Improbable Adventures of Sherlock Holmes

Comprised of Eight Documents

A Sherlockiana Primer by Christopher Roden
The Horror of the Many Faces by Tim Lebbon
The Adventure of the Death-Fetch by Darrell Schweitzer
The Adventure of the Lost World by Dominic Green
Dynamics of a Hanging by Tony Pi
Merridew of Abominable Memory by Chris Roberson
The Adventure of the Green Skull by Mark Valentine
You See But You Do Not Observe by Robert J. Sawyer

A Sherlockiana Primer
by Christopher Roden

Fog swirls thickly in the streets, its gloom penetrated from time to time by the weak gleam of a gaslight; a hansom cab grinds its steady way through the murk; there are occasional shouts from vendors and street urchins, whistles as policemen go about their business. It is the London of 1895, the London that will bring a stream of unusual characters to 221B Baker Street seeking help from the world's first and greatest consulting detective, Mr. Sherlock Holmes.

When Arthur Conan Doyle (1859–1930) first created the great detective, little did he know that he was beginning a series of stories that would still be read some 120-odd years later. But Conan Doyle was an inventive writer, and the characters that filled his stories gripped the imagination of his readers, who devoured episode after episode of the adventures of Sherlock Holmes. In many ways the characters of the Holmes stories are often more interesting than the cases themselves.

So who are the major players on the Baker Street stage? Putting Holmes himself aside (for Holmes is recognisable even to people unfamiliar with the stories themselves), Dr. John H. Watson has to be given pride of place. A veteran of the second Afghan War, Watson, who served as a Duty Surgeon, had been injured by a Jezail bullet at the battle of Maiwand, and saved from certain capture by the courage of his orderly, known to us only as Murray. Pain and illness followed and an urgent return to England became necessary. Watson naturally gravitated to London where, following an introduction by a former colleague, Stamford, he made the acquaintance of Sherlock Holmes. It did not take the two long to decide to share rooms in Baker Street. Throughout the adventures Watson is the ever faithful companion, willing to accompany Holmes at a moment's notice. He is never as smart as Holmes—indeed, his conclusions are often considerably off the mark—and Conan Doyle cleverly does not allow Watson to appear more perceptive than his readers. But without Watson there would be no Holmes stories, for Watson chronicled Holmes's adventures and made Holmes famous by publishing them for the reading public in *The Strand Magazine.*

Although Holmes knew that he could always rely on Watson's companionship and assistance, even a detective as astute as Holmes occasionally needed the wisdom and advice of others. But whose knowledge and deductive skills would be sufficient to assist our genius hero? Obviously

someone who shared Holmes's faculties of deduction and analysis—possibly to an even greater degree. For that person we need look no further than Holmes's older brother, Mycroft. Mycroft is an unusual character indeed, a larger-than-life figure who spends his days passing between his lodgings in Pall Mall, his office in Whitehall, and the Diogenes Club ("the queerest club in London").

It came as something of a surprise to Dr. Watson to discover that Holmes had a brother at all, and he could never have dreamed of Mycroft's influence on national affairs. ("Occasionally," Holmes told Watson, "he *is* the British Government . . . . His position is unique. He has made it for himself. There has never been anything like it before, nor will be again. He has the tidiest and most orderly brain, with the greatest capacity for storing facts of any man living . . . . The conclusions of every department are passed to him, and he is the central exchange, the clearing-house, which makes out the balance. Other men are specialists, but his specialism is omniscience . . . . Again and again his word has decided the national policy.")

Quite a man. It's no wonder that Holmes was able to entrust his affairs to Mycroft during the years of his "hiatus" following his presumed death at the Reichenbach Falls.

Our next major player is the long-suffering Mrs. Hudson, Holmes's landlady—a saint if ever there was one for her tolerance of Holmes's chemical experiments, the foul odours from his pipes, and his indoor pistol practice (who else, we ask, would have put up with a tenant who peppered the wall of his room with Boxer cartridges to carve out "a patriotic V. R. done in bullet-pocks"?)

Smaller players, but invaluable to Holmes, are the band of a dozen or so ragged children (described as "street Arabs") known as the Baker Street Irregulars, who can go everywhere, see everything, overhear everyone, and provide vital information to the great detective.

Given the nature of Holmes's business, it is inevitable that Holmes should attract his fair share of enemies, and chief among his adversaries has to be Professor James Moriarty, the Napoleon of Crime —"the organizer of half that is evil and of nearly all that is undetected in this great city." Although Moriarty plays a major role in only one canonical story, his presence seems to pervade the canon. He is a criminal mastermind with "a brain of the first order. He sits motionless, like a spider in the centre of its web, but that web has a thousand radiations, and he knows well every quiver of each of them." As Holmes noted, Moriarty did little himself—he was the planner with numerous agents, and there was little or no reason for the authorities to suspect him of misdeeds. In what became the "Final Problem," Holmes lured Moriarty and his henchman, Colonel Sebastian Moran, to Switzerland, where a final confrontation took place above the Reichenbach Falls—a struggle which Moriarty failed to survive.

Moriarty's second-in-command, Colonel Sebastian Moran, once of Her Majesty's Indian Army, and the best heavy game shot that Britain's Eastern Empire ever produced, attempted to wreak vengeance with an air rifle for Moriarty's death, in the adventure titled "The Empty House," only to be deceived by a silhouette cast by a wax bust commissioned by Holmes from the craftsman M. Oscar Meunier of Grenoble.

Other villains worthy of mention are the master blackmailer Charles Augustus Milverton ("the worst man in London"); the evil Dr. Grimesby Roylott, whose demise was brought about by the swamp adder with which he'd planned to kill his step-daughters; and the disgusting Baron Adelbert Gruner, murderer, and author of a "lust diary" which "no man, even if he had come from the gutter, could have put together."

While the Sherlockian canon is dominated by men, Holmes encounters strong women, too. Prominent among these are Kitty Winter, a victim of Baron Adelbert Gruner, who takes her revenge for mistreatment at Gruner's hand by throwing vitriol into his face. Nor should we overlook Rachel Howells ("a very good girl, but of an excitable Welsh temperament"), the jilted fiancée of the butler Brunton, who took her revenge by incarcerating her ex-lover in a cellar at Hurlestone Manor. Maud Bellamy

impressed Holmes: "[She] will always remain in my memory as a most complete and remarkable woman." But of all the women Holmes encounters during his investigations, Irene Adler, or *the* woman, as Holmes thinks of her, stands out. Irene appears in only one story, but her presence casts a shadow over the entire canon. In this spirited, intelligent, daring, and courageous woman, Conan Doyle created the female counterpart to Sherlock Holmes: a woman who lives by her wits, is equal to Holmes in her use of disguise, and has a splendid disregard for the mores of the time.

Inevitably, Holmes's business brings him in contact with the official police force from time to time, and during the course of the adventures we encounter a number of officers: some who are capable, and some who do little more than frustrate Holmes. We encounter the official force in the very first Holmes story, *A Study in Scarlet*, when Holmes is approached by Inspector Tobias Gregson. "Gregson is the smartest of the Scotland Yarders," Holmes tells Watson. "He and Lestrade are the pick of a bad lot." In *A Study in Scarlet*, Holmes also encounters Inspector Lestrade ("a little sallow, rat-faced, dark-eyed fellow," according to Watson), and he becomes a regular of the Holmes adventures, appearing in thirteen of the stories. Despite occasional difficulties with the official force, Holmes is always prepared to assist; but on occasion Holmes is also prepared to stretch the law for his own ends, as instanced by the wonderfully humorous episode (which shows Holmes's quiet contempt for the official force) in "The Adventure of Charles Augustus Milverton" when Lestrade visits Baker Street on the morning following Milverton's murder:

> "Criminals!" exclaimed Holmes. "Plural!"
>
> "Yes, there were two of them. They were, as nearly as possible, captured red-handed. We have their footmarks, we have their description; it's ten to one that we trace them. The first fellow was a bit too active, but the second was caught by the under-gardener, and only got away after a struggle. He was a middle-sized, strongly built man—square jaw, thick neck, moustache, a mask over his eyes."
>
> "That's rather vague," said Sherlock Holmes. "Why, it might be a description of Watson."
>
> "It's true," said the Inspector, with much amusement. "It might be a description of Watson."

Of the remainder of the official force, special mention need only be made of Stanley Hopkins ("for whose future Holmes had high hopes"), who appears in three of the adventures, and who seems the most likely of all to have been invited to Baker Street for a pleasant evening of conversation.

Despite the wealth of characters who appear in the Sherlockian canon, we lack information of a goodly number of others who are given no more than passing mention. We know that Holmes was involved in many more cases than are reported, because both Holmes and Watson tell us so. Who would not love to know more of the characters from the unreported cases: the Grice Patersons, who had singular adventures in the island of Uffa; Mr. & Mrs. Dundas, who separated—not through any cause of infidelity, but because Mr. Dundas was in the habit of winding up every meal by taking out his false teeth and hurling them at his wife; Merridew, of abominable memory, who is recorded in Holmes's index; Ricoletti of the club-foot and his abominable wife; Mr. James Phillimore, who stepped back into his own house to get his umbrella, and was never more seen in this world. And who is not prepared to ponder what political disgrace may have ensued had the story concerning the politician, the lighthouse,

and the trained cormorant been released to the public?

We should marvel at Arthur Conan Doyle's creativity and the characters he gave us. Over the years others have built upon these characters, adding more of their own in an attempt to ensure that there is always a supply of new Holmes adventures. In the pages that follow you will find characters new and old—and some "rivals" of Sherlock Holmes—making their way through the fog and the gaslight to the door of 221B Baker Street. Hark! A barrel-organ is playing at the corner of the street, the light brightens in the window of Holmes's room, and the scene is set for another adventure. The game is afoot!

The Horror of the Many Faces

by Tim Lebbon

Our next tale is the first of three in this volume to come to us from *Shadows Over Baker Street*, a book of stories that blend the world of Sherlock Holmes with the Cthulhu Mythos of H. P. Lovecraft. Lovecraft was perhaps the most influential horror writer of the twentieth century. He was a scholar of weird fiction, having written a pioneering survey called *Supernatural Horror in Literature*, and his own groundbreaking fiction appeared mostly in the pulp magazine *Weird Tales*. For centuries horror stories had been bound up with notions of eternal damnation, and Lovecraft, a committed philosophical materialist, felt that such notions had become hokey and shopworn. Edwin Hubble's startling discovery that our galaxy was just one of billions had inspired Lovecraft to write a new kind of horror story—tales set in a vast, incomprehensible universe, where human beings were tiny and insignificant, and in danger at any moment of being snuffed out by vast, uncaring forces. Holmes says, "When you eliminate the impossible, whatever remains, however improbable, must be the truth." Lovecraft felt that the truth would drive us to insanity. Where these two worldviews collide, our next story begins.

What I saw that night defied belief, but believe it I had to because I trusted my eyes. *Seeing is believing* is certainly not an axiom that my friend would have approved of, but I was a doctor, a scientist, and for me the eyes were the most honest organs in the body.

I never believed that they could lie.

What I laid eyes upon in the murky London twilight made me the saddest man. It stripped any faith I had in the order of things, the underlying goodness of life. How can something so wrong exist in an ordered world? How, if there is a benevolent purpose behind everything, can something so insane exist?

These are the questions I asked then and still ask now, though the matter is resolved in a far different way from that which I could ever have imagined at the time.

I was on my way home from the surgery. The sun was setting into the murk of the London skyline, and the city was undergoing its usual dubious transition from light to dark. As I turned a corner into a narrow cobbled street I saw my old friend, my mentor, slaughtering a man in the gutter. He hacked and slashed with a blade that caught the red twilight, and upon seeing me he seemed to calm and perform some meticulous mutilation upon the twitching corpse.

I staggered against the wall. "Holmes!" I gasped

He looked up, and in his honest eyes there was nothing. No light, no twinkle, not a hint of the

staggering intelligence that lay behind them.

Nothing except for a black, cold emptiness.

Stunned into immobility, I could only watch as Holmes butchered the corpse. He was a man of endless talents, but still I was amazed at the dexterity with which he opened the body, extracted the heart and wrapped it in his handkerchief.

No, not butchery. *Surgery*. He worked with an easy medical knowledge that appeared to surpass my own.

Holmes looked up at me where I stood frozen stiff. He smiled, a wicked grin that looked so alien on his face. Then he stood and shrugged his shoulders, moving on the spot as if settling comfortably into a set of new clothes.

"Holmes," I croaked again, but he turned and fled.

Holmes the thinker, the ponderer, the genius, ran faster than I had ever seen anyone run before. I could not even think to give chase, so shocked was I with what I had witnessed. In a matter of seconds my outlook on life had been irrevocably changed, brought to ground and savaged with a brutality I had never supposed possible. I felt as if I had been shot, hit by a train, mauled. I was winded and dizzy and ready to collapse at any moment.

But I pinched myself hard on the back of my hand, drawing blood and bringing myself around.

I closed my eyes and breathed in deeply, but when I opened them again the corpse still lay there in the gutter. Nothing had changed. However much I desired to not see this, wished it would flee my memory, I was already realising that this would never happen. This scene was etched on my mind.

One of the worst feelings in life is betrayal, the realisation that everything one held true is false, or at least fatally flawed. That look in Holmes's eyes . . . I would have given anything to be able to forget that.

His footsteps had vanished into the distance. The victim was surely dead, but being a doctor I had to examine him to make sure. He was a young man, handsome, slightly foreign-looking, obviously well-appointed in society because of the tasteful rings on his fingers, the tailored suit . . . holed now, ripped and ruptured with the vicious thrusts of Holmes's blade. And dead, of course. His chest had been opened and his heart stolen away.

Perhaps he was a dreadful criminal, a murderer in his own right whom Holmes had been tracking, chasing, pursuing for days or weeks? I spent less time with Holmes now than I had in the past, and I was not involved in every case he took on. But . . . murder? Not Holmes. Whatever crime this dead man may have been guilty of, nothing could justify what my friend had done to him.

