. The place is already overflowing with germs. But I have an alternative solution.”

“Yes?”

“I shall wait in your room at the Savoy. I hear the room service is excellent. You can pick me up at the front door at half-past three, and don’t be surprised if there are a few more charges on your tab.”

It was only a short walk from the Savoy along the Victoria Embankment to New Scotland Yard, and, it being a pleasant April afternoon, Holmes insisted that we travel by Shank’s pony. He preferred to rehearse his forthcoming encounters *en plein aire*.

The Home Office had recently centralized some of its functions within the newly-formed Directorate of Intelligence, housed in the Scotland Yard buildings.

The sweet-young-thing behind the reception desk of Scotland Yard beamed at the two of us when we announced ourselves.

“Oh, my goodness,” she said, “are you really *the* Sherlock Holmes and Doctor Watson? My mother read all those stories about you when she was a student. I did not know that you were both still alive. Please, follow me. Sir Basil’s office is on the top floor.”

We passed through a corridor of the offices of the Assistant Commissioners of Scotland Yard until we come to a suite labeled *Directorate of Intelligence*. The military directorates were responsible for catching and spies both at home and abroad but did not have the power to effect arrests. For that, they relied on Scotland Yard and the service of Sir Basil and his men.

The receptionist led us into an elegant office that had no one in it.

“This is Mr. Duponte’s office, Sir Basil’s secretary. He will be along shortly and take you to see Sir Basil.”

We sat in the comfortable leather chairs and waited ... and waited. At twenty past four, Holmes stood up and began an inspection of the paintings and photographs on the walls. On one wall was a row of photos of quite handsome men, all elegantly dressed.

“These,” said Holmes, “are a rogues’ gallery of the master criminals and spies Sir Basil has given himself credit for catching.”

“Who is the woman?” I asked.

There were three separate photographs of an exceptionally attractive, more-than-somewhat voluptuous woman dressed in varying exotic, indeed erotic, attire.

“She,” said Holmes, “it the famous, or perhaps infamous, depending on your sentiments, Mata Hari. Sir Basil interrogated her for several days, then handed his notes over to the French, who subsequently executed her for spying.”

“Was she guilty?”

“She was undoubtedly guilty of many sins, both known and unknown, although spying may not have been one of them.”

He moved on to another wall and inspected a row of oil paintings, all set outdoors. One was a scene of a village in India, several were of farm animals, and one that I recognized was of the Matterhorn in Switzerland. All were in the smudged style that the French called *Impressionisme* and not at all to my taste. Holmes seemed quite intrigued.

At four-forty, he sat back down and retreated into his familiar contemplative posture with his eyes closed and his fingers tented under his chin.

It was four-fifty when the back door of the office opened, and a well-dressed man of average height and thickness entered. He was carrying a small stack of books under his arm.

“Oh, good afternoon,” he said whilst shuffling through a stack of files on his desk and not looking up at us. “Holmes and Watson, right?”

“We are,” said Holmes, “and who might you be?”

That got his attention, and he looked up, positively offended.

“I am Bramwell Duponte, the Secretary to the Director. And yes, I understand that Sir Basil has an appointment to meet with you. However, he sends his regrets. He is frightfully busy as he is leaving London tomorrow for France. He will be giving a brief to the Big Four, as the press is calling them, at

Versailles. I have rescheduled your appointment for a fortnight from now, but he did ask if you would be so kind as to sign his copies of *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*. There are six books in the series, are there not? He has enjoyed them since his boyhood and was, I assure you, disappointed at not being able to meet with you this afternoon, but is very much looking forward to doing so when time permits.”

He placed the books on the coffee table and put a pen and inkwell down beside them.

“He may be frightfully busy,” said Holmes, “but we need to speak to him about a matter that is frightfully important.”

“Oh, yes, yes. I heard you were dabbling in that business of Lady Assherton. Please tell the old girl that she has been completely exonerated, and all suspicions have been lifted. Sir Basil asked me to organize sending her a small gift—a nice piece of Wedgewood or something like that—as our way of apologizing for any inconvenience we might have caused her.”

“I am sure she will be thrilled,” said Holmes. “However, our business with him concerns the threats to the meetings at Versailles.”

“Oh, you heard about that business as well, did you? Not to worry. An extra guard has been set up to protect everyone in the Hall. No anarchist or crazed German or Turk will get close to them. No need for Sherlock Holmes to worry his old detective brain about it. Now, please excuse me. I have other pressing matters to attend to. Please let yourselves out, and don’t forget to sign the books. Good day, gentlemen.”

He turned on his heel and departed through the same door as he had entered.

Sherlock Holmes was not happy.

“It is time to call in the cavalry,” he said.

“Mycroft? Again?”

“Regrettably, yes.”

“Shall we head over to Pall Mall?” I asked.

“Not yet. This is the time of day when he has his sherry, then his supper, and then his port. He won’t even have me let into the Stranger’s Room before eight o’clock.”

“And until then?”

“Forgive me, old friend, but I must prepare myself for the encounters we are going to face. Can you meet me at the Savoy at half-seven?”

We departed the Scotland Yard building, and Holmes called for his own taxi.

I made my way to Simpson’s and dined alone.

At the appointed time, he appeared in Savoy Court. He had altered his attire and was now sporting his tails, walking stick, and top hat. I made a passing comment on his appearance.

“When the stakes are high,” he said, “one must employ every weapon at one’s disposal. Come, we are meeting Mycroft at ten minutes to eight. That is the earliest I could get him to agree to.”

The porter of the Diogenes Club disappeared into the bowels of the building and reappeared five minutes later, followed by the slow-moving mass of Mycroft Holmes. I had not seen him in person for at least a decade. He looked every one of his seventy-two years. Were I to describe him, I might compare him to an aging, lumbering Grizzly bear—incapable of moving quickly but still capable of knocking your head off with one swipe if you came too close.

“Sherlock,” he growled, “I will have you know that I never venture outside before the Queen’s birthday. You better be sure that this travail is worth it.”

“Preventing another war-too-end-all-wars is at stake.”

“Right. Get in the car. And wake me up when we get there.”

It was only a few blocks from Pall Mall to the home of Sir Basil Thomson in Mayfair, but Mycroft Holmes immediately laid his heavily-jowled head on the back of the seat, closed his eyes, and began to snore.

Ten minutes later, we stopped in front of an elegant home a block away from Grosvenor Square.

“Give me your hand,” Mycroft ordered his brother as he extracted himself from the vehicle. He moved slowly up the steps to the front door, taking one step at a time. With surprising forcefulness, he banged on the door with his stick and, for good measure, rang the bell several times.

A butler opened the door and looked aghast at the three of us.

“Gentlemen, please. No one is available to see you—,”

Mycroft Holmes pushed his way into the foyer. He looked up the staircase and shouted.

“BASIL!!” Get down here, NOW!”

“Sir!” said the butler. “Stop that. You cannot barge into Sir Basil’s house like that. Sir, I must ask you to leave this—,”

“BASIL!! You hear me? Come here this minute. I don’t have all evening.”

“Sir!”

At the top of the staircase, a tall man in an elegant dressing gown appeared. He appeared to be in his mid-fifties, with thinning hair and a lampshade mustache.

“What in the world ... Mycroft Holmes? ... Is that you?” he said.

“Of course, it’s me, and I am not coming up, so get down here.”

“Mycroft, what are you doing here?”

“You know perfectly well I would not be here if it were not of disastrous importance to the Empire.”

“Can it not wait until I get back from Paris? I will return in ten days.”

“After which the Prime Minister of England, and of France, and of Italy, and the President of the United States may very well be dead. Not to mention you, too, Basil.”

That brought him down the stairs.

“Whatever it is, Mycroft, get on with it. I am in the midst of packing, and I have a train at sunrise.”

“You can sleep on the train, Basil,” said Mycroft. “For the next hour, you are going to sit and read and listen. Now, have your man bring me some Port and sit down in the parlor.”

He strode into the parlor, but Sir Basil Thomson did not move.

“BASIL! Are you deaf?”

“Now look here, Mycroft, old chap. I will have you know—,”

“What I know is that you will not have a job anywhere if you do not move. Dead men do not last long in their employment. Now get in here.”

Sir Basil Thomson, the head of the Directorate of Intelligence and the Assistant Commissioner 'C' of Scotland Yard, followed Mycroft Holmes into the parlor and sat down. Sherlock Holmes and I meekly came in after him.

"Sherlock," said Mycroft, "give me those letters. The latest one on top."

Holmes hurried to open his valise and hand a bundle of letters to his oversize older brother.

"Read this, Basil," said Mycroft.

Sir Basil took the letter and glanced at it.

"I saw this a week ago. It is meaningless. Nothing but womanly chatter. You are wasting my time."

"No Basil," said Mycroft, "I am not. I am saving your life. Take this pencil and mark down the first letter of each sentence."

He diligently recorded each letter in sequence. It ran:

S-E-D-A-N-E-R-G-G-N-I-R-B-S-R-E-V-G-N-I-W-L-Y-R-O-T-A-V-A-L-8-25-I-R-F-T-N-E-G-A-T-E-E-M.

Sir Basil looked up at us.

"This is meaningless. Utter gibberish."

"No, Basil, it is not," said Mycroft. "Read them again. This time start at the end and proceed to the beginning."

"M-e-e-t...meet....agent...fri, 25—Friday? 25th? 8 ... lavatory ... Lwing...left wing?... vers...what is that?"

"Try Versailles, perhaps."

"Perhaps...bring...Good heavens! Grenades? Someone is being told to bring grenades to Versailles this Friday! Who was this sent to?"