I suddenly had an intense feeling of guilt, kneeling over a corpse with fresh blood on my fingertips. If anyone rounded the corner at that moment I would have trouble explaining things, I was sure, not only because of the initial impression they would gain but also the shock I was in, the *terror* I felt at what I had witnessed.

The police should have been informed. I should have found a policeman or run to the nearest station, led them to the scene of the crime. I was probably destroying valuable evidence . . . but then I thought of Holmes, that crazy grin, and realised that I already knew the identity of the murderer.

Instead, something made me run. Loyalty to my old friend was a small part of it, but there was fear as well. I knew even then that things were not always as they seemed. Holmes had told me that countless times before, and I kept thinking *impossible, impossible* as I replayed the scene in my mind. But I trusted my eyes, I knew what I had seen. And in my mind's eye Holmes was still grinning manically . . . at me.

With each impact of my feet upon the pavement, the fear grew.

Holmes was the most brilliant man I had ever known. And even in his obvious madness, I knew that he was too far beyond and above the ordinary to ever be outsmarted, outwitted or tracked down. *If his spree is to continue*, I prayed, *please God don't let him decide to visit an old friend*.

I need not have worried about informing the police of the murder. They knew already.

The day following my terrible experience I begged sick, remaining at home in bed, close to tears on occasion as I tried to find room in my life for what I had seen. My thoughts were very selfish, I admit that, because I had effectively lost my very best friend to a horrendous madness. I could never have him back. My mind wandered much that day, going back to the times we had spent together and forward to the barren desert of existence which I faced without him. I liked my surgery, enjoyed my life . . . but there was a terrible blandness about things without the promise of Holmes being a part of it.

I mourned, conscious all the time of the shape of my army revolver beneath my pillow.

Mixed in with this was the conviction that I should tell the police of what I had seen. But then the evening papers came and somehow, impossibly, the terrible became even worse.

There had been a further six murders in the London streets the previous night, all very similar in execution and level of violence. In each case organs had been removed from the bodies, though not always the same ones. The heart from one, lungs from another, and a dead lady in Wimbledon had lost her brain to the fiend.

In four cases—including the murder I had witnessed—the stolen organs had been found somewhere in the surrounding areas. Sliced, laid out on the ground in very neat order, the sections sorted perfectly by size and thickness. Sometimes masticated gobs of the tissue were found as well, as if bitten off, chewed and spat out. Tasted. *Tested*.

And there were witnesses. Not to every murder, but to enough of them to make me believe that the murderer — Holmes, I kept telling myself, Holmes — wanted to be seen. Though here lay a further mystery: each witness saw someone different. One saw a tall, fat man, heavily furred with facial hair, dressed scruffy and grim. Another described a shorter man with decent clothes, a light cloak and a sword in each hand. The third witness talked of the murderous lady he had seen . . . the lady with great strength, for she had stood her victim against a wall and wrenched out the unfortunate's guts.

A mystery, yes, but only for a moment. Only until my knowledge of Holmes's penchant for disguise crept in, instantly clothing my memory of him from the previous night in grubby clothes, light cloak and then a lady's dress.

"Oh dear God," I muttered. "Dear God, Holmes, what is it my old friend? The cocaine? Did the stress finally break you? The strain of having a mind that cannot rest, working with such evil and criminal matters?"

The more I dwelled upon it the worse it all became. I could not doubt what I had seen, even though all logic, all good sense forbade it. I tried reason and deduction as Holmes would have, attempting to ignore the horrors of the case to pare it down to its bare bone, setting out the facts and trying to fill in the missing pieces. But memory was disruptive; I could not help visualising my friend hunkered down over the body, hacking at first and then moving instantly into a caring, careful slicing of the dead man's chest. The blood. The strange smell in the air, like sweet honey (and a clue there, perhaps, though I could do nothing with it).

Holmes's terrible, awful smile when he saw me.

Perhaps that was the worst. The fact that he seemed to be *gloating*.

I may well have remained that way for days, my feigned sickness becoming something real as my soul was torn to shreds by the truth. But on the evening of that first day following the crimes, I received a visit that spurred me to tell the truth.

Detective Inspector Jones, of Scotland Yard, came to my door looking for Holmes.

"It is a dreadful case," he said to me, "I've never seen anything like it." His face was pale with the memory of the corpses he must have been viewing that day. "Different witnesses saw different people, all across the south end of London. One man told me the murderer was his *brother*. And a woman, witness to another murder, was definitely withholding something personal to her. The murders themselves are so similar as to be almost identical in execution. The killing, then the extraction of an organ."

"It sounds terrible," I said lamely, because the truth was pressing to be spoken.

"It was," Jones nodded. Then he looked at me intently. "The papers did not say that at least three of the victims were alive when the organs were removed, and that was the method of their death."

"What times?" I asked.

"There was maybe an hour between the killings, from what we can work out. And yet different murderers in each case. And murderers who, I'm sure it will be revealed eventually, were *all* known to those bearing witness. Strange. *Strange!* Dr Watson, we've worked together before, you know of my determination. But this . . . this fills me with dread. I fear the sun setting tonight in case we have another slew of killings, maybe worse. How many nights of this will it take until London is in a panic? One more? Two? And I haven't a clue as to what it's all about. A sect, I suspect, made up of many members and needing these organs for some nefarious purpose of their own. But how to find them? I haven't a clue. Not a clue! And I'm sure, I'm certain, that your friend Sherlock Holmes will be fascinated with such a case."

Jones shook his head and slumped back in the armchair. He looked defeated already, I thought. I wondered what the truth would do to him. And yet I had to bear it myself, so I thought it only right to share. To *tell. Holmes, my old friend* . . . I thought fondly, and then I told Jones what I had seen.

He did not talk for several minutes. The shock on his face hid his thoughts. He stared into the fire as if seeking some alternate truth in there, but my words hung heavy, and my demeanour must have been proof enough to him that I did not lie.

"The different descriptions . . . " he said quietly, but I could sense that he had already worked that out.

"Disguises. Holmes is a master."

"Should I hunt Holmes? Seek him through the London he knows so well?"

"I do not see how," I said, because truly I thought ourselves totally out of control. Holmes would play whatever game he chose until its closure, and the resolution would be of his choosing. "He knows every street, every alley, shop to shop and door to door. In many cases he knows of who lives where, where they work and who they associate with. He can walk along a street and tell me stories of every house if he so chooses. He carries his card index in his brain, as well as boxed away at Baker Street. His mind . . . you know his mind, Mr Jones. It is *endless*."

"And you're sure, Dr Watson. Your illness has not blinded you, you haven't had hallucinations—"

"I am merely sick to the soul with what I have witnessed," I said. "I was fit and well yesterday evening."

"Then I must search him out," Jones said, but the desperation, the hopelessness in his voice told me that he had already given up. He stared into the fire some more and then stood, brushed himself down, a man of business again.

"I wish you luck," I said.

"Can you help?" Jones asked. "You know him better than anyone. You're his best friend. Have you any ideas, any reasoning as to why he would be doing these crimes, where he'll strike next?"

"None," I said. "It is madness, for sure." I wanted Jones gone then, out of my house and into the

night. Here was the man who would hunt my friend, stalk him in the dark, send his men out armed and ready to shoot to kill if needs must. And whatever I had seen Holmes doing . . . that memory, *horrible* . . . I could not entertain the idea of his death.

Jones left and I jumped to my feet. He was right. I knew Holmes better than anyone, and after many years accompanying him as he had solved the most baffling of cases, I would hope that some of his intuition had rubbed off on me.

It was almost dark, red twilight kissing my window like diluted blood, and if tonight was to be like last night then my old friend was already stalking his first victim.

I would go to Baker Street. Perhaps there I would find evidence of this madness, and maybe even something that could bring hope of a cure.

The streets were very different that night.

There were fewer strollers, for a start. Many people had heard of the previous night's murders and chosen to stay at home. It was raining too, a fine mist that settled on one's clothes and soaked them instantly. Street lamps provided oases of half-light in the dark and it was these I aimed for, darting as quickly as I could between them. Even then, passing beneath the lights and seeing my shadow change direction, I felt more vulnerable than ever. I could not see beyond the lamps' meagre influence and it lit me up for anyone to see, any stranger lurking in the night, any *friend* with a knife.

I could have found my way to Baker Street in the dark. I walked quickly and surely, listening out for any hint of pursuit. I tried to see into the shadows but they retained their secrets well.

Everything felt changed. It was not only my new-found fear of the dark, but the perception that nothing, *nothing* is ever exactly as it seems. Holmes had always known that truth is in the detail, but could even he have ever guessed at the destructive parts in him, the corrupt stew of experience and knowledge and exhaustion that had led to this madness? It was a crueller London I walked through that night. Right and wrong had merged and blurred in my mind, for as sure as I was that what Holmes had done was wrong, it could never be right to hunt and kill him for it.

I had my revolver in my pocket, but I prayed with every step that I would not be forced to use it.

Shadows jumped from alleys and skirted around rooftops, but it was my imagination twisting the twilight. By the time I reached Baker Street it was fully dark, the moon a pale ghost behind London's smog.

I stood outside for a while, staring up at Holmes's window. There was no light there, of course, and no signs of habitation, but still I waited for a few minutes, safe in the refuge of memory. He would surely never attack here, not in the shadow of his long-time home. No, I feared that he had gone to ground, hidden himself away in some unknown, unknowable corner of London, or perhaps even taken his madness elsewhere in the country.

There was a sound behind me and I spun around, fumbling in my pocket for my revolver. It had been a shallow pop, as of someone opening their mouth in preparation to speak. I held my breath and aimed the revolver from my waist. There was nothing. The silence, the darkness felt loaded, brimming with secrets and something more terrible . . . something . . .

"Holmes," I said. But he would not be there, he was not foolish, not so stupid to return here when he was wanted for some of the most terrible murders—

"My friend."

I started, tried to gauge where the voice had come from. I tightened my grip on the pistol and swung it slowly left and right, ready to shoot should anything move. I was panicked, terrified beyond belief. My stomach knotted and cramped with the idea of a knife parting its skin and delving deeper.

"Is that you Holmes?"

More silence for a while, so that I began to think I was hearing things. It grew darker for a moment

as if something had passed in front of the moon; I even glanced up, but there was nothing in the sky and the moon was its usual wan self.

"You feel it too!" the voice said.

"Holmes, please show yourself."

"Go to my rooms. Mrs Hudson hasn't heard of things yet, she will let you in and I will find my own way up there."

He did not sound mad. He sounded different, true, but not mad.

"Holmes, you have to know—"

"I am aware of what you saw, Watson, and you would do well to keep your revolver drawn and aimed ahead of you. Go to my rooms, back into a corner, hold your gun. For your sanity, your peace of mind, it has to remain between us for a time."

"I saw . . . Holmes, I saw . . . "

"My rooms."

And then he was gone. I did not hear him leave, caught sight of nothing moving away in the dark, but I knew that my old friend had departed. I wished for a torch to track him, but Holmes would have evaded the light. And in that thought I found my continuing belief in Holmes's abilities, his genius, his disregard for the normal levels of reasoning and measures of intelligence.

The madness he still had, but . . . I could not help but trust him.

From the distance, far, far away, I heard what may have been a scream. There were foxes in London, and thousands of wild dogs, and some said that wolves still roamed the forgotten byways of this sprawling city. But it had sounded like a human cry.

He could not possibly have run that far in such short a time.

Could he?

Mrs Hudson greeted me and was kind enough to ignore my preoccupation as I climbed the stairs to Holmes's rooms.

There was another scream in the night before Holmes appeared.

I had opened the window and was standing there in the dark, looking out over London and listening to the sounds. The city was so much quieter during the night, which ironically made every sound that much louder. The barking of a dog swept across the neighbourhood, the crashing of a door echoed from walls and back again. The scream . . . this time it *was* human, I could have no doubt of that, and although even further away than the one I had heard earlier I could still make out its agony. It was followed seconds later by another cry, this one cut short. There was nothing else.

Go to my rooms, back into a corner, hold your gun, Holmes had said. I remained by the window. Here was escape, at least, if I needed it. I would probably break my neck in the fall, but at least I was giving myself a chance.

I've come to his rooms! I thought. Fly to a spider. Chicken to a fox's den. But even though his voice had been very different from usual—more *strained*—I could not believe that the Holmes who had spoken to me minutes before was out there now, causing those screams.

I thought briefly of Detective Inspector Jones, and hoped that he was well.

"I am sure that he is still alive," Holmes said from behind me. "He is too stupid to not be."

I spun around and brought up the revolver. Holmes was standing just inside the door. He had entered the room and closed the door behind him without me hearing. He was breathing heavily, as if he had just been running, and I stepped aside to let in the moonlight, terrified that I would see the black stain of blood on his hands and sleeves.

"How do you know I was thinking of Jones?" I asked, astounded yet again by my friend's reasoning.

"Mrs Hudson told me that he had been here looking for me. I knew then that you would be his next port of call in his search, and that you would inevitably have been forced by your high morals to relay what you have so obviously seen. You know he is out there now, hunting me down. And the scream . . . it sounded very much like a man, did it not?"

"Turn on the light, Holmes," I said.

I think he shook his head in the dark. "No, it will attract attention. Not that they do not know where we are . . . they must . . . fear, fear smells so sweet . . . to bees . . . "

"Holmes. Turn on the light or I will shoot you." And right then, standing in the room where my friend and I had spent years of our lives in pleasurable and business discourse, I was telling the truth. I was frightened enough to pull the trigger, because Holmes's intellect would bypass my archaic revolver, however mad he sounded. He would beat me. If he chose to—if he had lured me here to be his next victim—he would kill me.

"Very well," my friend said. "But prepare yourself Watson. It has been a somewhat eventful twenty-four hours."

The lamp flicked alight.

I gasped. He looked like a man who should be dead.

"Do not lower that revolver!" he shouted suddenly. "Keep it on me now, Watson. After what you think you saw me doing, lower your guard and you are likely to shoot me at the slightest sound or movement. That's right. Here. Aim it here." He thumped his chest and I pointed the gun that way, weak and shocked though I was.

"Holmes . . . you look terrible!"