"We shall get to that," said Mycroft. "First, read through all of these letters received over the past two months. You might find them interesting."

Over the next half hour, Sir Basil Thomson read backwards through the series of letters. As he did so, his mouth hung open in disbelief, and he repeatedly shook his head. By the time he had finished his task, the color had drained from his face.

"These letters contain the complete plot to destroy the meetings now taking place in France. Leaders of over thirty countries could be assassinated, including Lloyd George, Wilson, Clemenceau, and Orlando."

"Don't forget yourself, Basil. You will be giving your briefing on Friday morning," said Mycroft. "And will be blown to smithereens along with the rest of them."

"But why? Why would anybody want to do this? Who are these people? Are they crazed anarchists who have gone mad?"

"Good heavens, Basil. Are your agents over there utterly useless? Do you not know what is going on in Versailles?"

"What do you mean? The chaps over there are busy writing a treaty to ensure peace, an ending to all wars."

“No, Basil. They are ensuring a Carthaginian peace. As we speak, there is a group from our side who are drafting the chapters on reparations that Germany is going to be forced to pay. And they will be forced to admit that they and they alone are guilty for causing the war.”

“And so they should,” said Sir Basil.

“And, if you were the average Boche, who had been told that you agreed to the Armistice on the basis of that American’s Fourteen Points, would you be happy?”

“Oh, yes, that fellow. Almighty God Himself only needed ten. He is a bit much.”

“And so are the terms they are going to force on the Germans. The economic consequences will be devastating for decades to come.”

“And rightly so. We won. They lost. And they should jolly well accept defeat like good losers. Now then, who is behind these letters and this nasty plot? They were all sent to Lady Assherton. Is she a traitor, after all? We thought it was someone within the Directorates. This makes no sense whatsoever.”

At this point, Sherlock Holmes took over posing the questions.

“Is Her Ladyship going to be in Versailles on Friday?” he asked.

“Of course not.”

“Is Captain Faulknor? Also known as the dead Captain Nichol.”

“No. And how did you know about him?”

“Then who else has seen this letter?”

“Only myself and my secretary,” said Sir basil.

“And are you planning to explode yourself on Friday morning.”

“Don’t be ridiculous.”

“Then, having eliminated all other possibilities, who remains?”

“Only Bramwell Duponte. But that is unthinkable. He has been my loyal secretary for over a decade. I trust the man completely.”

“Does he have family in Germany?” asked Holmes.

“In the German part of Switzerland, yes. But he has not been in touch with them for years ... not since his grandfather emigrated from Zurich. He has no connection whatsoever with anyone in Switzerland, or in Germany. He is an Englishman through and through.”

“Are you certain?” asked Holmes.

Sir Basil gave Holmes a hard look.

“By your question, Mr. Holmes, I perceive that you are not. Explain yourself.”

“The paintings on his wall were done by Martha Burkhardt and Friedrich Eckenfelder. They are both contemporary Swiss-German artists. The Duponte family owns one of the largest shipping companies in the world. I am quite certain that it was he who forged the false shipping documents. I suspect that you know that as well, Sir Basil.”

“Yes, I do. It was part of the blind we set up to point the finger at Lady Assherton. But that does not mean he was part of the entire plot.”

“Would you agree that the communicating of secret information did not occur in one direction only? Is it highly likely, inevitable even, that secrets were revealed and sent in return to Fräulein Doktor?”

“Well, yes, I suppose that would make sense.”

“Who had the opportunity to send such replies, other than yourself, sir?” asked Holmes.

“Only my secretary. But see here, Mr. Holmes, Bramwell has had my complete confidence for a decade or more.”

“And quite possibly was entirely trustworthy before August of 1914. After that date, I would remind you that blood is thicker than water.”

“Mr. Holmes, you ... you...”

Sir Basil was visibly deflated and looked as if his chest had descended into his stomach.

“He has already departed for France,” he muttered. “I will call ahead and have him detained as soon as he steps off the boat in Calais.”

“Basil!” said Mycroft. “Use your head for more than a hat rack.”

“Mycroft, that was not called for.”

“My dear Basil. You move with immediate speed to pounce and capture an escaped prisoner. You move with deliberate slowness when snatching a spy. Has no one ever told you that you tail a spy and wait until he has led you to his contacts, and *then* descend on both of them? What you need to do is have your men waiting for him at the lavatory, watch until he transfers the grenades, and then and only then make your move.”

“Oh, yes. I suppose that makes more sense. I will have him brought back to England for interrogation.”

“Considering,” said Mycroft, “the gravity of the offense, the application of electricity to certain bodily appendages might be called for.”

“Mycroft! We are a civilized country. We do not torture prisoners, not even if they are traitors.”

“I agree. Then leave him with the French. They have no such qualms.”

On Friday morning, 28 April of 1919, four men from that section of Military Intelligence that no one will acknowledge exists, assisted by a half-dozen gendarmes, waited in the vicinity of the lavatory in the southern arm of the *Palais de Versailles*. At precisely eight o'clock, a credentialed member of the British delegation entered the lavatory, carrying a valise. At five minutes after eight, a member of the maintenance staff of the *Palais*, who had been assigned to the care of the Hall of Mirrors, also entered.

At seven minutes after eight, the second man emerged, carrying the valise.

He did not get far.

Neither did Mr. Bramwell Duponte.

I have no idea what happened to either them after that, and I knew enough not to ask.

Had the plot been successful, leaders of thirty-one countries might have been assassinated. It would have been thirty-two, but the entire Italian delegation had walked out of the meetings on 24 April, disgruntled with their allocation of increased territory. They returned on 5 May.

On 29 April, Lady Lillian Assherton was released from hospital and returned to her home. There was no butler there to greet her, and she was, once again, despondent, after learning her sister's treachery and betrayal.

On 1 May, an elegantly packed parcel was delivered to a house on Chequer Street by a government driver. In it was a fine Wedgewood bowl along with a note from His Majesty thanking Her Ladyship for her stalwart patriotism.

She sent a note with her thanks to me and Holmes. We read it together over a final glass of brandy in the bar of the Savoy.

“Watson,” he said. “Fine work. We have won a final battle. We won the war. However, my dear old friend, I fear the center cannot hold. We may have lost the peace.”

On 2 May, Sherlock Homes returned to Sussex Downs and his bees.

Dear Sherlockian Reader:

Some historical notes for *The Adventure of the Suicidal Sister*.

From January to June of 1919, representatives of the Allied Powers met in Versailles and engaged in the Paris Peace Conference. The final outcome was the *Treaty of Versailles*. Should you wish to know more about those fascinating days, you may wish to read *Paris 1919* by Margaret MacMillan.

During late April and early May, a sub-committee of the Allied Powers drafted Articles 231 and 232 of the Treaty. These assigned the entire guilt for The Great War to Germany and laid out the requirement for extensive financial reparations. A young economist assisting the British delegation warned that the terms were too punitive and that they threatened the entire future economies of Europe, including Britain. In December of 1919, he published his conclusions as *The Economic Consequences of the Peace*. His name was John Maynard Keynes.

Some historians have argued that these punishments were among the factors that led to the rise of fascism in Germany and eventually to Nazism, the Holocaust, and World War II.

Cotton shipments to England from the US were disrupted during the war and supplies were restricted to those coming from Egypt. The government took over supply management and divided the imports amongst several mills in order to keep as many people as possible employed. Several of the great mills of the time were in Lancashire.

The Loyal North Lancashire Regiment served with distinction during many of the battles of World War I. They were present in the Battle of Passchendaele in November 1917, during which nearly half a million men died in a battle that accomplished next to nothing.

Elsbeth Schragmüller is a historical figure and served as described in the story as one of the master spies of Germany and as the trainer of spies Germany sent into England, France and the other Allied Powers. There are several fictionalized accounts of her exploits, including several movies. She did not have a sister in England. I made that up.

The reference to Edith Cavell is historically accurate. There is a mountain in Western Canada named in her honor. In August of 1965, I had the good fortune, as a teenager, to visit that mountain exactly 50 years to the day after her arrest. The description of it as “a massive, snow-covered mountain” was written by none other than Arthur Conan Doyle in his account of his visit to Jasper, Alberta in June, 1914. In September of 2020, my wife and I visited the site again. It had not changed.

Sir Basil Thomson is also a historical figure who had served with some distinction as the director of several of England’s largest prisons. During the war, he was appointed as the head of the CID Division of Scotland Yard and as the head of the short-lived Intelligence Directorate that was housed within Scotland Yard. He gained renown for his success in capturing and convicting spies, including the interrogation of Mata Hari, who he sent on to the French, who shot her. His reputation has been tarnished by his blatant anti-Semitism and other attitudes that are now considered unforgivable bigotry.

I have no idea if in 1919 *Simpson’s on the Strand* rolled trollies to your table bearing massive cuts of roast beef or ham. However, they do today, and we were lucky to enjoy such a lunch in January of 2020. Highly recommended.

References to events and locations in London are generally accurate for the year 1919.

Warm regards, Craig



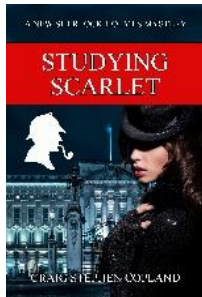
About the Author

In May of 2014, the Sherlock Holmes Society of Canada – better known as The Bootmakers – announced a contest for a new Sherlock Holmes story. Although he had no experience writing fiction, the author submitted a short Sherlock Holmes mystery and was blessed to be declared one of the winners. Thus inspired, he has continued to write new Sherlock Holmes Mysteries since and is on a mission to write a new story as a tribute to each of the sixty stories in the original Canon. He currently writes from Buenos Aires, Toronto, the Okanagan, and Manhattan. Several readers of New Sherlock Holmes Mysteries have kindly sent him suggestions for future stories. You are welcome to do likewise at: craigstephencopland@gmail.com.

More New Sherlock Holmes Historical Mystery/Thrillers

By Craig Stephen Copland

www.SherlockHolmesMystery.com



#1. *Studying Scarlet*.

Garrotted.

That's what happened to the first three men she asked for help.

Treason, murder, assassination, regicide.

That's what I encountered when I agreed to help Sherlock Holmes with this case.

A magnificent, mature woman, a Southern goddess, desperately needs Sherlock Holmes's help. She has to find her estranged husband.

But she hasn't seen or heard from him.

Not since their last incredible weekend together ... seventeen years ago.

He has been involved in international struggles against murderous tyrants.

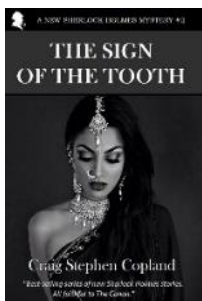
That is all that is known about him.

Now Holmes, Watson and his newest clients will have to find him ... and save the British Empire.

The game is afoot. Bombs and rekindled passion are ready to explode.

This New Sherlock Holmes Mystery is my tribute to *A Study in Scarlet*.

If you enjoy historical thrillers, you will enjoy it. Click on your link



#2. *The Sign of the Tooth*.

Someone murdered her father ... and then murdered his friends.

They died horrible, terrifying deaths.

Someone sent her eight small, priceless golden statues of the Buddha.

Were they a loving gift? Or were they a warning?

Sherlock Holmes knows that for centuries religious zealots have killed others to protect their faith and its sacred relics.

One of the world's most precious relics, the Tooth of the Buddha, is coming to

London. If anything happens to it, there will be hell to pay throughout the Raj.

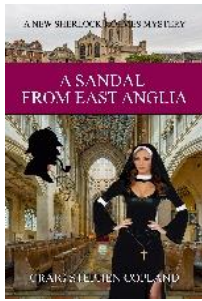
She knows all about the transport and exhibiting of The Tooth. Holmes knows she is a vulnerable young woman ... and that her life is in danger.

Watson did not know he might fall in love with her.

This New Sherlock Holmes Mystery is a tribute to *The Sign of the Four*.

If you enjoy historical thrillers combined with a bit of romance, you will enjoy it. Click on your link.





#3. *A Sandal from East Anglia.*

Nuns should not have secret lovers.

Bishops should not be murdered.

Ancient documents should not have the power to upend English law and culture.

And a young nun who discovers such a document should not be in fear of her life.

A team of young men and women excavate the ancient graveyard in the ruined Abbey of St. Edmunds. They make an amazing discovery.

Some of those who hear about it are thrilled. Others are horrified and will stop at nothing ...

Not even murder.

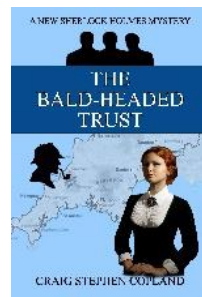
Holmes and Watson are off to St. Edmunds to investigate.

They learn more than could be imagined, and the consequences are staggering. And Sister Serena is not the ideal young woman in holy orders.

But ... to Sherlock Holmes, she will always be *The Nun*.

This New Sherlock Holmes Mystery is my tribute to *A Scandal in Bohemia*.

If you enjoy historical thrillers with religious settings, you will like this story. Click on your link, download and start reading.



#4. *The Bald-Headed Trust.*

Two engineers come to Plymouth to set up the Western Union office.

The wealth of Wall Street is connected to the London Stock Exchange.

Then they were murdered.

Watson takes Sherlock Holmes to Plymouth for the good of his health.

That doesn't work.

Holmes encounters the case of the Telegraph Murders.

He knows that millions of dollars and pounds are moving through the undersea cables every day.

An enormous scheme of fraud is possible.

His arch enemy, the *Napoleon of Crime* could be behind it ...

And does not like having his plans thwarted,

Not by Sherlock Holmes nor the pious woman who runs the Christian bookstore next door.

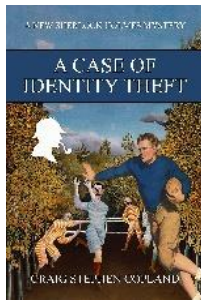
Sherlock Holmes is determined to wreak financial ruin on the perpetrators of fraud.

His enemy is determined to do away with all who oppose him

This New Sherlock Holmes Mystery is a tribute to *The Red-Headed League*.

Do you enjoy historical thrillers set in a religious context? If you do, the click on your link.





#5. *A Case of Identity Theft.*

**Her husband has vanished.
She asks Sherlock Holmes for help.
The husband reappears, but now his wife is missing.**

A couple are found dead in a London alley.
Their heads are missing.

Holmes and Watson investigate and discover that a massive, secret inheritance is about to fall into criminal hands.

Family members are complicit.

Hidden crimes from decades ago and far away come to the surface.

The evil genius who wants the money will use murder, and kidnapping, and torture.

Holmes has to stop him, with a little help from Mycroft.

Royal Marines had better be able to shoot, and not hit the wrong target.

This New Sherlock Holmes Mystery is a tribute to *A Case of Identify*

Mycroft Holmes has an interesting role. Click on your link and see what he does.



#6. *The Hudson Valley Mystery.*

**A young American student goes mad,
He murders his father and is locked away in an institution.
But his mother knows better.**

She appeals to Sherlock Hoomes to come to New York and help her son.

Holmes and Watson cross the Atlantic and enter the metropolis of Manhattan where corruption is everywhere ...

all the way up the Hudson to the mysterious village of Sleepy Hollow.

Another student is murdered.

A young woman is violated.

The villains of Tammany Hall will not allow their empire to be threatened.

Holmes and Watson and a courageous troupe of college actors take them on. We have a weapon they did not expect.

The play's the thing wherein we'll catch the conscience of the crooks.

This New Sherlock Holmes Mystery is a tribute to *The Boscombe Valley Mystery*.

Love New York? You'll love this adventure. Click on your link and off to Manhattan





#7. The Mystery of the Five Oranges.

**The Ku Klux Klan kidnap his daughter.
If he goes to the police, they will kill her.
Terrified, he goes to Sherlock Holmes, his last resort**

On a dark and stormy night, he slips unseen into 221B.
Holmes reassures him. There is hope.

The daughter is no helpless maiden. She sends clues.
She has a friend, a plucky redhead named Anne (with an 'e').

Holmes and Watson cross the Atlantic to Prince Edward Island where we join forces with the newest Irregular.

We must act quickly, before the Klan destroys the only settlement of African Canadians in that part of the world.

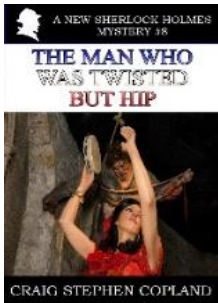
Then the Klan will spread its evil throughout Canada.

Murilla, Matthew, Holmes, Watson Anne team up with the Mounties and try to stop them.

But the world's favorite redhead will have to become a spy.

This New Sherlock Holmes Mystery is a tribute to *The Five Oranges Pips*.

You will enjoy it, especially if you are intrigued by the possibility of Sherlock Holmes working together with *Anne of Green Gables*. Click on your link.



#8 The Man Who Was Twisted But Hip

**France is torn apart by the Dreyfus Affair.
The scourge of Anti-Semitism has spread to England.
Mycroft conscripts Sherlock Holmes to investigate,**

and to start by meeting with a concerned wife whose husband is engaging in strange behavior in a West End theater.

The theater and the Dreyfus Affair in France are connected.

But how? No one knows.

So, Holmes and Watson are sent to Paris.

What they discover could lead to a disastrous conflict between England and France.

Holmes will have to foil the plans of the Napoleon of Crime, and at the same time arrange for the strange husband and his bewildered wife to fall in love all over again.

What happens in Paris does not stay in Paris.

This New Sherlock Holmes Mystery is a tribute to *The Man with the Twisted Lip* as well as y *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*.

If you are drawn to stories about love and tragedy and political intrigue in Paris, this is for you. Click on your link and be transported to the City of Light.





#9. *The Adventure of the Blue Belt Buckle*

**An American Indian lies dead in a hotel room in Mayfair.
He has a bullet in his head,
and the belt that holds up his trousers is missing.**

Scotland Yard is baffled, and Holmes is assigned to the case.

He deduces that the murder is linked to the Golden Anniversary of our beloved Queen.

Fabulous celebrations are planned — fireworks, brass bands, the Crown jewels put on display, the Queen to float down the Thames on the Royal Barge.

But some evil doer plans to turn the events into chaos.

Why? Because in chaos there is profit ... enormous profit.

We have to discover what mayhem is about to be unloosed and stop it.

Our adventure starts with a silver and turquoise belt buckle, and ends with a hysterical Press and an intricate trap that may or may not work.

This New Sherlock Holmes Mystery is a tribute to *The Adventure of the Blue Carbuncle*.

It's a political thriller. There is no goose with a gem in its gullet. Click on your link.



#10. *The Adventure of the Spectred Bat*

**A very pregnant young woman walks home under a full moon.
She is attacked by a bat and bitten on her breast.
She dies in the arms of her sister.**

At the next full moon, the sister is also attacked.

She escapes and flees to Baker Street, begging Sherlock Holmes to protect her.

A Vampire Bat? A demonic assault?