"I feel worse." From Holmes that was a joke, but I could not even raise a smile. Indeed, I could barely draw a breath. Never had Holmes looked so unkempt, exhausted and bedraggled. His normally immaculate clothing was torn, muddied and wet, and his hair was sticking wildly away from his scalp. His hands were bloodied—I saw cuts there, so at least for the moment I could believe that it was his own blood—his cheek was badly scratched in several places and there was something about his eyes . . . wide and wild, they belied the calm his voice conveyed.

"You're mad," I said, unable to prevent the words from slipping out.

Holmes smiled, and it was far removed from that maniacal grin he had offered me as he crouched over the dying man.

"Do not jump to conclusions, Watson. Have you not learned anything in our years together?"

My hand holding the gun was starting to shake, but I kept it pointing at my friend across the room.

"I have to take you in, you know that? I will have to take you to the station. I cannot . . . I cannot . . . "

"Believe?"

I nodded. He was already playing his games, I knew. He would talk me around, offer explanations, convince me that the victims deserved to die or that he had been attacked . . . or that there was something far, far simpler eluding me. He would talk until he won me over, and then his attack would come.

"I cannot believe, but I must," I said, a new-found determination in my voice.

"Because you saw it? Because you *saw* me killing someone you must believe that I *did*, in fact, kill?"

"Of course."

Holmes shook his head. He frowned and for an instant he seemed distant, concentrating on something far removed from Baker Street. Then he glanced back at me, looked to the shelf above the fire and sighed.

"I will smoke my pipe, if you don't mind Watson. It will put my mind at rest. And I will explain what I know. Afterwards, if you still wish to take me in, do so. But you will thereby be condemning countless more to their deaths."

"Smoke," I said, "and tell me." *He was playing his games, playing them every second . . .*

Holmes lit a pipe and sat in his armchair, legs drawn up so that the pipe almost rested on his knees. He looked at the far wall, not at me where I remained standing by the window. I lowered the revolver slightly, and this time Holmes did not object.

I could see no knives, no mess on his hands other than his own smeared blood. No mess on his chin from the masticated flesh of the folks he had killed.

But that proved nothing.

"Have you ever looked into a mirror and really concentrated on the person you see there? Try it, Watson, it is an interesting exercise. After an hour of looking you see someone else. You see, eventually, what a stranger sees, not the composite picture of facial components with which you are so familiar, but individual parts of the face—the big nose, the close-together-eyes. You see yourself as a *person*. Not as *you*."

"So what are you trying to say?"

"I am saying that perception is not definite, nor is it faultless." Holmes puffed at his pipe, then drew it slowly away from his mouth. His eyes went wide and his brow furrowed. He had had some thought, and habit made me silent for a minute or two.

He glanced back up at me then, but said nothing. He looked more troubled than ever.

"I saw you killing a man, Holmes," I said. "You killed him and you laughed at me, and then you tore him open and stole his heart."

"The heart, yes," he said, looking away and disregarding me again. "The heart, the brain . . . parts, all part of the one . . . constituents of the same place . . . " He muttered on until his voice had all but vanished, though his lips still moved.

"Holmes!"

"It has gone quiet outside. They are coming." He said it very quietly, looked up at me from sad, terrified eyes, and I felt a cool finger run down my spine. *They're coming*. He did not mean Jones or the police, he did not mean *anyone*. No man scared Holmes as much as he was then.

"Who?" I asked. But he darted from his seat and ran at me, shoving me aside so that we stood on either side of the window.

"Listen to me, Watson. If you are my friend, if you have faith and loyalty and if you love me, you have to believe two things in the next few seconds if we are to survive: the first is that I am not a murderer; the second is that you must not trust your eyes, not for however long this may take. Instinct and faith, that is what you *can* believe in, because they cannot change that. It is too inbuilt, perhaps, too ingrained, I don't know . . . "

He was mumbling again, drifting in and out of coherence. And I knew that he could have killed me. He had come at me so quickly, my surprise was so complete, that I had plain forgotten the gun in my hand.

And now, the denial.

Doubt sprouted in my mind and grew rapidly as I saw the look on Holmes's face. I had seen it before, many times. It was the thrill of the chase, the excitement of discovery, the passion of experience, the knowledge that his reasoning had won out again. But underlying it all was a fear so profound that it sent me weak at the knees.

"Holmes, what are *they?"*

"You ask *What*, Watson, not *Who*. Already you're half way to believing. Quiet! Look! There, in the

street!"

I looked. Running along the road, heading straight for the front door of Holmes's building, came Sherlock Holmes himself.

"I think they will come straight for me," Holmes whispered. "I am a threat."

"Holmes . . . " I could say little. The recent shocks had numbed me, and seemed now to be pulling me apart, hauling reality down a long, dark tunnel. I felt distanced from my surroundings even though, at that moment, I knew that I needed to be as alert and conscious of events as possible.

"Don't trust your eyes!" he hissed at me.

That man, he had been running like Holmes, the same loping stride, the same flick of the hair with each impact of foot upon pavement. The same look of determination on his face.

"Faith, Watson," Holmes said. "Faith in God if you must, but you *must* have faith in me, us, our friendship and history together. For there, I feel, will lie the answer."

There came the sound of heavy footsteps on the stairs.

"I will get them, it, the thing on the floor," Holmes said, "and you shoot it in the head. Empty your revolver, one shot may not be enough. Do not baulk, my friend. This thing here, tonight, is far bigger than just the two of us. It is London we're fighting for. Maybe more."

I could not speak. I wished Jones were there with us, someone else to make decisions and take blame. Faith, I told myself, faith in Holmes.

I had seen him kill a man.

Don't trust your eyes.

He was bloodied and dirtied from the chase, hiding from the crimes he had committed.

I am not a murderer.

And then the door burst open and Sherlock Holmes stood in the doorway lit by the lamp—tall, imposing, his clothes tattered and muddied, his face scratched, hands cut and bloodied—and I had no more time.

The room suddenly smelled of sweet honey, and turning my head slightly to look at the Holmes standing with me at the window, I caught sight of something from the corner of my eye. The Holmes in the doorway seemed to have some things buzzing about his head.

I looked straight at him and they were no more. Then he gave me the same smile I had seen as he murdered that man.

"Watson!" Holmes said, reaching across the window to grasp my arms. "Faith!"

And then the new visitor smashed the lamp with a kick, and leapt at us.

I backed away. The room was dark now, lit only by pale moonlight and the paler starlight filtering through London's constant atmosphere. I heard a grunt, a growl, the smashing of furniture and something cracking as the two Holmes tumbled into the centre of the room. I quickly became confused as to which was which.

"Away!" I heard one of them shout. "Get away! Get away!" He sounded utterly terrified. "Oh God, oh sanity, why us!"

I aimed my revolver but the shapes rolled and twisted, hands at each other's necks, eyes bulging as first one and then the other Holmes presented his face for me to shoot. I stepped forward nonetheless, still smelling that peculiar honey stench, and something stung my ankle, a tickling shape struggling inside my trousers. I slapped at it and felt the offender crushed against my leg.

Bees.

"Watson!" Holmes shouted. I pulled down the curtains to let in as much moonlight as I could. One Holmes had the other pinned to the floor, hands about his neck. "Watson, shoot it!" the uppermost Holmes commanded. His face was twisted with fear, the scratches on his cheek opened again and

leaking blood. The Holmes on the floor thrashed and gurgled, choking, and as I looked down he caught my eye. Something there commanded me to watch, held my attention even as the Holmes on top exhorted me to *shoot,* shoot, *shoot it in the face!*

The vanquished Holmes calmed suddenly and brought up a hand holding a handkerchief. He wiped at the scratches on his face. They disappeared. The blood smudged a little, but with a second wipe it too had gone. The scratches were false, the blood fake.

The Holmes on top stared for a couple of seconds, and then looked back at me. A bee crawled out of his ear and up over his forehead. And then the scratches on his own cheek faded and disappeared before my eyes.

He shimmered. I saw something beneath the flesh-toned veneer, something crawling and writhing and separate, yet combined in a whole to present an image of solidness . . .

Bees left this whole and buzzed around the impostor's head. Holmes was still struggling on the floor, trying to prise away hands that were surely not hands.

The image pulsed and flickered in my vision, and I remembered Holmes's words: *you cannot trust your eyes . . . instinct and faith, that is what you can believe in* . . .

I stepped forward, pressed the revolver against the uppermost Holmes's head and pulled the trigger. Something splashed out across the floor and walls, but it was not blood.

Blood does not try to crawl away, take flight, buzz at the light.

My pulling the trigger—that act bridging doubt and faith—changed everything.

The thing that had been trying to kill Holmes shimmered in the moonlight. It was as if I was seeing two images being quickly flickered back and forth, so fast that my eyes almost merged them into one, surreal picture. Holmes . . . the thing . . . Holmes . . . the thing. And the thing, whatever it is, was monstrous.

"Again!" Holmes shouted. "Again, and again!"

I knelt so that my aim did not stray towards my friend and fired again at that horrible shape. Each impact twisted it, slowing down the alternating of images as if the bullets were blasting free truth itself. What I did not know then, but would realise later, was that the bullets were *defining* the truth. Each squeeze of the trigger dealt that thing another blow, not only physically but also in the nature of my beliefs. I *knew* it to be a false Holmes now, and that made it weak.

The sixth bullet hit only air.

It is difficult to describe what I saw in that room. I had only a few seconds to view its ambiguous self before it came apart, but even now I cannot find words to convey the very unreality of what I saw, heard and smelled. There was a honey tang on the air, but it was almost alien, like someone else's memory. The noise that briefly filled the room could have been a voice. If so it was speaking in an alien tongue, and I had no wish to understand what it was saying. A noise like that could only be mad.

All I know is that a few seconds after firing the last bullet Holmes and I were alone. I was hurriedly reloading and Holmes was already up, righting the oil lamp and giving us light. I need not have panicked so, because we were truly alone.

Save for the bees. Dead or dying, there were maybe a hundred bees spotting the fine carpet, huddled on the windowsill or crawling behind chairs or objects on the mantelpiece to die. I had been stung only once, Holmes seemed to have escaped entirely, but the bees were expiring even as we watched.

"Dear God," I gasped. I went to my knees on the floor, shaking, my shooting hand no longer able to bear the revolver's weight.

"Do you feel faint, my friend?" Holmes asked.

"Faint, no," I said. "I feel . . . belittled. Does that make sense, Holmes? I feel like a child who has

been made aware of everything he will ever learn, all at once."

"There are indeed more things in Heaven and Earth, Watson," Holmes said. "And I believe we have just had a brush with one of them." He too had to sit, nursing his bruised throat with one hand while the other wiped his face with the handkerchief, removing any remaining make-up. He then cleaned the blood from both hands and washed away the false cuts there as well. He seemed distracted as he cleansed, his eyes distant, and more than once I wondered just where they were looking, what they were truly seeing.

"Can you tell me, Holmes?" I asked. I looked about the room, still trying to imagine where that other being had gone but knowing, in my heart of hearts, that its nature was too obscure for my meagre understanding. "Holmes? Holmes?"

But he was gone, his mind away as was its wont, searching the byways of his imagination, his intellect steering him along routes I could barely imagine as he tried to fathom the truth in what we had seen. I stood and fetched his pipe, loaded it with tobacco, lit it and placed it in his hand. He held on it but did not take a draw.

He remained like that until Jones of Scotland Yard thundered through the door.

"And you have been with him for how long?" Jones asked again.

"Hours. Maybe three."

"And the murderer? You shot him, yet where is he?"

"Yes, I shot him. It. I shot it."

I had told Jones the outline of the story three times, and his disbelief seemed to be growing with each telling. Holmes's silence was not helping his case.

Another five murders, Jones had told me. *Three witnessed, and each of the witnesses identified a close friend or family member as the murderer*.

I could only offer my own mutterings of disbelief. Even though I had an inkling now—however unreal, however unbelievable, Holmes's insistence that the improbable must follow the impossible stuck with me—I could not voice the details. The truth was too crazy.

Luckily, Holmes told it for me. He stirred and stood suddenly, staring blankly at me for a time as if he had forgotten I was there.

"Mr Holmes," Jones said. "Your friend Dr Watson here, after telling me that you were a murderer, is now protesting your innocence. His reasoning I find curious to say the least, so it would benefit me greatly if I could hear your take on the matter. There were gunshots here, and I have no body, and across London there are many more grieving folks this evening."

"And many more there will be yet," Holmes said quietly. "But not, I think, for a while." He relit his pipe and closed his eyes as he puffed. I could see that he was gathering his wits to expound his theories, but even then there was a paleness about him, a frown that did not belong on his face. It spoke of incomplete ideas, truths still hidden from his brilliant mind.

It did not comfort me one bit.

"It was fortunate for London, and perhaps for mankind itself, that I bore witness to one of the first murders. I had taken an evening stroll after spending a day performing some minor biological experiments on dead rodents, when I heard something rustling in the bushes of a front garden. It sounded larger than a dog, and when I heard what can only have been a cry I felt it prudent to investigate.

"What I saw . . . was impossible. I knew that it could not be. I pushed aside a heavy branch and witnessed an old man being operated on. He was dead by the time my gaze fell upon him, that was for sure, because the murderer had opened his guts and was busy extracting kidneys and liver. And the murderer, in my eyes, was the woman Irene Adler."

"No!" I gasped. "Holmes, what are you saying?"

"If you would let me continue, Doctor, all will become clear. Clearer, at least, because there are many facets to this mystery still most clouded in my mind. It *will* come, gentlemen, I am sure, but . . . I shall tell you. I shall talk it through, tell you, and the truth will mould itself tonight.

"And so: Adler, the woman herself, working on this old man in the garden of an up-market London house. Plainly, patently impossible and unreal. And being the logically minded person I am, and believing that *proof* defines truth rather than simply *belief*, I totally denied the truth of what I was seeing. I knew it could not be because Adler was a woman unfamiliar with, and incapable of, murder. And indeed she has not been in the country for quite some years now. My total disregard for what I was seeing meant that I was *not* viewing the truth, that something abnormal was occurring. And strange as it seemed at the time—but how clear it is now!—the woman had been heavily on my mind as I had been strolling down that street."