Holmes is a man of science. Vampires do not exist.

But some evil force is loose. Several more young, pregnant women have been attacked the same way ... and they died.

Who is doing it? The local band of Gypsies? The step-father? The furious mother-in-law? The captain of the Coldstream Guards?"

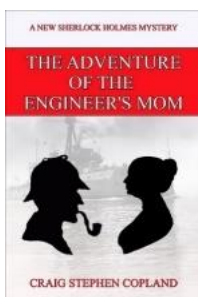
There is only one way to unearth the evil.

While Lestrade and I stand guard, Holmes becomes the bait for the vampire bat.

The murderer escapes. But then ...

This New Sherlock Holmes Mystery is a tribute to *The Adventure of the Speckled Band*.

If you are drawn to stories about vampires, you will like it all the more. Click on your link



#11. *The Adventure of the Engineer's Mom*

**Save your mother's life or betray your country?
A brilliant Cambridge engineering student must make a choice.
The choice gets much harder when a fellow student is murdered.**

He is shot right in front of Sherlock Holmes.

The engineer and his mom know a lot about Britain's greatest secret — the plans to the world's most powerful battleship, The Dreadnought.

The mother is kidnapped. If her son will not turn over the secret plans, she will be tortured ... and murdered.

The villains were not counting on being outsmarted by an unexpected source, the mom herself. All Holmes has to do was to follow her clues and try to save her and England before it is too late. **But a boy's best friend is not always his mother.**

This New Sherlock Holmes Mystery is a tribute to *The Adventure of the Engineer's Thumb*.

If you enjoy the intermingling of Sherlock Holmes and the events leading to World War One, this is for you. Click on your link.



www.SherlockHolmesMystery.com



#12. *The Adventure of the Notable Bachelorette.*

Lord St. Simon's wife disappears.

He demands the services of Sherlock Holmes to find her.

She is much younger than he is. Highly spirited. And American. And unhappy.

Three days later the wife reappears, but she is accused of a vile crime.

Now *she* comes to Sherlock Holmes seeking his help to prove her innocence ... and avoid the gallows.

Neither noble husband nor wife have been playing by the moral rules of Victorian

London.

Both of them have secrets ... dangerous secrets.

So who did it? Who committed the murder?

The wife? The mistress? The younger brother? Someone unknown?

The twisted story began years earlier, out on the American frontier ...

Where the wife learned to use a Colt 45 with deadly accuracy.

And she vows revenge.

This New Sherlock Holmes Mystery is a tribute to *The Adventure of the Noble Bachelor*.

It's a bit racy. Hope you don't mind. Click on your link.



#13. *The Adventure of the Beryl Anarchists.*

Did the sons betray their father?

Did they steal the confidential records of the clients of his bank?

Did they give those records to a gang of miscreants who will use them for blackmail?

The banker begs Holmes to investigate.

Was it really his sons? Or maybe his daughter? Or maybe her boyfriend? Or maybe the voluptuous maid?

The sons and the Anarchists have something in common. They are all besotted with the latest craze — riding motorcycles.

Holmes and I make inquiries.

And things get worse.

A young girl is murdered.

We give chase to the villains ... on motorcycles. ...

All the way to the Peak District.

They threaten the mass murder of an encampment of children if their demands are not met.

This New Sherlock Holmes Mystery is my tribute to *The Adventure of the Beryl Coronet*.

Devotees of Norton, Triumph and the fabulous Brough will love it. Click on your link



#14. *The Adventure of the Coiffured Bitches.*

A young woman about to receive a massive inheritance disappears. Her little brother believes she has become a zombie and is trapped in the graveyard.

His governess knows something is very wrong in the strange family.

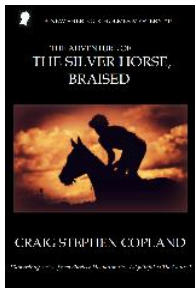
She appeals to Sherlock Holmes ... who she finds rather attractive.

Holmes and Watson travel to Winchester.

We encounter a tyrannical step-father, a weird mother, twisted servants, and an earnest lover ... or two.

Not to mention the enormous mastiff that could tear our throats out.

This New Sherlock Holmes Mystery is a tribute to *The Adventure of the Copper Beeches*. It's a bit on the creepy side, but you will still enjoy it. Click on your link..



#15. *The Silver Horse, Braised.*

Dead jockeys can't win horse races.

What happens when the favored jockey is found dead at Epsom Downs?

Sherlock Holmes can see he was murdered.

News of the suspicious death is splashed all over the newspapers.

Rumors of threats, bribes and doping abound.

Scotland Yard is at a loss.

The *Horsrace of the Century* will match the best steeds in Great Britain against those of the United States.

Millions are wagered.

Holmes and Watson go to Epsom and get to work, assisted by a colorful cast of Runyanesque characters from New York.

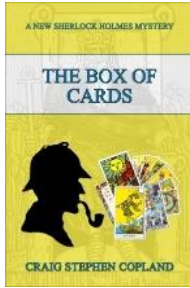
He fails to apprehend the murderers.

Years pass. And then ...

“It is solidly against the rules to do anything that will harm animals, especially magnificent racehorses ... And nobody is allowed to get away with doing that.”

This New Sherlock Holmes Mystery is my tribute to *The Adventure of Silver Blaze*. You will also meet the guys and dolls from the stories by Damon Runyan. You will more than somewhat enjoy it. Click on your link.





#16. *The Box of Cards.*

**Children are kidnapped. Bodies are tortured and dismembered.
Body parts arrive in the post.**

Revenge for adultery? or something else?

A brother and a sister from a strict religious family disappear.

Scotland Yard says they are just off sowing their wild oats

A horrific, gruesome package arrives.

A terrible crime is in process.

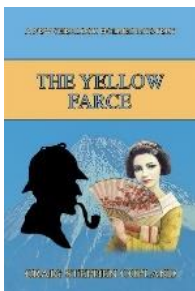
Sherlock Holmes is called in.

We learn that there have been illicit things happening in this strict, religious family for years.

And even before that, something evil took place.

This New Sherlock Holmes Mystery is my tribute to *The Adventure of the Cardboard Box.*

You might enjoy it. Think Tarot cards and. Click on your link.



#17. *The Yellow Farce.*

“Sherlock, this woman must be investigated. Every fortnight, she abandons her husband for several days, and every month a large sum of money appears in their bank account.”

“Oh, my. Half the married men on earth who would be on their knees thanking whatever gods they believe in were their wives to do likewise.”

In far-off Japan a war is raging against the Russians.

Great Britain is officially neutral, but not entirely.

The Japanese are buying their navy from us.

The new Envoy to Japan is brilliant, but his wife is suspected of being a Russian agent.

And maybe having an affair with another Russian agent.

And maybe part of a plot to assassinate the Emperor.

Mycroft sends Holmes and me off to Japan to investigate.

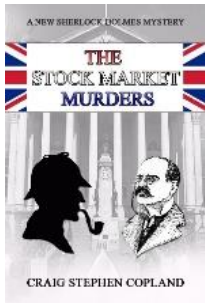
And we learn that ...

Things are seldom what they seem.

This New Sherlock Holmes Mystery is a tribute to *The Adventure of the Yellow Face.*

Holmes goes on a journey. You might want to visit Japan ...like he did. Click on your link.





#18. *The Stock Market Murders.*

A clever Cambridge graduate who works in The City goes missing. Two of his classmates are found murdered.

Holmes investigates and finds that all of them were caught up in the greatest fraud ever visited upon the citizens of England.

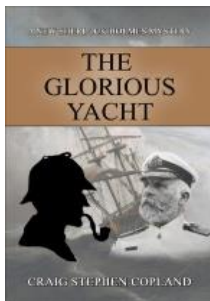
The tentacles of the financial empire behind it reach to the far corners of the globe. In London, they are wrapped around the construction of the new Bakerloo Underground line.

Millions of pounds are about to vanish.

The characters and actions in the story are borrowed from the historic events surrounding the life of James Whittaker Wright.

He has been called ‘the Bernie Madoff of the Victorian era.’ He sounds a lot like you-know-who.

This New Sherlock Holmes Mystery is a tribute to *The Adventure of the Stock-Broker’s Clerk*. Given my iconoclastic sense of satire, it was fun to write. Hope you enjoy it. Click on your link.



#19. *The Glorious Yacht.*

On April 12, 1912 the Titanic strikes an iceberg and sinks.

Over 1500 lives are lost, including an old friend of Holmes and Watson.

Devastated, Sherlock Holmes, now retired, pays a visit to Dr. Watson and his wife.

Together, they reminisce about the time, thirty years ago, when, as much younger men, they went on a sea adventure with their now-deceased friend.

What started as a sailing race turned into a tale of murder, kidnapping, piracy and survival through a tempest.

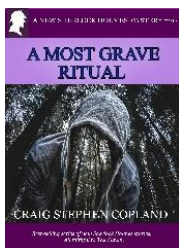
The members of the crew were not who they claimed to be.

But neither did the fifteen-year-old cook with the colorful vocabulary.

And their lives depended on her.

This New Sherlock Holmes Mystery is a tribute to *The Adventure of the Gloria Scott*.

Many of my readers have adored the character of fifteen-year-old Miss Molly Snow. You will likely enjoy meeting her too. Click on your link.



#20. *A Most Grave Ritual.*

The locals claim the ancient estate is haunted.

The estate's patriarch is murdered. The police accuse the son.

The locals know it was the ghost of the headless Charles I.

Sherlock Holmes is hired to exonerate the son.

We hurry to an old village in East Sussex and investigate.

We discover clues not only to hidden riches, but to deeds too foul to tell.

The secrets of the past continue into the present.

Unless we can solve the mystery, the son will hang.

This New Sherlock Holmes Mystery is a tribute to *The Adventure of the Musgrave Ritual*.

The author learned a lot about England in the 1600s while researching the story. Now, so will you. Click on your link.



#21. *The Spy Gate Liars*

“Your friend, Monsieur Sherlock Holmes is near death. Come at once.”

Having received this telegram, Watson rushes to eastern France, where Holmes is investigating the serial murders of former German army officers.

The events that led to this murder mystery began in the Franco-Prussian War of 1870.

But the evil that was done back then has continued until the present day ... and vengeance will be had.

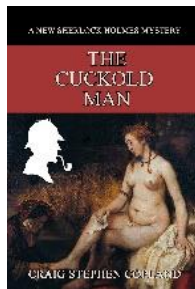
All the victims were killed in the same way, a dagger through the eye socket.

Another likely victim has moved to England, so we rush to find him before the assassin does.

These men may be innocent victims of a mad murderer ... or they may have been executed for their past crimes.

This New Sherlock Holmes Mystery is a tribute to *The Adventure of the Reigate Squires*.

This story was fun to research and write. Hope you enjoy too. Click on your link.



#22. *The Cuckold Man*

Colonel James Barclay married a very beautiful and much younger wife. After ten years of marriage, she disappears.

Did she abandon him? Was she kidnapped? Did some vile pervert want her for unspeakable, depraved reasons?

The Colonel appeals to Sherlock Holmes.

He and Watson travel to the family home in Aldershot and start to investigate.

What we discover indicates that all has not been what it appears to be in this May-December marriage.

Secrets emerge. As does blackmail.

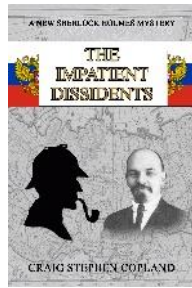
It seems his loving wife was a young widow who never got over the death of her first husband.

So, what has happened to her ... and why?

This New Sherlock Holmes Mystery is a tribute to *The Adventure of the Crooked Man*.

It is also a tribute to the biblical story of King David and Bathsheba. What is the connection? You'll have to read the story. Click on your link.





#23. *The Impatient Dissidents.*

Her Majesty the Queen was not amused.

**A would-be assassin tried to kill her daughter-in-law,
who happened also to be the daughter of the Czar of Russia.**

And she was rather displeased when a Russian count ended up on her front lawn, dead.
Scotland Yard asks Holmes to help find the assassin and stop him.

Why are the *Narodnaya Volya*, the Russian anarchists going about killing Russian diplomats in London?

Holmes recruits his Irregulars and some interesting characters to assist him.

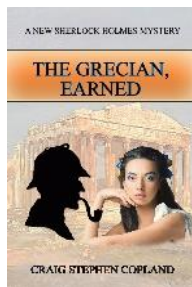
The most unusual is Madam Betsy Burdukovsky, a dowager from Wisconsin who claims to be a countess and a distant cousin of the Czar.

Her life can be summed up in two words. *Bozha moy.*

Together they devise a plot to expose and capture the murderers.

Events do not follow in the way Holmes expected.

This New Sherlock Holmes Mystery is a tribute to *The Adventure of the Resident Patient*. The historical connection is to the Assassination of Czar of Russia in 1881. The results of that event were felt in England and around the world. Click on your link to learn about what took place in London.



#24. *The Grecian, Earned*

Wilson Kemp and Harold Latimer, the villains from the story of *The Greek Interpreter*, ran off to Budapest,

Where they were stabbed multiple times ... and died.

The killer ran away ... a long way away.

Holmes and Watson go to Budapest.

They meet with one of Holmes's former assistants ... one who is smart, but despised.

The trail then takes then to Athens,

Where the first Olympic Games in modern times will soon take place.

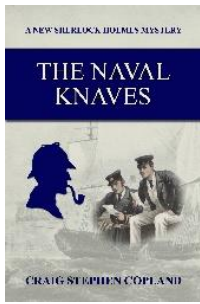
Something is not right. A massive fraud? Cheating to win gold for national pride?

Only one thing is for certain ... *timeo danaos et dona ferentes.*

Beware of Greeks bearing gifts.

This New Sherlock Holmes Mystery is a tribute to *The Adventure of the Greek Interpreter*. You might enjoy attending the first Olympics along with Sherlock Holmes. Click on your link and get ready to cheer for your country.





#25. *The Naval Knaves.*

On September 15, 1894, an anarchist attempted to bomb the Greenwich Observatory.

All he succeeded in blowing up was himself.

But he did not act alone.

Sherlock Holmes discovers that he was part of an intricate web of spies, foreign naval officers, and a drop-dead-gorgeous, not-English princess.

Once again, suspicion lands on poor Percy Phelps.

Now he's in a senior position in the Admiralty.

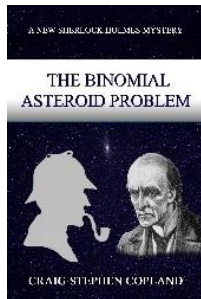
Holmes has to rescue Percy,

But he has a much bigger worry.

A massive, terrorist explosion is planned. It will take many lives.

But where? And when?

This New Sherlock Holmes Mystery is a tribute to *The Adventure of the Naval Treaty*. It is based on actual historic events that took place in the 1890s. Click on your link and learn how bad things really got back then.



#26. *The Binomial Asteroid Problem.*

A Gladstone suitcase is stolen from a small language school.

No one is worried.

A suspicious fire takes the lives of two men.

Sherlock Holmes knows they were murdered/

And then an entire group of students disappears. No one knows what happened to them.

Holmes tracks them an entire day's journey to the north,

They are prisoners at a remote location on the River Tees.

And who is behind the criminal conspiracy? The Napoleon of Crime himself.

The lives of every one of the students are at risk.

This new story is a tribute to *The Adventure of the Final Problem*. It's a prequel to the meeting between Holmes and Moriarty. Click on your link and enjoy.





#27. *The Horror of the Bastard's Villa.*

A Scottish clergyman and his faithful border collie visit 221B. He tells Sherlock Hoomes a horrifying story of a ghostly banshee on the Isle of Skye.

Two people have already died. The villagers blame the banshee.

First Watson rushes up to the Isle. Then Holmes joins him.

A strange cast of characters live in the village of Kyleakin.

The local constable is a braggadocio. The newly-arrived young laird has alternative gender preferences. The scientist is pre-occupied with his work. The barmaid is a gorgeous Scots redhead.

The clergyman is concerned for the endangered souls of his parish.

More people die.

Holmes does not believe in ghosts ... or banshees.

But he most certainly believes in evil.

This new story is a tribute to Arthur Coman Doyle's masterpiece, the *The Hound of the Baskervilles*. The presence of spine-chilling evil is comparable, even if the dog is smaller and friendlier. Click on your link and join the battle against something horrible.



#28. *The Mystery of 222 Baker Street.*

Sherlock Holmes picks the lock and opens the door of the locked room.

On the floor in front of the hearth lies the body of Inspector Forbes of Scotland Yard.

"He has been dead for less than two hours," said Watson.

"Impossible," said Holmes. "We have been watching this house since daybreak, eight hours ago."

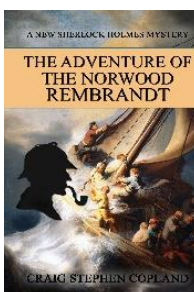
Holmes quickly assembles a list of suspects.

But how did they manage to murder the inspector inside a locked room?

Holmes and Watson have to become the next victims themselves to find out.

They will have to be locked in the room and wait to be murdered.

The story is a tribute to *The Adventure of the Empty House* and is a classic locked-room mystery. Click on your link and see if you can solve the puzzle before Holmes does.



#29. *The Adventure of the Norwood Rembrandt.*

In two weeks, an innocent man will be on his way to the gallows.

Five years ago, he was convicted of stealing invaluable works of art, And murdering the butler.

All possible appeals have been lost. His last hope is Sherlock Holmes.

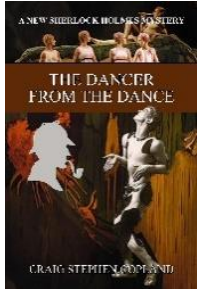
Holmes and Watson hasten to Norwood to investigate.

Clues are found in the cemetery. Both the living and the dead have a story to tell.

If Holmes can find the stolen art, it might lead him to the truth.

If he can't, the man will hang ... and the stolen art could end up in Boston

This new Sherlock Holmes mystery is a tribute to *The Adventure of the Norwood Builder*. If you know about famous events in the world of art, it will have special significance. Click and enjoy.



#30. *The Dancer from the Dance*

The murdered bodies of a young man and a young woman are found in a London alley.

Scotland Yard is baffled and drag Sherlock Holmes out of retirement to help them.

“They are dancers from *Les Ballets Russes*,” says Holmes.

The revolutionary ballet company founded by the flamboyant impresario, Serge Diaghilev, comes once a year to the West End.

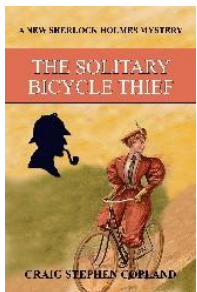
Holmes and Watson attend a traditional performance of *Swan Lake*, and an avant garde presentation of *The Rite of Spring*.

They are looking for clues.

Someone is attempting to take over control not only of the ballet company, but the entire lucrative empire of London's West End.

They will need help from the world's most celebrated dancer, troubled soul though he may be.