"Well to hear you actually admit that, Holmes, means that it is a great part of this mystery."

"Indeed," Holmes said to me, somewhat shortly. "My readiness to believe that something, shall we say, out of this world was occurring enabled me to see it. I saw the truth behind the murderer, the scene of devastation. I saw . . . I saw . . . " He trailed off, staring from the window at the ghostly night. Both Jones and I remained silent, seeing the pain Holmes was going through as he tried to continue.

"Terrible," he said at last. "Terrible."

"And what I saw," I said, trying to take up from where Holmes had left off, "was an impersonator, creating Holmes in his own image—"

"No," Holmes said. "No, it created me in *your* image, Watson. What you saw was your version of me. This *thing* delved into your mind and cloaked itself in the strongest identity it found in there: namely, me. As it is with the other murders, Mr Jones, whose witnesses no doubt saw brothers and wives and sons slaughtering complete strangers with neither rhyme, nor reason."

"But the murderer," Jones said. "Who was it? Where is he? I need a corpse, Holmes. Watson tells me that he shot the murderer, and I need a corpse."

"Don't you have enough already?" Holmes asked quietly. I saw the stare he aimed at Jones. I had never been the subject of that look, never in our friendship, but I had seen it used more than a few times. Its intent was borne of a simmering anger. Its effect, withering.

Jones faltered. He went to say something else, stammered and then backed away towards the door. "Will you come to the Yard tomorrow?" he asked. "I need help. And…."

"I will come," Holmes said. "For now, I imagine you have quite some work to do across London this evening. Five murders, you say? I guess at least that many yet to be discovered. And there must be something of a panic in the populace that needs calming."

Jones left. I turned to Holmes. And what I saw shocked me almost as much as any event from the previous twenty-four hours.

My friend was crying.

"We can never know everything," Holmes said, "but I fear that everything knows us."

We were sitting on either side of the fire. Holmes was puffing on his fourth pipe since Jones had left. The tear tracks were still unashamedly glittering on his cheeks, and my own eyes were wet in sympathy.

"What did it want?" I asked. "What motive?"

"Motive? Something so unearthly, so alien to our way of thinking and understanding? Perhaps no motive is required. But I would suggest that examination was its prime concern. It was slaughtering and slicing and examining the victims just as casually as I have, these last few days, been poisoning

and dissecting mice. The removed organs displayed that in their careful dismantling."

"But why? What reason can a thing like that have to know our make up, our build?"

Holmes stared into the fire and the flames lit up his eyes. I was glad. I could still remember the utter vacancy of the eyes I had seen on his likeness as it hunkered over the bloody body.

"Invasion," he muttered, and then he said it again. Or perhaps it was merely a sigh.

"Isn't it a major fault of our condition that, the more we wish to forget something, the less likely it is that we can," I said. Holmes smiled and nodded, and I felt a childish sense of pride from saying something of which he seemed to approve.

"Outside," said Holmes, "beyond what we know or strive to know, there is a whole different place. Somewhere which, perhaps, our minds could never know. Like fitting a square block into a round hole, we were not built to understand."

"Even you?"

"Even me, my friend." He tapped his pipe out and refilled it. He looked ill. I had never seen Holmes so pale, so melancholy after a case, as if something vast had eluded him. And I think I realised what it was even then: understanding. Holmes had an idea of what had happened and it seemed to fit neatly around the event, but he did not *understand*. And that, more than anything, must have done much to depress him.

"You recall our time in Cornwall, our nightmare experience with the burning of the Devil's Foot powder?"

I nodded. "How could I forget."

"Not hallucinations," he said quietly. "I believe we were offered a drug-induced glimpse beyond. Not hallucinations, Watson. Not hallucinations at all."

We sat silently for a few minutes. As dawn started to dull the sharp edges of the darkness outside, Holmes suddenly stood and sent me away.

"I need to think on things," he said urgently. "There's much to consider. And I have to be more prepared for the next time. *Have* to be."

I left the building tired, cold and feeling smaller and more insignificant than I had ever thought possible. I walked the streets for a long time that morning. I smelled fear on the air, and one time I heard a bee buzzing from flower to flower on some honeysuckle. At that I decided to return home.

My revolver, still fully loaded, was warm where my hand grasped it in my coat pocket.

I walked along Baker Street every day for the next two weeks. Holmes was always in his rooms, I could sense that, but he never came out, nor made any attempt to contact me. Once or twice I saw his light burning and his shadow drifting to and fro inside, slightly stooped, as if something weighed heavy on his shoulders.

The only time I saw my brilliant friend in that time, I wished I had not. He was standing at the window staring out into the twilight, and although I stopped and waved he did not notice me.

He seemed to be looking intently across the rooftops as if searching for some elusive truth. And standing there watching him I felt sure that his eyes, glittering dark and so, so sad, must have been seeing nothing of this world.

The Adventure of the Death-Fetch

by Darrell Schweitzer

We all have days when the world seems too much to bear, and all we want to do is

lock ourselves in our room and not come out. It's an illusion, this idea that a foot of wood and plaster can seal us off from the troubles that beset us, but it's a comforting illusion, and it resonates. Authors have spun some wonderful dramatic scenarios out of this notion of a safe room within a hostile universe. H. P. Lovecraft's "The Music of Erich Zann" is about a violinist who plays unearthly tunes to keep hostile entities from invading his apartment. China Miéville's "Details" is about a woman who has plastered over all the visible lines and angles in her apartment, because those angles are traversed by the other-dimensional terrors that assail her. The movie *Pulse* features characters who must seal up their room with red duct tape to protect themselves from malevolent spirits. There's something instantly intriguing about a person who *refuses to come out*, and also about the idea that evil could be kept at bay by something simple, such as music or duct tape. Our next tale brings us a chilling new variation on this theme.

In retrospect, the most amazing thing is that Watson confided the story to me at all. I was nobody, a nineteen-year-old college student from America visiting English relatives during Christmas break. I just happened to be in the house when the old doctor came to call. He had been a friend of my grandfather long before I was born, and was still on the closest terms with my several aunts; and of course he was *the* Doctor John Watson, who could have commanded the immediate and rapt attention of any audience he chose.

So, why did he tell me and only me? Why not, at least, my aunts? I think it was precisely because I was no one of any consequence or particular credibility and would soon be returning to school far away. He was like the servant of King Midas in the fairy tale, who can no longer bear the secret that the king has ass's ears. He has to "get it off his chest," as we Americans say. The point is not being believed, or recording the truth, but release from the sheer act of telling. The luckless courtier, fearing for his life, finally has to dig a hole in the swamp, stick his head in it, and whisper the secret. Not that it did him much good, for the wind in the rattling reeds endlessly repeated what he had said.

There being no swamp conveniently at hand for Dr. Watson, I would have to do.

The old gentleman must have been nearly eighty at the time. I remember him as stout, but not quite obese, nearly bald, with a generous white moustache. He often sat smoking by the remains of our fire long after the rest of the household had gone to bed. I imagined that he was reminiscing over a lifetime of wonderful adventures. Well, maybe.

I was up late too, that particular night, on my way into the kitchen for some tea after struggling with a wretched attempt at a novel. I chanced through the parlor. Doctor Watson stirred slightly where he sat.

"Oh, Doctor. I'm sorry. I didn't know you were still there."

He waved me to the empty chair opposite him. I sat without a further word, completely in awe of the great man.

I swallowed hard and stared at the floor for perhaps five minutes, jerking my head up once, startled, when the burnt log in the fireplace settled, throwing off sparks. I could hear occasional automobiles passing by in the street outside.

Dr. Watson's pipe had gone out and he set it aside. He folded his age-spotted hands in his lap, cleared his throat, and leaned forward.

He had my absolute attention. I knew that he was about to *tell a story*. My heart almost stopped.

"I am sure you know there were some cases of Sherlock Holmes which never worked out, and thus went unrecorded."

I lost what little composure I had and blurted, "Yes, yes, Doctor. You mention them from time to time. Like the one about the man and the umbrella—"

He raised a hand to silence me. "Not like that, boy. Some I never found the time to write up, and I inserted those allusions as reminders to myself; but others were *deliberately suppressed,* and never committed to paper at all, because Holmes expressly forbade it. One in particular—"

At least I didn't say anything as stupid as, *"Then why are you telling me?"* No, I had the good sense to sit absolutely motionless and silent, and just listen.

It was about this same season [*Watson began*] in the year 1900, a few days after Christmas if I recall correctly—I cannot be certain of such facts without my notebooks, and in any case the incident of which I speak was never entered into them—but I am certain it was a bright and brisk winter day, with new-fallen snow on the sidewalks, but no sense of festivity in the air. Instead, the city seemed to have reached a profound calm, a time to rest and tidy up and go on with one's regular business.

Holmes remarked how somehow, in defiance of all logic, it appeared that the calendar revealed patterns of criminality.

"Possibly the superstitions are true," I mused, "and lunatics really *are* driven by the moon."

"There may be scattered facts buried in the morass of superstition, Watson," said he, "if only science has the patience to ferret them out—"

We had now come, conversing as we walked, to the corner of Baker Street and Marylebone Road, having been abroad on some business or other—damn that I don't have my notes with me—when this train of thought was suddenly interrupted by an attractive, well-dressed young woman who rushed up and grasped Holmes by the arm.

"Mr. Sherlock Holmes? You *are* Mr. Sherlock Holmes, are you not?"

Holmes gently eased her hand off him. "I am indeed, Miss—"

"Oh! Thank God! My father said that no one else could possibly save him!"

To my amazement and considerable irritation, Holmes began walking briskly, leaving the poor girl to trail after us like a common beggar. I'd often had words with him in private about these lapses of the expected courtesy, but now I could only follow along, somewhat flustered. Meanwhile the young lady—whose age I would have guessed at a few years short of twenty—breathlessly related a completely disjointed tale about a mysterious curse, approaching danger, and quite a bit else I couldn't make head or tail out of.

At the doorstep of 221B, Holmes turned on her sharply.

"And now Miss—I'm afraid I did not catch your name."

"Thurston. My name is Abigail Thurston."

"Any relation to Sir Humphrey Thurston, the noted explorer of Southeast Asia?"

"He is my father, as I've already told you—"

"I am not sure you've told me much of anything—yet!" Holmes turned to go inside. Miss Thurston's features revealed a completely understandable admixture of disappointment, grief, and quite possibly—and I couldn't have blamed her—rage.

"Holmes!" I said. "Please!"

"And now Miss Abigail Thurston, as I have no other business this morning, I shall be glad to admit you." As she, then I, followed him up the stairs, he continued, "You must pardon my abrupt manner, but it has its uses."

When I had shown her to a chair and rung Mrs. Hudson for some tea, Holmes explained further, "My primary purpose has been to startle you into *sense,* Miss Thurston. A story told all in a jumble is like a brook plunging over a precipice—very pretty, but, alas, babbling. Now that the initial rush of excitement is past, perhaps now you can tell me, calmly and succinctly, why you have come to see

me. I enjoin you to leave out none of the facts, however trivial they may seem to you. Describe the events *exactly,* in the order that they occurred, filling in such background as may be necessary to illuminate the entire tale."

She breathed deeply, then began in measured tones. "I am indeed the daughter of the explorer, Sir Humphrey Thurston. You are perhaps familiar with his discoveries of lost cities in the jungles of Indo-China. His books are intended for a limited, scholarly audience, but there have been numerous articles about him in the popular magazines—"

"Suffice it to say that I am familiar with your father and his admirable contributions to science. Do go on."

"My mother died when I was quite small, Mr. Holmes, and my father spent so much time abroad that he was almost a stranger to me. I was raised by relatives, under the supervision of a series of governesses. All this while Father seemed more a guardian angel than a parent, someone always looking out for my welfare, concerned and benevolent, but invisible. Oh, there were letters and gifts in the post, but he remained *outside* my actual life. Each time he came, we had to become acquainted all over again. Such is the difference in a child's life between six and eight and twelve. *I* had changed profoundly, while he was always the same, brave, mysterious, inevitably sunburnt from long years in the jungles and deserts; home for a short time to rest, write his reports, and perhaps give a few lectures before setting forth again in the quest of knowledge. So things have continued. This past month he has returned again, after an absence of three years, to discover his little girl become a *woman,* and again a stranger. He has promised to remain this time until I am married and secure in a home of my own—"

"Then it should be a happy occasion for you," said Holmes, smiling to reassure her, the corners of his mouth twitching to betray impatience. The smile vanished. "But I perceive it is not. Please get to the point then. *Why* have you come rushing to Baker Street on a winter's day when you would surely be much more comfortable in a warm house in the company of your much-travelled sire?"

She paused, looking alarmed once more, glancing to me first as if for reassurance. I could only smile and nod, wordlessly bidding her to continue.

"The first few days of his visit were indeed happy, Mr. Holmes, but very suddenly, a shadow came over him. For a week and more, he seemed distracted and brooding. Then five days ago he withdrew into his study, refusing to venture out for any reason. He is afraid, deathly afraid!"

"Of what, pray tell?"

"I cannot discern the central fear, exactly, only its broader effects. Certainly he has become morbidly afraid of his own reflection. He will not allow a mirror to be brought anywhere near him. He even shaves with his eyes closed, by touch alone, rather than risk seeing himself."

"This *is* extraordinary," I said.

"But surely," said Holmes, "this sort of mania is more in Doctor Watson's line than mine, work for a medical man of a specialized sort, not a detective."

"Oh no, Sir! My father is completely sane. I am certain of that. But I am equally certain that he is not telling me everything, perhaps in an attempt to spare me some horror—for it must be a horror that makes so bold an adventurer cringe behind a locked door with a loaded elephant gun across his knees!"

I leaned forward and spoke to her in my most soothing medical manner. "I am sure, Miss Thurston, that your father has a very good reason for acting as he does, and that, indeed, his chief object is to protect you."

"Yes," said Holmes. "I am certain it is."