This new Sherlock Holmes mystery is a tribute to *The Adventure of the Dancing Men*. If you are interested in both Tchaikovsky and Stravinsky, you will be good at seeing the clues. Click and hum along.



#31. *The Solitary Bicycle Thief*

Attractive, clever students are brought to England.

**They were recruited from Africa, Asia and Eastern Europe,
And promised scholarships.**

But that was not what they found when they arrived.

These young men and women were sold into virtual slavery and forced to engage in nefarious and debased activities.

Two of them ride their bicycles to the home of Violet Smith. Remember her?

She alerts Sherlock Holmes.

Together, they uncover an underground web of vice, blackmail and murder.

Today, we would call it human trafficking.

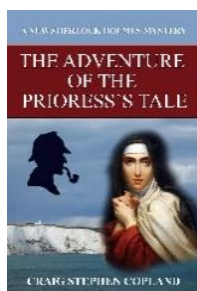
Those who refuse to cooperate are disposed of.

This new Sherlock Holmes mystery is a tribute to *The Adventure of the Solitary Cyclist*. Ever wonder what became of Violet Smith and Cyril Morton? Click and find out.

Buy from [amazon.co.uk](#)

Buy from [amazon.ca](#)

Buy from [amazon.com](#)



#32. *The Adventure of the Prioress's Tale.*

**An entire girls' field hockey team disappears.
Were they kidnapped and held for ransom? Abducted into white slavery?
Did they run off to Paris ... or worse, New York?**

A team from an elite girls' school goes to Dover for a short holiday.

In the haunted courtyard of Dover Castle, and under the full moon, they party ... with a group of boys from America.

At morning roll call, they do not appear. No one knows what happened to them.

Sherlock Holmes is called in by the Prioress in charge.

Together with his latest Irregulars, he tries to find them before something terrible happens.

Then, something terrible does happen.

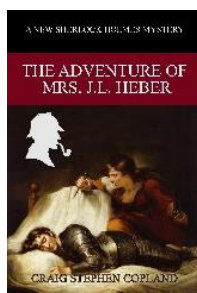
This new Sherlock Holmes mystery is a tribute to *The Adventure of the Priory School*. One reader commented that it was "a real page turner."

You agree? Click and see.

Buy from [amazon.co.uk](#)

Buy from [amazon.ca](#)

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#33. *The Adventure of Mrs. J.L. Heber.*

**A mad woman is murdering London's bachelors,
By driving a railway spike through their heads.
And then vanishing before Scotland Yard can show up.**

Sherlock Holmes is called in.

He sees a re-enacting of the biblical story of Jael.

Just like her, this killer is exacting revenge,

For acts that took place a decade ago and far away.

Holmes has a plan. He will use Dr. Watson as bait.

It's almost Christmas.

One targeted bachelor will not be celebrating. Why him?

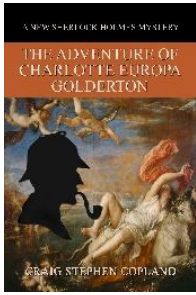
That's the one Dr. Watson will impersonate.

This new Sherlock Holmes mystery is a tribute to *The Adventure of Black Peter*. Not recommended for squeamish readers. Click and read if you don't believe me.

Buy from [amazon.co.uk](#)

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#34. *The Adventure of Charlotte Europa Golderton.*

**The mother of the first young woman to come to 221B has disappeared.
The father of the second young woman cannot be found.
The third woman's fiancé has died in the war.**

Some evil genius who calls himself Charles Augustus Milverton — but who cannot possibly be him seeing as he is dead — is engaged in a nefarious scheme of blackmail.

The Royal Mail Telegraph Office has been compromised.

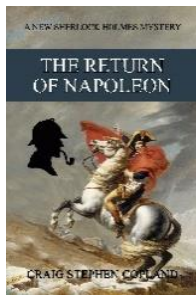
All three of the women and the blackmail scheme are somehow connected to an archeological expedition to Crete.

Priceless Minoan artifacts are worth fighting over.

Holme takes on what promises to be an amusing and challenging case.

Then one of the women is murdered.

This new Sherlock Holmes mystery is a tribute to *The Adventure of Charles Augustus Milverton*. If the interplay of the present with ancient history is something you find intriguing, the click and read.



#35. *The Return of Napoleon.*

**Napoleon did not like being blown out of the water at Trafalgar.
His ghost has returned to wreak revenge.
Sherlock Holmes does not believe in ghosts.**

Watson is not so sure.

The 100th anniversary of Lord Nelson's naval triumph is about to be celebrated.

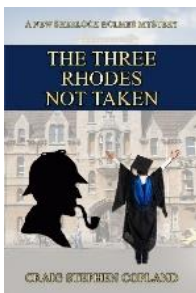
A massive naval event will take place.

Nelson will be represented by his descendants, including two precocious children, whose lives are threatened by what appears to be the return of Napoleon.

Either someone has arranged an elaborate, criminal hoax, or

Napoleon has returned.

This new Sherlock Holmes mystery is a tribute to *The Adventure of the Six Napoleons*. It is a Sherlockian ghost story. Do you believe? Click and read.



#36. *The Three Rhodes Not Taken.*

**Oxford University is one of the most prestigious schools in the world.
And the most sought-after award is the newly established Rhodes scholarship.
Is it worth cheating, kidnapping, or murdering to be one of the few recipients?**

A document vital to winning the scholarship is stolen.

Sherlock Holmes is brought in to investigate.

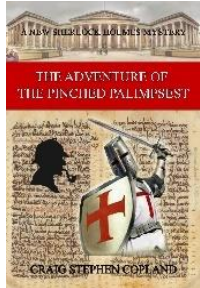
He quickly established the prime suspect.

Then that suspect is murdered.

So who did it?

And what has the winner been hiding all along?

This new Sherlock Holmes mystery is a tribute to *The Adventure of the Three Students*. Most of it takes place in the fascinating city of Oxford. Click, download and read.



#37. *The Adventure of the Pinched Palimpsest*.

**Three students from Oxford break into the British Museum.
A museum guard is found murdered.
They are charged.**

Students can be very naïve.

They are easily swayed by anarchist professors,

Who encourage them to help return objects taken from conquered people and send them back.

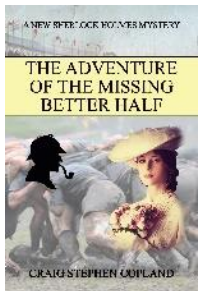
A dear friend of the students begs Sherlock Holmes to help them.

He soon discovers that no one is telling the truth.

Holmes and Watson travel all the way to a remote village in Scotland to try to find the culprit.

The truth lies in an obscure palimpsest, if they can find it.

This new Sherlock Holmes mystery is a tribute to *The Adventure of the Golden Pince-Nez*. The plot overlaps with *The Da Vinci Code*. How? Click on your link and find out.



#38. *The Adventure of the Missing Better Half*.

**Did you read *The Adventure of the Missing Three Quarter*?
Ever wonder what happened to the bereaved, heart-broken Godfrey Staunton?
He found a new life ... and it's all in this story.**

Staunton's life slowly got better.

He met another young woman and fell in love all over again.

His life got much better.

Then it got much worse.

Bribery, beatings, murder and more swept him and his beloved away.

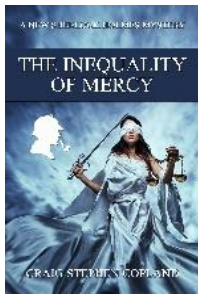
He comes to Sherlock Holmes ... desperate.

The Home Nations Championship Games will soon start.

And a monstrous crime could take place.

This new Sherlock Holmes mystery is a tribute to *The Adventure of the Missing Three Quarter* and is all about the great game of rugby. Are you a fan? Doesn't matter ... click on your link anyway and enjoy. Click on your link and find out.





#39. *The Inequality of Mercy.*

**Captain Jack Croker killed Sir Eustace at Abbey Grange.
Holmes and Watson pardoned him, and off he went.
He returns a year later, hoping to be reunited with his fiancée.**

Fate intervened.

So did murder, treachery, and international intrigue.

Croker has no choice but to forget about Mary Fraser.

His beloved is more interested in marrying a rich nobleman.

Her maid, Theresa Wright, asks Sherlock Holmes to intervene.

Bad things happen.

Mary's life is at risk.

Jack Croker, Holmes, and Watson race to help her.

Do you remember the choices placed before Portia in *The Merchant of Venice*

Holmes recreates them.

This new Sherlock Holmes mystery is a tribute to *The Adventure of Abbey Grange*. If you might enjoy seeing Sherlock Holmes interact with Shakespeare, you will like the story. Click on your link and recite Portia's famous speech.



#40. *The Adventure of the Second Entente.*

**A rich young baron goes to the Middle East.
He is searching for oil. He finds it.
Then he is murdered.**

The obvious suspect?

His only relative and sole heir,

An American woman ... from California.

She come to Sherlock Holmes, proclaiming her innocence.

If it wasn't her ... who did it?

In 1901 the great powers of Europe were forming and breaking alliances.

Oil was quickly becoming the route to money and power.

This story is a tribute to *The Adventure of the Second Stain*. The problems in the Middle east today started way back then. How? Click and read the story.





#41. *The Adventure of the Morning Glory Murders.*

Victorian England was racist ... and bigoted.

A family fled Argentina and came to England, hoping for a better life.

The father made many enemies years ago.

They have followed him to England.

The family is abducted.

The enormous cook from Haiti, who readers met in *Wisteria Lodge*, is falsely accused.

He cares about the missing children, and will help Holmes save the family ...

Before it is too late.

On a dark night, he is unstoppable.

This story is a tribute to *The Adventure of Wisteria Lodge*. If you want to read about how brave people faced those evils and overcame them, this is a story you will find interesting. Click and enjoy.



#42 *The Adventure of the Treacherous Trust*

A young woman falls off a roof terrace ... and dies.

A rich older man had found her attractive.

He introduces her to his son.

He sees that she is appointed to the board of directors of a charity his son operates.

The charity is supposed to be helping poor children in war-torn countries.

She attends a meeting of the directors,

An hour later, she is dead.

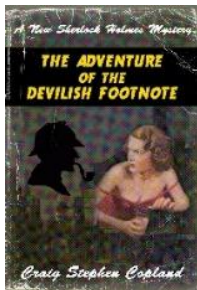
Everybody believes it was a tragic accident ... everybody except her sister, Miss Violet Westbury.

She appeals to Sherlock Holmes.

He traces the evidence all the way to Calcutta and back to St. James Square.

The villains almost get away with their vile crime ... almost.

This new story is a tribute to *The Adventure of the Bruce-Partington Plans*. If you think the non-profit charity world is safe and honest ... thin again and click on your link.



#43 *The Adventure of the Devilish Footnote*

A publisher holds a soiree.

She is poisoned and dies.

Her brilliant editor almost dies too.

Scotland Yard calls for Sherlock Holmes.

He soon discovers that almost everyone in the literary world wanted the woman dead.

He investigates. He and Watson travel to Cornwall.

The famous great game hunter they met there before has returned.

Matters become complicated when Dr. Watson, now a widower, becomes romantically attracted to the editor.

More guests die.

They all must have known something.

This new story is a tribute to *The Adventure of the Devil's Foot*. There is no love lost in the world of books and publishing. Click on your link.



#44 *The Adventure of the Insane Napoletano.*

The Criminal Lunatic Asylum in Broadmoor held some of the most dangerous men in England.

An insane criminal escapes.

Rich French people living in London are murdered and mutilated.

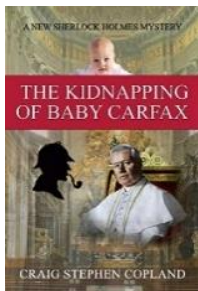
Sherlock Holmes and he and Dr. Watson enter the world of organized crime mingled with insanity.

The French ambassador, a former general, is recruited to help.

The evil began many years ago, on another continent.

Evil and obsession for revenge do not die.

This new story is a tribute to *The Adventure of the Red Circle*. The paperback edition bears the title *The Adventure of the Assassino Pazzo*. Organized crime began in London over a century ago. Click on your link and learn.



#45 *The Kidnapping of Baby Carfax.*

Years ago, Lady Frances Carfax who was almost buried alive.

She returns to 221B and asks Holmes for help.

Her love child also disappeared ... a long time ago.

Holmes refuses to take her case ... then things change and he agrees.

There is much more than a kidnapped baby involved.

There is a plot to manipulate the election of the new pope ... for crass political gain.

Holmes and Watson and their latest assistant (who Watson trusts but Holmes does not) race across Europe.

Once again, their client is buried alive.

This new story is a tribute to *The Disappearance of Lady Frances Carfax*. Want to roam through Europe, even if only vicariously? Click and join Holmes and Watson as they do so.





#46 *The Dying Debutante*

“Watson, wake up. We have a visitor.”

I felt the firm but friendly hand of Sherlock Holmes on my shoulder, forcing me awake.

A young woman sat the sofa.

“The members of my family are conspiring to murder me” she said.

Because I am young, beautiful and brilliant; because I control the family estate following the recent death of my father; and because I utterly despise every one of them.”

Sherlock Holmes agreed to take on her case.

When Dr, Watson tried to wake her up in the morning. there was no response.

This new story is a tribute to *The Adventure of the Dying Detective*. *Once again, family members can be dangerous to your health*. Be warned and click anyway.



#47 *The Village of Revenge*.

Inspector Lestrade asks Holmes to take a case.

He's not interested.

Lestrade wagers five pounds he will agree after a short journey to a cottage south of London.

They come to a small cottage that burned to the ground the previous night.

In the bedroom is a charred body of a woman. Murdered, then set on fire.

Holmes cannot refuse. He lost the bet.

The story began several years earlier in New York City.

A family was murdered. But one member survived. A daughter.

She is bent on revenge.

And she is brilliant and ruthless, and not afraid of an evil professor of mathematics.

This new story is a tribute to *The Valley of Fear*. Like that story, it begins in America and then crosses the Atlantic and continues in England. Click on your link and enjoy the adventure.



#48 *The Adventure of Mata Hari's Harem*. “

The woman known to the world as Mata Hari was famous ...

For reasons that were salacious.

But Holmes is aware of her unique skills.

“The German ambassador, madam,” said Sherlock Holmes, “is reputed to be brilliant and very difficult.”

“My dear, Mr. Holmes,” she said. “He is a man. Like all men when they are drunk and in the throes of ecstasy, he will be easy.”

The eyes of every man in the room followed her out of the bar of the Ritz.

Once again, at the outbreak of The Great War, Sherlock Holmes must engage in dangerous espionage.

He will be assisted by the most glamorous and tragic of spies.

This story is a tribute to *His Last Bow*. The title was used fifty years ago when the author attended Bible camp in Muskoka, Ontario, Canada. Click and become part of Mata Hari's harem.



#49 The Adventure of Hope Abandoned.

**It was the most expensive diamond in the world.
When she entered her private railway car, she was wearing it.
Then chaos erupted. People died.**

When the smoke had cleared, she was not wearing it.

The Hope Diamond had vanished.

Scotland Yard sent their best men to investigate.

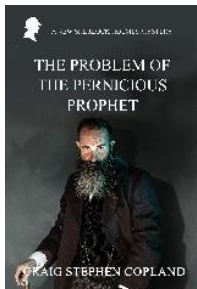
They did not ask Sherlock Holmes for help. The insurance company did.

Sherlock Holmes recruits four new Irregulars and together they set out to find the diamond ... and the murderers.

Their lives will be at risk.

Another story with a heroic dog.

The new story is a tribute to *The Adventure of the Mazarin Stone*. But it is far more exciting and highly appropriate for young adults. Click and then share it with your children and grandchildren



#50 The Problem of The Pernicious Prophet.

**“I have heard the whisper of death. I have heard it in the wind.
Someone will die. Murdered, and soon.
Only you, Mr. Sherlock Holmes, can stop it.”**

His words were prophetic.

Sherlock Holmes would be implicated in a murder.

Holmes and Watson travel to Thor Bridge and to the estate of Neil Gibson, the belligerent American who has now married his former mistress.

A murder has taken place, and it is followed by another one.

Several people had the motive, the means, and the opportunity to commit murder. But which one was it?

This story is a tribute to the original story, *The Problem of Thor Bridge*. Did you ever wonder whatever became of Neil Gibson and Miss Dunbar? Now you will find out. NOTE: This story was first published under the title *The Problem of Whispered Death*.





#51 *The Adventure of Homo Creepius Maximus.*

Miss Edlyn Ferenci, an upper sixth form student, returned to her room in the senior dormitory after the Vespers Service.

As she was preparing for bed, she looked out her window.

Perched in the large oak tree and looking directly at her was a vile looking man.

He was almost naked and grinning.

A fortnight later, Miss Edlyn lay dead at the base of the tree.

The Headmistress said it was a tragic accident.

Her best friend knew better.

She slipped out of the school, traveled to London in disguise, and called on Sherlock Holmes.

Holmes and Watson hurry to Oxford.

The school where the death took place is housed in the former home of Professor Presbury.

His elixir is worth a fortune.

Its effect on men is comparable to what Viagra does today.

This new story is a tribute to *The Adventure of the Creeping Man*. Join Holmes and three determined female students as they battle some sleazy, evil men. Click and download.



#52 *The Adventure of the Sanguisuge of Surrey.*

When a man's beautiful, beloved daughter dies, a part of his soul dies with her.

When that daughter dies at the hands of a murderer, that man's mind is filled with a burning fire for justice, for revenge.

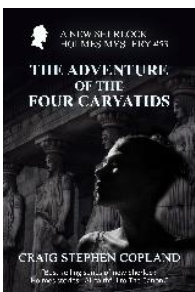
When the local police shrug off the murder as a random robbery gone wrong,

when the local populace gossip about the daughter being a victim of an evil vampire, that man turns to Sherlock Holmes.

Join Holmes and Watson in their quest to uncover the monster behind the crime.

The monster may or may not be a vampire.

This story is a tribute to *The Adventure of the Sussex Vampire*. Suggest you keep garlic and a crucifix nearby while reading. Click during the sunlight.



#53 *The Adventure of the Four Caryatids.*

A new adventure begins with a single counterfeit £100 note.

Soon, there are many more counterfeit notes.

Then a man's body appears in a church graveyard with counterfeit notes in his pocket.

Scotland Yard demands that Sherlock Holmes take the case

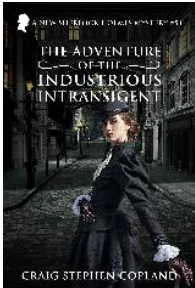
The next day, Holmes and Watson are off to Europe in search of a dangerous conspiracy that is threatening the security of the British Empire.

Holmes will need help if he is to avoid being murdered himself.

And maybe the motives have nothing to do with greed after all.

Intense national pride is an irresistible force.

This new mystery is a tribute to the original Sherlock Holmes story, *The Adventure of the Three Garridebs*.