"His very words were, 'Summon Sherlock Holmes, girl, or I shall not live out the week!' So here I am. Please come and see him, Mr. Holmes, *at once!"*

Holmes shot to his feet. "Watson! How foolish of us to have even removed our hats and coats. Come!" He took our guest by the hand and helped her up. "As I said, Miss Thurston, I have no other business this morning."

It was but a short cab ride to the Thurston residence, in the most fashionable part of west London. We rode in silence, crowded together, the girl in the middle, Holmes deep in thought. Unconsciously almost, Miss Thurston took my hand for reassurance. I held her firmly, but gently.

It was admittedly an intriguing problem: what, if not a sudden mania, could cause so brave a man as Sir Humphrey Thurston to be paralyzed with fear at the sight of his own reflection?

As we neared the house, the girl suddenly struggled to stand up in the still moving cab.

"Father!"

She pointed. I had only a glimpse of a tall, muscular man on the further streetcorner, and noted the tan coat and top hat, white gloves, and silver-tipped stick. He turned at the sound of Miss Thurston's cry, revealing a grey-bearded face, dark eyes, and a broad, high forehead, then moved speedily away in long strides, not quite running. Abruptly, he vanished down a side street.

Holmes pounded on the ceiling of the cab for the driver to stop and we three scrambled out, I attending to Miss Thurston and the driver while Holmes set off at a furious run, only to return moments later, breathing hard, having lost all trace of Sir Humphrey.

"I don't know what explanation I can offer," said Miss Thurston. "Perhaps my father's difficulty, mania or whatever it is, has passed, and I have wasted your time."

Holmes nodded to me.

"Mental disease is not my specialty." I said, "but from what medical papers I've read, and from the talk of my colleagues, I do not think it likely that so powerful a delusion would go away so quickly. It makes no sense."

"Indeed, it does not," said Holmes. "One moment, the man behaves as if he is faced with mortal danger. The next, he is out for a stroll as if nothing had happened, but he flees the approach of his beloved daughter and vanishes with, I must confess, remarkable speed and agility."

"What do we do now, Mr. Holmes?"

"If you would admit us to his chamber. Perhaps he left some clue."

"Yes, yes. I should have thought of that. Pray forgive me—"

"Do not trouble yourself, Miss Thurston. Only lead the way."

She unlocked the door herself. Although it was a fine, large house, there were no servants in evidence. I helped her off with her coat and hung it for her in a closet off to one side. As we ascended the front stairs, she hastily explained that another of her father's inexplicable behaviors was to give leave to the entire staff until—she supposed—the crisis had passed.

"Oh, I do fear that it *is* a mania, Mr. Holmes."

I was beginning to fear as much myself, but scarcely a moment to consider the possibility when a voice thundered from above, "Abigail! Is that you?"

Miss Thurston looked to Holmes, then to me with an expression of utmost bewilderment and fright. I think she all but fainted at that moment. I made ready to catch her lest she tumble back down the stairs.

Again came the voice, from somewhere off to the left of the top of the stairs. "Abigail! If that's you, speak up girl! If it's Hawkins, you damned blackguard, I have my gun ready and am fully prepared to shoot!"

Holmes shouted in reply, "Sir Humphrey, it is Sherlock Holmes and his colleague Dr. Watson. We have been admitted by your daughter, who is here with us."

"Abigail?"

"Yes, Father, it is I. I've brought them as you asked."

Heavy footsteps crossed the floor upstairs. A door opened with a click of the lock being undone.

"Thank God, then . . . "

Holmes, Miss Thurston, and I were admitted into Sir Humphrey's study. I was astounded to confront the *same man* we had seen on the street. The broad shoulders, bearded face, high forehead, dark eyes, and athletic gait were unmistakable. But now he wasn't dressed for the outdoors. He wore a dressing gown and slippers. An elephant gun lay across the chair where he had obviously been sitting moments before. On the table by his right hand were a bottle and glass of brandy, a notebook, a pen and an uncapped ink jar.

"Thank God you are here, Mr. Holmes," he said. "Doubtless my daughter has told you of my distress and seeming madness. If anyone on Earth may convince me that I am *not* mad, it is you, Mr. Holmes. I can trust no one else to uncover the fiendish devices by which I have been made to see the impossible."

We all sat. Thurston offered Holmes and me glasses of brandy. Holmes waved his aside. I accepted out of politeness, but after a single sip placed it on the table beside me.

Sir Humphrey seemed about ready to speak, when Holmes interrupted.

"First, a question. Have you been, for any reason, outside of the house this morning?"

Thurston looked startled. "Certainly not. I have not been out of this *room* for five days—" He paused, as if uncertain of how to proceed.

It was Holmes's turn to be astonished, but only I, who knew him well, could detect the subtle change in his manner and expression. To the others he must have seemed, as before, calm and attentive, purely analytical.

The silence went on for a minute or two. Now that I had a chance to examine our surroundings, the room proved to be exactly what I expected, a cluttered assembly of mementoes and books, a large bronze Buddha seated on a teakwood stand, strangely demonic Asian masks hanging on the walls amid framed citations and photographs. In a place of honor behind his writing desk hung a portrait of a beautiful woman whose features resembled those of Abigail Thurston but were somewhat older. This I took to be her mother.

"Do go on, Sir Humphrey," said Holmes, "and tell us what has taken place during these five days in which you have never once left this room."

"You'll probably think I am out of my mind, Mr. Holmes. Indeed, I think so myself, whenever I am unable to convince myself that I am beguiled by some devilish trickery. For the life of me, I cannot figure out how it is *done.*"

"How what is done, Sir Humphrey?"

"Mr. Holmes, do you know what I mean when I say I have seen my *death fetch?"*

Abigail Thurston let out a cry, then covered her mouth with her hand.

Holmes seemed unperturbed. "In the superstitions of many races, a man who is about to die may encounter his spirit-likeness. The German term is *doppelganger,* meaning double-walker. Certainly such an apparition is held to be a portent of the direst sort, and to be *touched* by this figure means instantaneous death. You haven't been touched by it then, have you, Sir Humphrey?"

Thurston's face reddened. "If you mean to mock me, Mr. Holmes, then my faith in you is misplaced."

"I do not mock. Nor do I deal in phantoms. My practice stands firmly flat-footed upon the ground. No ghosts need apply. Therefore I must agree with your conclusion, even before I have examined the evidence, that you are the victim of trickery of some kind. But first, describe to me what you *think* you have seen."

"Myself, Mr. Holmes. My daughter has surely mentioned my sudden aversion to mirrors."

"Don't we all see ourselves in mirrors?"

"I saw myself *twice."*

"Twice?"

"Five mornings ago, I stood before the mirror shaving, when a second image appeared in the glass, as if an *exact duplicate of myself* were looking over my shoulder. I whirled about, razor in hand, and confronted *myself* as surely as if I gazed into a second mirror, only the face of this *other* was contorted with the most venomous hatred, Mr. Holmes, the most absolute malevolence I have ever beheld. The lips were about to form an utterance which I somehow *know* would mean my immediate death.

"So I slashed frantically with my razor. I felt the blade pass through only the air, but the figure vanished, like a burst soap bubble."

"And it did not harm you in any way," said Holmes, "any more than a soap bubble—or some projected illusion of light and shadow."

"Oh no, Mr. Holmes, this was no magic-lantern show. It was a fully three-dimensional image. Each time I saw it, it was as real to my eyes as you and Dr. Watson appear now."

"You saw it, then, more than once?"

"Three times, Mr. Holmes, until I had the sense to remove all mirrors and reflective surfaces from the room. That is how it *gets in.* I am certain of that."

"And I am certain, Sir Humphrey, that *you* are certain of far more than you have told me. Unless you give me *all* of the facts, I cannot help you, however much your daughter may entreat me. Who, for instance, is the 'blackguard Hawkins' you took us for on the stairs?"

Thurston refilled his glass and took a long draught of brandy, then settled back. "Yes, you are right, of course, Mr. Holmes. I shall have to tell you and Dr. Watson everything." He turned to his daughter. "But you, my dear, perhaps should not hear what we have to say."

"Father, I think I am old enough."

"It is not a pretty story."

"My early years were wild," Sir Humphrey began. "I was no paragon of scientific respectability at twenty-one, but little more than a common criminal. I have never before admitted that I was dismissed from the Indian Army under extremely disreputable circumstances and only escaped court martial because a sympathetic officer allowed me time to flee, change my name, and disappear. The offense involved the pillage of a native temple, and the officer's sympathy had been purchased with some of the loot.

"And so, under another name, I wandered the East. I had no means by which to return to England, nor had I any desire to present myself to friends and family as a failure and a disgrace. Once in a very great while I dispatched a letter filled with fanciful, if artfully vague, tales of confidential adventures in government service.

"In the course of my travels I picked up several languages and a profound education in the ways of the world's wickedness. I fell in with the roughest possible company, and was myself more often than not on the wrong side of the law. In the gold fields of Australia there was a certain dispute and a man died of it, and once more I had to vanish. In Shanghai I worked as an agent for a wealthy mandarin, whose true activities, when they became known to the Chinese authorities, caused his head to be pickled in brine.

"But the blackest depths were in Rangoon, for there I met Wendall Hawkins. He was a vile rogue, Mr. Holmes, even among such company as I found him. Murderer, thief, pirate, and more—I am sure. He was a huge, powerful man with an enormous, dark beard, who used to jokingly boast—though I think he half believed it—that he was the reincarnation of Edward Teach, the notorious buccaneer

commonly known as Blackbeard.

"Reckless as I was, my normal instinct would have been to avoid such a man as I would a live cobra, but he had something which fascinated me: an idol six inches in height, of a hideous, bat-winged dog, carven of the finest milky green jade, stylized in a manner which resembled the Chinese but wasn't. Its eyes were purest sapphires.

"Mr. Holmes, I was more than just a thieving lout in those days. Already the direction of my life's work was clear to me—though I had yet to learn its manner—for if ever I suffered from a true mania, it was the craving to penetrate the deepest secrets of the mysterious Orient. Oh, I wanted riches, yes, but more than that I hoped to come back to England famous, like some Burton or Livingstone or Speke, having brought the light of European science to the darkest and most forbidden corners of the globe.

"I knew what this idol was, even before Wendall Hawkins told me. It was an artifact of the Chan-Tzo people who inhabit the Plateau of Leng in central Asia, in that unmapped and unexplored region northwest of Tibet, where theoretically the Chinese and Russian empires adjoin, but in fact no civilized person has ever set foot—for all the ravings of Madame Blavatsky contain much nonsense about the place. The very name, Chan-Tzo, is often mistranslated as 'Corpse-Eaters,' and so occultists whisper fearfully of the hideous rites of the 'Corpse Eating Cult of Leng.' In truth necrophagia is the least of Leng's horrors. The Chan-Tzo are 'Vomiters of Souls' . . . but I am far ahead of myself.

"Hawkins had the idol and he had a map—which had been acquired, he darkly hinted, at the cost of several lives—written in an obscure Burmese dialect. He needed me to translate. That was why he had come to me. Otherwise he would share his treasure-hunt with as few as possible—for that was what it was to be. We would journey to Leng armed to the teeth, slaughter any natives who stood in our way, and return to civilization rich men. I tried to console my conscience with the belief that I, at least, would be travelling as much for knowledge as for wealth, and that through my efforts this find could be of scientific value.

"Hawkins and ten others had pooled funds to buy a steam launch, which we christened, to suit our leader's fancy, the *Queen Anne's Revenge*. Once we had secured sufficient ammunition and supplies, we slipped up the Irrawaddy by night and journeyed deep into the interior, beyond the reach of any colonial authorities, ultimately anchoring at Putao near the Chinese border and continuing overland.

"I don't have to tell you that the trip was a disaster. Supplies went bad or disappeared. We all had fevers. What native guides we could hire or seize at gunpoint misled us, then got away. I alone could read the damned map, but it was cryptic, even if you could make out the script. Much of the time I merely guessed and tried to find our way by the stars.

"Many times I was certain that none of us would get back alive. The first to die was the crazy American, something-or-other Jones, a lunatic who carried a bullwhip and fancied himself an archaeologist. We found Jones in his tent, bloated to half again normal size, his face eaten away by foot-long jungle leeches.

"One by one the others perished, from accidents, from disease that might have been poisoning. Gutzman, the South African, caught a dart in the neck one night. Van Eysen, the Dutchman, tried to make off with most of our remaining food and clean water. Hawkins shot him in the back, then killed the Malay when he protested, and the Lascar on general principles. Another Englishman, Gunn, got his throat cut merely so that there would be one mouth less to feed.

"Since I alone could read the map—or pretended to—I was certain Hawkins needed me alive. In the end, there were only the two of us, ragged and emaciated wretches staggering on in a timeless delirium of pain and dread. It was nothing less than a living death.

"At last we emerged from the jungle and climbed onto the windswept tableland of central Asia. Still

the journey seemed endless. I had no idea of where we were going anymore, for all I made a show of consulting the map over and over so that Hawkins would not kill me. Each night I dreamed of the black and forbidding Plateau of Leng, which was revealed to me in a series of visions, its ruins and artificial caverns of shocking antiquity, perhaps older even than mankind itself, as were the immemorial blasphemies of the Chan-Tzo.

"What Hawkins dreamed, I cannot say. His speech had ceased to be coherent, except on the point of threatening me should I waver from our purpose. I knew he was insane then, and that I would die with him, likewise insane, unless I could somehow escape his company.

"I was past thinking clearly. How fortunate, then, that my plan was simplicity itself—almost the bare truth rather than some contrived stratagem.

"I fell to the ground and refused to rise, no matter how much Hawkins screamed that he would blow my brains out with his pistol. I said I was dying, that his pistol would be a mercy. *He* would offer me no mercy. I was counting on that. Instead, he forced me to translate the map for him and make notes as best I could. There was nothing to write with by a thorn and my own blood, but I wrote, and when he was satisfied, he laughed, folded the map into his pocket, took *all* our remaining supplies, and left me to my fate on the trackless, endless plain.

"And so we parted. I hoped I had sent him to Hell, deliberately mixing up the directions so he'd end up only the Devil knew where. He, of course, assumed I would be vulture's meat before another day or two.

"But I did not die. Mad with fever and privation, my mind filled with fantastic and horrible hallucinations, I wandered for what might have been days or even weeks, until, by the kindness of providence alone, I stumbled into the camp of some nomads, who, seeing that I was a white man, bore me on camel-back into the Chinese province of Sinkiang and there turned me over to a trader, who brought me to a missionary.

"This proved to be my salvation, both physical and otherwise. I married the missionary's daughter, Abigail's mother, and largely through the influence of her family I later found a place on a much more respectable Anglo-French expedition to Angkor. That was the true beginning of my scientific career. Still the mysteries of the East haunted me, but my cravings were directed into proper channels until I achieved the renown I have today."

At this point Sir Humphrey paused. The only sound was the slow ticking of a great clock in some other room. Abigail Thurston's face was white from the shock of what she had heard. She scarcely seemed to breathe. Holmes sat very still, his chin held in his hand, staring into space.

I was the one who broke the silence.

"Surely, Sir Humphrey, there is more to the story than that. I don't see how your luckless expedition or whatever fate the rascal Hawkins must have met has anything to do with the here and now."

Thurston's reaction was explosive.

"Damn it, man! It has *everything* to do with my predicament and what may well be my inevitable fate. But . . . you are right. There is more to tell. After many years of roving the world, giving lectures, publishing books, after I was knighted by the Queen—after my past life seemed a bad dream from which I had finally awakened—I thought I was safe. But it was not to be. *This past fortnight I began to receive communications from the fiend Hawkins!"*

"Communications?" said Holmes. "How so?"

"There. On the desk."

Holmes reached over and opened an ornately carven, lacquered box, removing a sheaf of papers. He glanced at them briefly and gave them to me.

"What do you make of them, Watson?"

"I cannot read the writing. The paper is an Oriental rice-paper. The penmanship shows the author to be under considerable mental strain, perhaps intoxicated. Notice the frequent scratchings and blottings. Beyond that, I can make out nothing."

Sir Humphrey spoke. "The language is an archaic—some would say degenerate—form of Burmese, the script a kind of code used by criminals in the Far East. Between these two elements, I am perhaps the only *living* man who can read what is written here, for Wendall Hawkins *is not alive*, if his words are to be believed."

"Surely if he is dead," said Holmes, "your troubles are at an end."

"No, Mr. Holmes, they are not, for all of these letters were written *after* Hawkins's death—long after it. It seems that he *reached* the Plateau of Leng, which I saw only in visions. There the almost sub-human priests of the Chan-Tzo murdered him after what might have been *years* of indescribable tortures, then brought him back into a kind of half-life as an animate corpse at their command, hideously disfigured, the skin flayed from his face, his heart ripped out, the cavity in his chest filled with inextinguishable fire. He is implacable now, driven both by the will of his masters and his own rage for revenge against me, whom he blames for his unending agony. He knows all the secrets of the Chan-Tzo priests, and the conjuring of death-fetches is easily within his power."

"He says all *that* in these letters?" I asked.

"That and more, Dr. Watson, and if it is true, I am defenseless. My only hope is that Mr. Holmes and yourself can prove me to be *deluded,* the victim of a *hoax* perpetrated by the vile Hawkins who has no doubt returned, but returned, I still dare to hope, as no more than a mortal villain. If you can do this, I certainly have the means to reward you handsomely for your services."

"My services are charged on a fixed scale," said Holmes, "but let us not concern ourselves with the monetary details now. I shall indeed collar this Hawkins for you and unmask his devices—which I am sure would make the tricks of our English spirit mediums child's play in comparison—but they are devices none the less. For what else can they be?"

"Mr. Holmes, I will be forever in your debt."

"We shall watch and wait until Hawkins is forced to show his hand. But first, I think Dr. Watson should escort Miss Abigail to a safer place, my own rooms, which I shall not be needing until this affair is concluded." When Thurston's daughter made to protest, Holmes turned to her and said, "You have been a heroine, but now that the battle is actually joined, I think it best that you remove yourself from the field. Will you go with Dr. Watson?"

"Whatever you say, Mr. Holmes."

"Splendid. Now I must busy myself examining the house inside and out, to discover any way our enemy might use to gain entrance."

Thurston picked up the elephant gun and lay it across his lap, then began idly polishing the barrel with a cloth.

"I've survived five days like this. I think I shall be safe here behind the locked door for a little while longer yet. Your plan makes excellent sense, Mr. Holmes."

We left Sir Humphrey alone in the room. As Holmes and I escorted Miss Thurston down the stairs, the detective asked me, "Well, Watson, what do you think?"

"A unique case, Holmes. One worthy of your talents."

"About Sir Humphrey. What about him?"

"I judge him to be of fundamentally sound mind, but what superstitious fears he may harbor are being played upon by the murderous Hawkins, who sounds himself to be completely mad."

"Mad or not, he shall have to manifest himself in a decidedly *material* form before long, at which

point he will be susceptible to capture by mundane means."

"One thing doesn't fit, Holmes. Who, or what, did we see upon our arrival here? Sir Humphrey hadn't been out of the room."

"An impostor, possibly a trained actor in league with Hawkins. I agree that all the pieces of the puzzle are not yet in place. But have patience. You know my methods."

"I am so glad that you and Dr. Watson will help Father," Miss Thurston said softly as we reached the base of the stairs. "You are sent from Heaven, both of you."

Holmes smiled indulgently. "Not from nearly so far, but we shall do what we can."

Alas, we could do but little. As we stood there at the base of the stairs and I helped Miss Thurston on with her coat, she turned and chanced to look back up the stairs. Suddenly she screamed.

"Good God!" I exclaimed.

Near the top of the stairs was a figure who appeared to be Sir Humphrey, but dressed for the outside, in coat and top hat, as we had seen him before. He *could not* have gotten past us.

"You! Stop!" Holmes was already in pursuit, bounding up the steps three at a time.

The figure moved so swiftly the eye could hardly follow, and soft-footedly. I heard only Holmes's boots pounding on the wooden stairs. Then there came a cry from within the study. Sir Humphrey shouted something in a foreign language, his tone that of abject terror, his words broken off in a gurgling scream. The elephant gun went off with a thunderous roar.

I left Miss Thurston and hurried up after Holmes. By the time I reached the study door, which was blown apart from the inside as if a cannonball had gone through it, Holmes was inside.

He rushed out again, his eyes wild, his face bloodless, and he saw Miss Abigail Thurston coming up behind me.

"For the love of God, Watson! Don't let her in!"

"Father!" she screamed. "Oh, you must let me pass!"

For all she struggled, I held her fast.

"Watson! Do not let her through no matter what happens! It is just . . . too horrible!"

I think that was the only time I ever saw Sherlock Holmes truly shocked, at a loss for words.

I forced Miss Thurston back down the stairs despite her vehement protests, holding onto her until the police arrived, which they did shortly, summoned by the neighbors who had heard the screams and the shot. Only after she had been conveyed away in a police wagon, accompanied by a patrolman, was I able to examine the body of Sir Humphrey Thurston, who was indeed murdered, as I had feared.

Though still seated in his chair, he had been mutilated hideously, almost beyond recognition.

His throat was cut from ear to ear. That was enough to have killed him. But the flesh had been almost entirely torn away from his face, and a strange series of symbols, like the ones I had seen in the letters, had been carved in the bare bone of his forehead. The crown of his skull had been smashed in by some blunt instrument, and—it revolted me to discover—most of his brain was gone.

The final detail was the worst, for it had been deliberately designed to mock us. The still smoking elephant gun lay across his lap, and, carefully placed so that it would be *reflected in the mirrored surface of the polished gun barrel,* was a small jade idol with emerald eyes, a stylized figure of a bat-winged dog.

"Yes, Holmes," I said, "it is entirely too horrible."

Dr Watson stopped telling the story, and I, the nineteen-year-old American college student, could only gape at him open-mouthed, like some imbecile, trying not to reach the attractively obvious conclusion that the good doctor's mind had gone soft after so many years. It was a terrible thing, just to entertain such a notion. I almost wept.

I would have remained there forever, frozen where I sat, wordless, had not Dr. Watson gone on.

"It was a case which I could not record, which Holmes *ordered* me to suppress on pain of the dissolution of our friendship. It just didn't work out."

"Wh-what do you mean, didn't work out?"

"I mean exactly that. The affair concluded too quickly and ended in abject failure. We accomplished nothing. He would have no more of the matter, the specifics, as he acidly phrased it, being left to the 'official imagination,' which, sure enough, concluded the murder to be the work of a madman or madmen, perhaps directed by a sinister Oriental cult, a new Thuggee. But even the police could not account for the powerful stench of *decay* which lingered in the explorer's study even long after the body had been removed, as if something long dead had invaded, done its worst, and departed as inexplicably as it had come.

"Enormous pressure was brought to bear to prevent any accurate reportage in the newspapers, to prevent panic. I think those instructions came from the very highest level. Sir Humphrey's obituary, ironically, listed the cause of his demise as an Asiatic fever. I signed the death certificate to that effect.

"My own conclusions were profoundly disturbing. The mystery could not be resolved. What we—even Miss Thurston—had witnessed were not merely unlikely, but *impossible*.

"'I *reject* the impossible,' said Holmes vehemently, 'as a matter of policy. Such things *cannot be*—'

"'You and I and the girl saw, Holmes. They *are.'*

"'No, Watson! No! The irrational has *no place* in detective work. We must confine ourselves to the tangible and physical, carefully building upon meticulous reason, or else the whole edifice of my life's work crumbles into dust. Against the supernatural, I am helpless, my methods of no use. My methods *have* been useful in the past, don't you think? And so they shall be in the future, but we must remain within certain bounds, and so preserve them.'"

Again I, the college boy, was left speechless.

"Holmes made me swear an oath—and I swore it—never to write up this case—and I never wrote it—"

Had he, in a sense at least, broken his oath by telling me? I dared not ask. Was there some urgency now, of which had lately become aware?

"I wanted to tell someone," was all he said. "I thought I should."

King Midas. Ass's ears. Who will believe the wind in the reeds?

I merely know that a week after I returned to school in America I received a telegram saying that Dr. Watson had died peacefully of heart failure, sitting in that very chair by the fire. A week later a parcel arrived with a note from one of my aunts, expressing some bewilderment that he had wanted me to have the contents.

It was the idol of the bat-winged dog.

The Adventure of the Lost World

by Dominic Green

When Sherlock Holmes and Professor Moriarty toppled to their deaths from Reichenbach Falls, the reading public was outraged. People loved Sherlock Holmes, and just didn't want to accept that he was dead. People have had much the same feeling about dinosaurs, ever since the first dinosaur fossils were widely exhibited in the early nineteenth century. Dinosaurs were just so great, so awe-inspiring, so fun, that people didn't want to believe that the dinosaurs were all dead, and novelists fed

this hunger. Maybe there were dinosaurs in South America. Maybe at the North Pole. Arthur Conan Doyle, author of Sherlock Holmes, wrote one of the best-known of these dinosaur romps, called *The Lost World*. As exploration foreclosed these possibilities, dino-loving authors resorted to increasingly desperate ploys. Maybe there were dinosaurs *inside the Earth*. Maybe you could *clone* dinosaurs from dino blood found in amber-encrusted mosquitoes. Sadly, the Earth has turned out to be depressingly un-hollow, and there's not much chance of genetic material hanging around for sixty-five million years. This next tale takes us back to a simpler, happier time, when one could more easily imagine gigantic, blood-crazed lizards haunting the forests of the night.

It was in the autumn of 1918, when my medical practice was burgeoning on account of casualties from the recent war, when my friend Sherlock Holmes called upon me in the most unexpected circumstances. Loyal readers of the *Strand Magazine* will, no doubt, already be indoctrinated in such exploits of Holmes as the intrigue surrounding the Ruritanian Abdication Crisis. However, at that time Holmes had failed to uncover anything incomprehensible to the human mind for several weeks, and I was beginning to fear for his health.

I was conducting surgery on an elderly Major of Rifles who had lost a leg in the Egyptian campaign, and whom I was treating for scrofula of the stump, when I all of a sudden heard the ghostly, unexpected voice of my friend Holmes.

"I apologize for this peculiar method of gaining entry to your consulting rooms, Watson, but I must beg your company right away."

I looked up, behind me, and all about the room, but could see nowhere my one-time room-mate and companion. I stared at the laudanum bottle I had been about to hand over to my patient.

"The Major was otherwise disposed today, Watson," said the Major. "I have taken the liberty of taking his place. The streets are not safe for me to walk in my customary attire at present."

"But the leg, Holmes," I stammered. "How did you do the leg?"

"Ah, Watson," said Holmes in a voice of immensely pleased conceit, "you have been making the assumption all the time that I had two legs to begin with."

"But Holmes," I protested. "I have seen you run, and jump!"

"Have you, Watson? Have you really?"

"Are you, at present, engaged upon an investigation?"

"An investigation more brutal and savage, perhaps, than any other I have previously been involved in. I consider it normal to see a man's life taken from him by another for the pursuit of criminal gain, Watson; but it is rare indeed for him to be eaten afterwards."

Even I, who have been in Afghanistan, was appalled. "Surely not."

"Just so, Watson. In the past seven days, on Hampstead Heath, there have been seven attacks upon street musicians, each the player of a trombone of some description, and each attacked, if those who heard the attacks are to be believed, whilst executing the closing bars of Gustav Holst's Thaxted. In each case, the victim appears to have been attacked from above, the flesh crushed and cut, the bones splintered, the capital extremity entirely missing in many cases. Each victim's body was also notable for the stench of corruption which hung about it, like gas gangrene."

"Accidental death has been ruled out, then? A recurrent trombone malfunction of some order—"

"—has already been checked for. The instruments were produced by different manufacturers, all of the very highest reputation and with large portfolios of quite living, healthy customers. However, I do not trust the unmedical minds of London's Metropolitan Police, Watson. I require your keen anatomical

brain. A fresh body has been discovered on the Heath this very hour. I enjoin you to take the new-fangled subterranean railway to Hampstead. I will be waiting outside the station, though of course you will not know me."