#54. The Adventure of the Industrious Intransigent.

Baron Gruner survived the sulfuric vitriol hurled in his face. He was left almost blind and horribly disfigured.

A year later, when he was shot twice in the back of his head, he did not survive.

Violet de Merville, the young woman of ethereal beauty who had been engaged to him, was accused by Scotland Yard of his murder.

She appeals to Sherlock Holmes for help.

Where does he start? There are a score of women in England and Austria who Gruner exploited, betrayed and humiliated.

They all have fathers and brothers and uncles.

There are many more men who he swindled and who hate him.

Holmes and Watson will have to find the one true murderer, save Violet from prison, and avoid being murdered themselves.

Can homicide be justified?

This original new mystery is a tribute to *The Adventure of the Illustrious Client*. **When your heart's on fire, smoke gets in your eyes.**



#55 The Adventure of the Six Gullibles.

Six students receive death threats.

For a lark over the summer, they wrote a satirical book.

It made fun of the crimes and foibles of a fictional baron.

Some real baron somewhere does not think it's funny.

They got too much of his story right. And now he is out to kill them.

They appeal to Sherlock Holmes.

But he is too busy with his bees, and so he sends Dr. Watson. What Watson discovers is terrifying.

Soon he, Holmes and one of the students are in a race against time to unmask the villain and take him down.

Before more lives are destroyed.

This New Sherlock Holmes Mystery is a tribute to *The Adventure of the Three Gables*. It was also inspired by *Naked Came the Stranger*. A fun read.





#56 The Adventure of the Bewildered Student.

Someone murdered a university student.
The police found him lying in his bed.
His head smashed by a cricket bat.

Another student is arrested ... claiming it was a case of jealous rage over the affections of a beautiful girl.

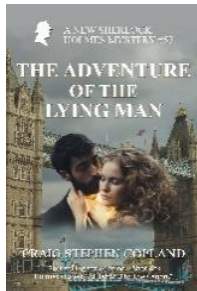
The arrested student's formidable mother demands Sherlock Holmes prove her son's innocence.

Holmes investigates.

Several people had reason to commit murder.

At least one wants to kill Holmes too.

This new mystery is a tribute to the original Sherlock Holmes story, *The Adventure of the Blanched Soldier*. Like that story, it is told directly by Sherlock Holmes himself.



#57 The Adventure of the Lying Man.

**A senior government official falls dead, almost into Sherlock Holmes's lap.
He was in charge of awarding contracts for major government projects, worth millions of pounds.**

They were to be announced in three weeks.

Somebody wanted to disrupt the awards.

A contract worth over a million pounds is a reason to commit murder.

The official grew up in Fulworth, the same town where a man died after being stung by the creepy, deadly giant jellyfish Holmes wrote about in *The Adventure of the Lion's Mane*.

The characters from that story, especially the peerless Sussex beauty, Maud, agree to help Holmes... and do so at their peril.

Mycroft must also try to help, also at his peril.

With each passing week, the implications of the case grow.

Holmes must act.

The security of the British Empire is at risk.

This story is a tribute to *The Adventure of the Lion's Mane*. Will the creepy, deadly giant jellyfish return? You will have to read the story.



#58 The Adventure of the Pain in the Artist

Artists are singularly passionate people.

Some are so intense, they commit suicide.

Some commit murder.

A popular French artist living in London has an appointment to see Sherlock Holmes.

He fails to appear.

Why? Because he is dead.

Suicide? Or murder?

Holmes is asked to investigate.

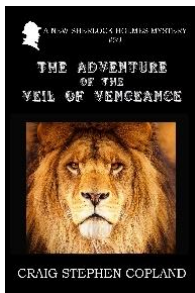
He quickly learns that nothing in the world of art is what it seems.

This new mystery takes Holmes and Watson into the world of late Victorian art where he meets the famous, the infamous and a horde of talented women artists who will have their first opportunity to exhibit their work to the world ... or will they?

Join Sherlock Holmes as he attempts to destroy a murderous villain even if it means using himself as bait.

The Pre-Raphaelites had some scary secrets.

This story is the 58th in the series of New Sherlock Holmes mysteries and is a tribute to the original story, *The Adventure of the Retired Colourman*.



#59 *The Adventure of the Veil of Vengeance.*

Thirteen years ago, a lion gnawed her face to shreds.

Her lover, a coward, fled, leaving her to her fate beneath the jaws of the beast.

Eight years ago, she contemplated suicide.

Sherlock Holmes intervened, and she continued to live behind her veil.

Now Holmes and Watson visit her again.

There is a possibility of surgery to partially restore her face, but it will require travel to the doctors in Berlin.

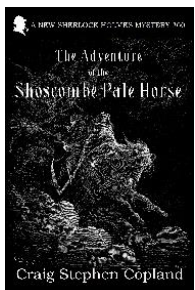
Thus begins another adventure. The events of all those years ago have consequences for the present.

Former lovers, new husbands and daughters will all have a role to play.

Sherlock Holmes will have to discover who committed another murder, and stop the villain from doing more harm.

She will have to make peace with the lion.

This new adventure is a tribute to *The Adventure of the Veiled Lodger*. It includes the familiar characters from the original story and introduces you to a few more ... and Sherlock Holmes will have to move quickly to save them all from peril.



60. *The Adventure of the Shoscombe Pale Horse.*

A schoolgirl pays a visit to Sherlock Holmes. She has discovered a dead body.

Dr. Watson does not believe her,

but Holmes does and asks her to take him to the corpse.

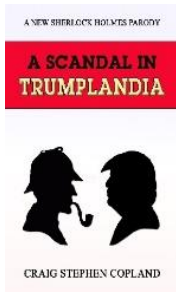
She leads the two of them to a place where unspeakable evil is present.

What Holmes learns there leads him to the hills of Berkshire and the ghostly white chalk horse.

The superstitious people of the town believe in the Pale Horse of Death from the Book

of Revelation. Another local resident dies, and Holmes connects the dots. They lead directly to the great horse race at the Derby and the millions of pounds that are at stake. Or do they lead to something else altogether.?

This New Sherlock Holmes Mystery is a tribute to *The Adventure of Shoscombe Old Place* and will be an enjoyable read for fans of the canonical Sherlock Holmes ... and those who love the sport of kings.

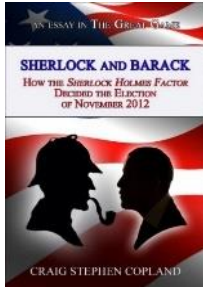


A Scandal in Trumplandia.

NOT a new mystery but a political satire. The story is a parody of the much-loved original story, *A Scandal in Bohemia*, with the character of the King of Bohemia replaced by you-know-who. If you enjoy both political satire and Sherlock Holmes, you will get a chuckle out of this new story



Contributions to The Great Game of Sherlockian Scholarship



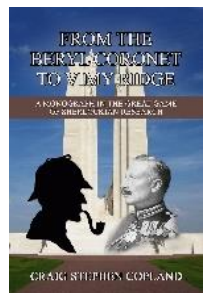
Sherlock and Barack.

**This is NOT a new Sherlock Holmes Mystery.
It is a Sherlockian research monograph.**

Why did Barack Obama win in November 2012?

Why did Mitt Romney lose? Pundits and political scientists have offered countless reasons. This book reveals the truth - The Sherlock Holmes Factor.

Had it not been for Sherlock Holmes, Mitt Romney would be president.



From The Beryl Coronet to Vimy Ridge.

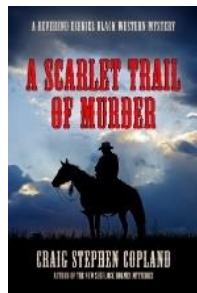
This is NOT a New Sherlock Holmes Mystery.

It is a monograph of Sherlockian research.

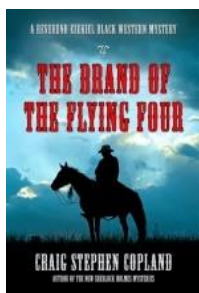
This new contribution to the Great Game of Sherlockian scholarship argues that there was a Sherlock Holmes factor in the causes of World War I... and that it is secretly revealed in the *roman a clef* story that we know as *The Adventure of the Beryl Coronet*.



Reverend Ezekiel Black—‘The Sherlock Holmes of the American West’— Mystery Stories.



A Scarlet Trail of Murder. At ten o'clock on Sunday morning, the twenty-second of October, 1882, in an abandoned house in the West Bottom of Kansas City, a fellow named Jasper Harrison did not wake up. His inability to do was the result of his having had his throat cut. The Reverend Mr. Ezekiel Black, a part-time Methodist minister, and an itinerant US Marshall is called in. This original western mystery was inspired by the great Sherlock Holmes classic, *A Study in Scarlet*.

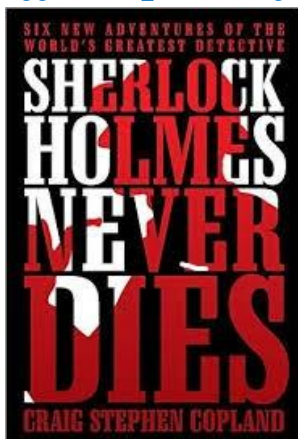


The Brand of the Flying Four. This case all began one quiet evening in a room in Kansas City. A few weeks later, a gruesome murder, took place in Denver. By the time Rev. Black had solved the mystery, justice, of the frontier variety, not the courtroom, had been meted out. The story is inspired by *The Sign of the Four* by Arthur Conan Doyle, and like that story, it combines murder most foul, and romance most enticing.



www.SherlockHolmesMystery.com

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