The London fog was thick as wool pulled over the eyes when I stepped out of the station at the pleasant rustic hamlet of Hampstead. Streetlamps were already being lit, each surrounded by a saintly halo in the murk. I bought a paper from a decrepit scion of the lower classes and sat down on a bench to wait for my tardy associate.

"Watson!" hissed a voice through the gloom.

"Egad," I replied. "Where are you, Holmes?"

"I have just sold you a copy of the *London Evening Standard.* LATEST NEWS, GUVNOR! Though I had thought you might have remarked on my trombone."

I remarked on his trombone. "Good lord, Holmes! You have a trombone. Are you mad?"

"Not in the least. This is quite a singular trombone. It was discovered, twenty feet up in the branches of a tree, but otherwise almost entirely unharmed, a hundred yards from the body of the penultimate victim. It plays beautifully." He essayed a bar of Thaxted.

"An improvement on your violin, at any rate. And now, where is the last man to be murdered?"

Holmes led me with the accuracy of a homing pigeon through a white haze out of which trees drifted like gigantic submarine fauna. Finally, he came upon a spot where two policemen sat playing cards over the sad, torn body of one of our city's street musicians.

"Evening, Mr. 'Olmes," they chorused.

"Good evening, officers. Now, Watson, your medical training will almost certainly draw your attention to the body's non-possession of a head. What I wish to know is, what removed that head so swiftly and so irrevocably?"

I examined the poor corpse as thoroughly as I could. "I have seen something similar to this at only one point in my career," I said. "An Indian mugger, not a man but a crocodile, which caused a commotion in our billet in Peshawar. One night, one of our subalterns, answering the call of nature by the waterside, was seized about a part of his anatomy I dread to name by the scaly abomination. Sixteen rifle bullets were needed to kill it, by which time the unfortunate officer was long dead. The brutes have jaws capable of cracking a man's ribcage like an egg."

"Interesting. And what do you suppose did this?"

"Something, I would hazard a guess," I said, "with bigger jaws."

Holmes was striding out across the frozen grass, tapping his heel with his cane impatiently. "So, what do you suppose has bigger jaws than a crocodile?"

"I have no idea. An extraordinarily large lion escaped from a zoo, perhaps."

"Come here, Watson."

I walked closer. Holmes was standing over something, an impression in the turf.

"There. What do you imagine that is?"

I looked. Then, I stared.

"It's a footprint, Watson," said Holmes. "It is the footprint of a gigantic ten-thousand-pound theropod from Hell."

Ten minutes later I was staring at Holmes as though he were the starkest madman.

"A megalosaurus?"

"The very same. You know my maxim—when you have eliminated the impossible, whatever remains, however improbable, must be, etcetera, etcetera."

I began to feel somewhat light-headed. "Holmes, the megalosaurus has been extinct for nearly two hundred million years."

"Not so, Watson." At this point Holmes fished out a stack of books and papers he had been concealing in his trombone case and began flicking frantically through a periodical. "I considered all the animals that currently exist in the world and are capable of killing a man, and eliminated them one by one from my inquiries. The leopard lacked the sheer height to attack from above unless concealed in a tree, and I could find no claw marks in the bark of any tree hereabouts. The elephant, meanwhile, whilst possessing sufficient elevation, would gore or trample in preference to biting. Finally, I concluded that the attacker was an animal unrecognized by conventional zoology.

"Therefore I switched from zoology to palaeontology. The characteristic dual puncture wounds of a sabre-toothed tiger attack were not present, nor were the sixfold blunt contusions that would indicate a charging uintatherium. I went through ten heavy tomes at the British Museum before I alighted on my culprit. A megalosaurus had performed this crime, Watson—a huge Jurassic beast moving on powerful three-clawed feet and with a mouth like a cavern of stalactites. I know what you will say, Watson—nowhere on Earth does a megalosaurus currently exist. But there are reports from the Belgian Congo of creatures that resemble a stegosaurus more than a stegosaurus's maiden aunt, and in addition, there are the remarkable accounts which I now commend to you." He had now found the pages he had been looking for, and set to reading aloud enthusiastically.

"Proceedings of the London Zoological Institute, June 13th, 1917: an address to be delivered by Professor Challenger to a general assembly of all members, regarding extraordinary discoveries recently made in a high tributary of the Amazon . . . "

"That was all poppycock. Totally discredited. The expedition brought back no evidence of the existence of living dinosauria in the Amazon whatsoever."

"You must remember, Watson, that the generally accepted public account of the expedition is that of Mr. Edward Malone of the *Daily Gazette*," admonished Holmes. "But I have recently been across the Channel to purchase Professor Challenger's own version of events and it makes most enlightening reading. As you know, the Professor's account was savaged by Her Majesty's censors, only a few select copies making their way here across the Channel after having had to be published in France."

He switched to a different volume, this one hardbound and bearing a lurid cover engraving of a lady in night attire being improbably menaced by a tumescent Mesozoic reptile.

"September 13th, 1916. Violently, bestially drunk on that fermented mash of giant spiders the natives call ghula-ghula. Still see huge green dinosaurs everywhere. Am having to gradually force myself to face the horrid truth that they might actually be real. After tea, with Roxton, Malone and Summerlee out of the camp, disported myself with two of the hallucinatory Stone Age women hereabouts, enjoying to the full their supple and surprisingly real-seeming honey-coloured bodies—"

"That is quite enough, Holmes," I snapped. "The ravings of a man in an arachnolysin-induced delirium are hardly proof of the continued existence of dinosaurs."

"Agreed, Watson. But if we read on! If we but read on! December 1, 1916. Our return to England has been safely negotiated without either my confederates or Customs & Excise suspecting I had more in my baggage than declared. The egg is ovoid—as is only to be expected—about the size of a large coconut, porous skinned, and a bright saffron yellow in colour. I have been incubating it by stealing into the cargo hold and covering it with rotting kitchen waste, and in addition, whenever possible, sit on the egg personally. When questioned why I was sitting in rotting kitchen waste in the cargo hold by the ship's purser, I simply replied that I was incubating an egg which, when it hatched out, would develop into a twenty-foot-long man-eating lizard, whereupon he simply grinned, tapped his cap in a friendly way, and left me to my own devices.

"February 2, 1917. My hatchling has arrived. Have been feeding it turkey giblets, which it consumes with gusto. Have named it Gladys, after Malone's carnivorous reptilian fiancée. Gladys very

attracted to bright objects and movement. Already appear to have lost the cat, a huge fluffy useless article good only for destroying valuable furnishings. Wife distraught. Am beginning to like Gladys already.

"April 10. Gladys over six feet long now. Intend to take her in to one of that confounded bore Walton's lectures on the malleability of germ plasm. I will say nothing and announce nothing—just take her in on the end of a long piece of string, and sit at the back, and stare. Then let that pieheaded buffoon deny the existence of living palaeozoons.

"Green, the children's music teacher, has packed his things and left. Complained about having to deliver lessons in the same room as Gladys; claims music drives her into a bestial fury. Good riddance, for his music drives me into just such a fury, as he practises nothing but Holst's Jupiter at every hour of the day and night.

"To the point, Holmes."

"September 23. Have negotiated a regular meat supply for Gladys from a Mr. Glass, a heavily bearded importer of fine Irish beef. Have surveyed Mr. Glass's warehouse and suspect his beef was formerly in the habit of whinnying, but his prices are cheap. Two of his associates delivered the first consignment to our drawing room, where Gladys is currently residing. The impertinent lackeys passed doubt on the ability of the window bars to prevent Gladys from escaping. Was only too ready to demonstrate to them how the windows could only be opened on the outside.

"September 25. Donned diver's helmet and steel gauntlets and took half horse carcass in to Gladys as a treat. Disaster! Window open, drawing room empty, three-toed clawprints disappearing over the lawn into the distance."

Holmes snapped the book shut.

"Are you seriously suggesting that a palaeozoic carnivore is stalking Hampstead Heath?"

"I have been checking public records, Watson. There have been over fifteen cases of unexplained decapitations and disappearing animals on and around the Heath in the last twelve months. The police no doubt failed to connect them with this investigation due to the fact that none of them involved trombones."

"So a prehistoric monster is responsible for these killings?"

"Not entirely, Watson. There are still facets of the affair that elude me. For example, in all six cases, listeners reported that the trombonist's solo was accompanied by a lone fiddle part which joined the refrain just before the notes suddenly, tragically choked off. No, my friend—I am thinking that the mind behind these enormities evolved quite recently."

Several days later, the eternal fog still covered the city. I was treating a case of phossie-jaw in a middle-aged match worker. My signature was still wet on the prescription for morphia when the worker suddenly spoke up—quite impossible in a patient whose jaw had entirely dissolved into a sort of calcareous mush—taking me momentarily aback.

"Good morning, Watson."

This time, however, I regained control with a steely resolve. I did not even look up.

"Good day, Holmes. I hope you realize you have just wasted fifteen minutes' valuable consulting time."

"I do apologize, dear fellow. The streets remain dangerous, and I had to see you. It was the excitement of finishing a case that has been puzzling me for some time."

"The Hampstead trombonist decapitations?"

"The very same. I have found what I believe to be an answer, Watson, in forensic palaeontology." Holmes fidgeted in his chair nervously. "Don't you want to know how I feigned a jaw entirely dissolved by phosphor poisoning?"

"I most certainly do not."

"Very well. It is a case, Watson, that will go down in the annals of all cases in which a dinosaur was used as a murder weapon. For there is a human being behind these deeds, Watson, make no mistake of it." Out of a carpet bag on the floor he drew another volume of bound periodicals. "These are the observations of a Mr. Barnum Brown, who has recently discovered a colossal ornithopod in the fastnesses of Alberta which he names Corythosaurus Casuarius. This creature, a member of the hadrosauridae or duck-billed dinosaurs, possesses a singular crest on its skull—a hollow, air-filled bony structure which some palaeontologists have wrongly supposed to have been used for breathing while the animal snorkelled like a scaly submarine. There is, however, a slight drawback to this theory in that the crest possesses no exterior nostril—"

"The murders, Holmes."

"Ah, yes. There is, you see, Watson, a school of thought who believe the crest formed a sort of resonating chamber with which the beast would be capable of making distinct musical notes—not unlike, one would imagine, a trombone."

"Holmes, I cannot see any conceivable reason why a house-sized prehistoric creature would wish to make a noise like a trombone."

"These creatures were not the sharpest of sorts, Watson. Some of them needed secondary brains in their abdominal regions to remain capable of coordinating their movements. It is also true that large creatures do not necessarily have acute senses; the rhinoceros is notoriously short-sighted, and relies on its sharper sense of hearing to detect approaching hunters.

"Consider, then, a herd of such creatures. Like African herbivores, they might not all be members of the same species. Multiple species of African antelope often gather at the same water-hole to drink. However, our antelope weigh five tons and are only marginally cleverer than the pond scum they are lapping up. It is quite possible that they might elect to mate with the wrong species if they are not provided with some constant audible cue. Some species of hadrosaur might therefore have made noises like trombones, as if to say, Here I am! I am a trombone-crested hadrosaur, and other trombone-crested hadrosaurs may profitably choose to mate with me. But the noises they made would not be of interest solely to their mates. They might also have interested their predators."

"Good God, Holmes," I cried. "Are you telling me those poor wretches died simply because their instruments made sounds resembling that creature's natural prey?"

"I not only believe it," said Holmes, "I intend to prove it, by the most direct means possible."

He drew out the trombone from his bag, along with a copy of the sheet music for Thaxted.

"You will not need your pistol, Watson. It would be entirely useless against the creature. Shooting it accurately in the brain would be as hard as hitting a bull from a hundred yards, and I imagine even four-five-five ball would simply bounce off its scaly hide."

We were walking through a wilderness of winter-deadened trees, in a fog in which an entire herd of hadrosauridae could have stood shoulder to shoulder unobserved. A bandstand loomed out of the murk. Posters announced a forthcoming event involving royalty.

"There do not seem to be any dinosaurs in the vicinity, Holmes. I feel sure that such large animals would advertise their presence."

"A predator," said Holmes, "never advertises its presence." And he raised the trombone to his lips, and blew out the final bar of Thaxted. A tear rose to my eye at the thought of the country all of whose ways are gentleness, all of whose paths are peace.

Then the hairs at the back of my neck stood on end as I heard a distant, clumsy crashing from far away in the fog, as if a drunken coachman were attempting to drive an omnibus through heavy brush.

"The hunter's afoot," said Holmes. "And it is we who are the game." He motioned to me to follow

as he stole away.

"Confound it, Holmes! I hadn't expected your damnable theory to actually be correct!"

"My theories, Watson, are always correct." With that, he plunged into a nearby drain or ha-ha and squelched ponderously along it, not appearing in any hurry to get to the other side. "Into the water, Watson. In this fog the beast will hunt by scent."

I have no shame in relating that I piled into the water more smartly than I have ever piled into water before, particularly since I heard, at a somewhat lesser distance now, the immense crackling whisper of something dreadfully, fearfully heavy walking across the carpet of fallen leaves on the Heath towards our former position. Walking slowly, and appearing to deviate to left and right, like a questing hound. I believe I actually heard breath, escaping like a head of steam from a ship's boiler.

"Do not make a sound, Watson, for your life depends on it."

Holmes claims that he still saw nothing at that point—I would have been able to see nothing even had the beast been standing right next to me, for I had my eyes tight shut. But at that point, we heard another sound, deep and sonorous, singing out through the fog—the sound of the low notes of a violin. It is difficult to convey how I knew purely from the sounds I heard through the mist that a Mesozoic lizard was cocking its head on one side, but somehow I knew this was what was happening, as if a bird on a branch had heard another bird whistle, or a dog heard its owner call.

We heard it plunge away through the fog.

"As I suspected," said Holmes. "There are two hadrosaur species."

We sat in the pleasant surroundings of the Jack Straw's Castle inn near the flagstaff on the northern perimeter of the Heath. Warm beer was a welcome antidote to the cold.

"I cannot understand, Holmes, how the fact that there were two species of hadrosauriwhatsit can possibly be significant."

"Quite simple, I imagine. The first species, whose calls sound like those of a trombonist executing the final bars of Thaxted, are our megalosaurus's preferred prey. The second species, meanwhile, whose call is more violinlike, are a related animal which moves with the herds of the first. But our carnivore will not attack this second species."

"It will not?"

"I will stake my life on it. These animals are not prey. Their flesh is shunned by our megalosaurus, which will nevertheless follow them in much the same way a lion will follow an animal it is incapable of bringing down, such as a rhinoceros, in the hope of finding other herbivores it can bring down. Nevertheless, Watson, whoever is controlling this creature is playing fiddle with the Devil. And he is about to walk through that door, right about—now."

The doors opened to admit a shabby-looking street musician, similar in appearance to the poor devil I had examined only a day earlier.

"Mr. Green, I believe," said Holmes. "Formerly music teacher to the family of Professor Challenger of Enmore Park. No, don't trouble yourself to pull out that revolver. You will find that almost every person in this hostelry right now is an armed member of Her Majesty's Metropolitan Police."

Eerily, as if Holmes were some macabre puppeteer, every single one of the establishment's customers turned round and raised their hats to the newcomer.

"You will perhaps be mystified as to how I know your name. You are, of course, an adherent of the Fenian cause and a proponent of Home Rule for Ireland. The merits or demerits of that question I leave to politicians. I involve myself only at the point when people believe their political causes justify murder. Your principal mistake was in presenting yourself, in disguise, to your former employer as a meat wholesaler of the name of Glass. 'Glas,' as Watson doubtless does not know but I certainly do, is the Gaelic for Green, a childish conceit which led to your downfall. You noticed several months ago

whilst tutoring Professor Challenger's children that the notes of the trombone appeared to induce a blind killing rage in the juvenile megalosaurus chained up at the other end of the drawing room. The notes of the violin, meanwhile, served only to attract its attention and cause it to follow the violinist round the room. It was after learning these facts that you formulated your plan.

You planned to remove the beast from confinement using two of your Fenian confederates, and train it to attack human beings. The small number of bites inflicted on his serving staff had convinced Challenger that the creature did not seek out human beings as prey; it needed to be taught to do so. And you, Mr. Green, have been teaching it to kill for the last twelve months. And why have you been doing so? Why, in only one week's time, His Majesty King George is due to attend an open air concert at the Parliament Hill bandstand on the Heath, where the final piece on the programme will be Mr. Spring-Rice's inspired lyrics to Thaxted by Gustav Holst. In fact, it is only the final note of that tune that sets off the beast, am I right?" Holmes began whistling the final few bars of Thaxted.

The musician's face palled.

"For pity's sake," he exclaimed, in a pronounced Dublin brogue, "you do not know what you're doing. If you value your life, if you value all our lives, stop!"

And Holmes did stop, drawing out that long penultimate note, and laughed. "Indeed," he chuckled. "How could it be otherwise? We have Professor Challenger's word that you practised Holst's Jupiter in the beast's presence without ill effect. Jupiter, of course, would have been safe to practise, for in Jupiter, which is otherwise identical to Thaxted, the final note never resolves. Were you, perhaps, hoping that the beast would wreak such havoc among the crowd that His Majesty would be trampled?"

The scarlet-haired Fenian shook his head. "You do me an injustice, sir. If you had only troubled to look further into the cast of the orchestra, you would have discovered I was to play the principal trombone. I intended to place myself directly before the monarch of your despicable island, blowing my horn for all I was worth. The beast would surely have taken the ermine-laden buffoon after it had finished with me."

Holmes nodded. "I see you are a man of courage, if a misguided one. I am offering you an honourable way out."

He extended a hand, proffering the trombone. The Irishman nodded sadly and accepted it. Holmes picked up the untouched pint of ale he had been nursing since we arrived, and held it up as well.

"A last drink for a condemned man."

Green accepted the pint, and drained it with gusto. Then, he turned round to the assembled police officers and cried:

"Fianna Fail!"

—before striding out through the inn doors into the white murk. We saw no more of him; but heard, droning in from without, the clear, calm notes of that timeless patriotic hymn which, I became more acutely aware than ever before, apply to any country, any King, and more especially to that great country we all hope to become citizens of upon our end.

Then, suddenly, there was a great thundering crash, and a hideous roaring, and the notes of the trombone ceased as the instrument itself was flung out of the fog, bent double, towards the window where we sat.

"Gods, what a beast! It will take a troop of soldiers with an artillery piece to kill it!"

"I think not," said Holmes. "That pint of ale contained enough strychnine to kill ten elephants. Now, I believe there is time for me to consume another less dangerous pint before we repair to the bandstand, where I believe the local brass ensemble is currently setting up to practise. I fancy I could stand to hear that tune again."

And he clicked his fingers for the barman to bring him another beer.

Dynamics of a Hanging

by Tony Pi

Most people know Lewis Carroll (the pen name of Charles Lutwidge Dodgson) as the author of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. Dodgson became good friends with the family of one of his academic colleagues, the Liddells, and would often take their children along with him when he went rowing on the nearby rivers. During these expeditions he would make up fanciful tales to entertain the children, and one of the girls, Alice, was so enchanted that she begged Dodgson to write it all down. The enthusiastic reception for the manuscript by fantasy author George MacDonald and his children convinced Dodgson to pursue publication. Dodgson's private life has been the subject of intense speculation, especially regarding his relationship with the Liddells. (Dodgson's family apparently destroyed several pages of his diary, presumably to protect his reputation.) We know that he was tormented by feelings of guilt and shame, which apparently restrained him from following his father into the priesthood. It's all very mysterious. One thing that's beyond any doubt though is that Dodgson demonstrated brilliance in many different fields. Notably, he held a lectureship in mathematics, and wrote books on logic. It's those abilities that he puts to good use in our next adventure.

It was in the fall of 1891 that I received a telegram from the Reverend Charles Dodgson, inviting me to his residence in Guildford, Surrey. It was not for a medical consultation, but of vital importance to the present trial of the Moriarty gang: the mystery of Professor Moriarty's cipher.

Reverend Dodgson was both an author of children's books and a mathematician. My wife was fond of the Alice books under his *nom-de-plume*, Lewis Carroll, while Holmes once recommended me to read his *Game of Logic* to hone my analytical reasoning. It surprised me that Dodgson knew of the coded notebooks, as their existence had been suppressed. It was not five months ago that my friend Sherlock Holmes perished at Reichenbach Falls in his final confrontation with James Moriarty. Even in death, Holmes struck a fatal blow against Moriarty's criminal confederates, leaving documents that thoroughly incriminated them. Inspector Patterson invited me to examine the materials recovered from one of Moriarty's secret lairs: vials of opiates among blueprints and handwritten musical scores; purloined paintings beside burned account books; and most intriguing, notebooks written in Moriarty's hand, the oldest of which had a page torn out.

Moriarty's notebooks contained mathematical formulae interspersed with code. Mycroft Holmes speculated it was a Vigenère cipher, but even he couldn't solve it. "Alas, both the Kasiski and Kerckhoffs methods failed," said Mycroft. "If only we knew what the coded messages were about. Are they musings on mathematics, or something more sinister? Find the key, Watson, and we'll glimpse Moriarty's mind."

I was intrigued by Dodgson's message. Did he know the key, when even Mycroft Holmes failed? I immediately dispatched a telegram accepting his invitation.

Thus I found myself in Guildford, sipping tea with Charles Dodgson in his parlour. The Reverend, a thin man with uneven blue eyes and sloped shoulders, tilted his left ear towards me as we talked.

"My condolences, Doctor Watson, on the untimely passing of Mr. Holmes," said he. "I fear I must bear some of the burden for his demise."

"Oh? Did you know him?" I asked.

"I knew of Holmes at Oxford, though we never met. It was James Moriarty I knew, through our years at Christ Church debating mathematics and logic. Is there a volume from Moriarty's effects, with a single coded page torn out?"

"Indeed!" I exclaimed. "How did you know?"

"Because I have that page." Dodgson retrieved a copy of *Through the Looking Glass* from his collection. Tucked within was the coded page he spoke of, folded and yellowed with age. "Tenniel's Jabberwock illustration always reminds me of Moriarty, hypnotic and serpentine."

"How did you get this?"

"That, Doctor, is a twisted tale," said he. "It began with the Order of Copernicus, and ended with the tragic murder of a young prodigy named Arthur Doyle."

The Order of Copernicus is a fellowship of scholars, physicians, mathematicians and philosophers. The Copernicans often invite new members to enrich their symposia with fresh ideas and voices. Moriarty first introduced me to the Order years ago, after he completed his dissertation on the Binomial Theorem. I found their debates enthralling, and participated whenever I could.

In early summer, 1879, Moriarty and I were invited to Aston by a fellow Copernican, Doctor Reginald Hoare. Reginald introduced us to his young lodger, Arthur Doyle, a medical student who was working as a dispensing assistant taking house calls on Reginald's behalf. I found him an engaging conversationalist and a sharp observer.

"What do you plan to do with your future, Arthur?" I asked.

"Surgery, sir," said Arthur. "I'm very much inspired by Doctor Bell at the Edinburgh University. But I'd also like to become a writer like you, actually, and have written some stories for Reginald's children. Edgar Allan Poe's another inspiration, and I'm attempting a mystery now."

"Poe! Now there was a true Copernican. I heard he was a great cryptographer," I said.

Moriarty disagreed. "He indulged in substitution codes, barely worth the effort to solve, unlike Vigenère ciphers."

Arthur asked what a Vigenère cipher was.

"It's based on the Caesar cipher, which shifted letters by a chosen number of positions, looping back to the beginning of the alphabet if necessary," I explained. "Shift the word JABBERWOCKY four positions to the right, you'd have NEFFIVSGOC. To solve the coded message, apply the shift in reverse.

"The Vigenère cipher uses a keyword where each letter in the alphabet represented a different shift. For example, if ALICE were my keyword, that would mean shifts of 0, 11, 8, 2, and 5. The keyword is repeated as needed, and so JABBERWOCKY becomes JLJDIRHWEOY."

Moriarty nodded. "There are mathematical ways to solve a Vigenère code. Kasiski's method determines the length of the keyword by measuring distances between repeating combinations, then uses frequency analysis to break the code. Kerckhoffs' method focuses on solving the keyword itself."

"Moriarty, didn't you have a notebook at Christ Church where you jotted down your formulae?" I asked. "You used a cipher on the annotations. Was that Vigenère?"

Moriarty smiled. "It was, to ensure that the musings and errors of my youth were for my eyes alone. But I'm confident that my code cannot be broken by either the Kerckhoffs or Kasiski solutions. They assume the keyword would be short, and repeated. But if the keyword's significantly long, like a piece of text, then a coded message would be virtually unbreakable."

"Respectfully, Professor, the keyword may be impervious to analysis, but the codemaker is not," said Arthur. "At medical school, Professor Bell taught us to observe the person as well as the disease in our diagnoses. By analyzing the man's habits, experiences and indulgences, one can deduce the

choice of text he uses for his code."

"You presume to unriddle my cipher by mere observation?" asked Moriarty.

"If I had the chance to get to know you better, Professor, I daresay I could figure out your code," said Arthur.

"I know a challenge when I hear one! Reginald, indulge me by releasing Arthur from his obligations on weekends. My university's not far, and I will pay for travel and lodging. He may observe me in my element, while I in turn will mentor him and provide him with a sample of cipher to unriddle. If he succeeds by summer's end, I will pay his tuition."

Moriarty had obviously taken a liking to Arthur Doyle, perhaps eager to guide a young man into his genius.

Reginald heartily agreed. "If he doesn't fall behind his duties here, why not?"

Arthur smiled. "It will be a pleasure learning from you, Professor."

"Before I forget, gentlemen, Samuel Haughton left these for you on his last visit," Reginald said, giving us each a copy of a treatise titled *On Hanging*. Reverend Haughton was a doctor and fellow Copernican from Dublin who dabbled in mathematics. "Haughton claims the mathematics of hanging can be useful in medicine. Humane versus inhumane hangings: depending on the criminal's weight and the length of drop, it could mean the difference between a quick death from snapping his spinal cord, to a long death from strangulation."

We argued awhile over the need for executions, with Moriarty maintaining ambivalence. When the topic somehow drifted onto the three-body problem in astronomy, which I had little interest in, Arthur and I excused ourselves so I could see his story manuscripts.

Arthur's room was modest, and his desk cluttered with papers on medicine, scraps of writing, and sheet music. Among his medical books were works by Burton, Dickens, Leibniz, and of course, Poe. He moved a violin case off a chair so I could sit and read his stories. I found them well-written and engaging, and encouraged Arthur to continue writing.

Arthur retrieved a book bound in red Moroccan leather, gilt in silver: a copy of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. "Would you mind signing this, Reverend, for Herr Gleiwitz? I see him on my rounds, and feel sorry for the man. He's down on his luck, raising his children on what little income he receives from giving German lessons. Perhaps your book will give his family some joy."

I gladly signed the copy.

Arthur wrote to me at Oxford thereafter, telling me of his tutelage under Moriarty. At first, his letters were ebullient, saying that the Professor's cunning rivaled that of Doctor Bell's. Whereas Bell emphasized observation, Moriarty taught him anticipation. *Predicting behaviour was as crucial as establishing history*, he wrote, explaining Moriarty's philosophy. *The world was a chessboard and men were as predictable as game pieces*.

But Arthur's later letters were sombre, hinting at a rift between himself and Moriarty. Did Moriarty's enthusiasm for his student turn to envy? Or did Arthur discover Moriarty's dark dealings? In any event, it spelled death for him.

In late summer, both Moriarty and I accepted an invitation from a fellow Copernican in London. On our third night there, upon our return from the symphony, we learned by telegram that tragedy had struck: Arthur Doyle was found dead, hanged.

"Arthur had been concerned about matters in Aston, but refused to say more," said Moriarty, stunned by the news. "I ought to have foreseen disaster."

I consoled him. "How could you have known?"

"We owe it to the boy to investigate his death, Charles," he insisted.

And so Moriarty and I returned to Aston, bearing our condolences to Reginald.

Reginald recounted the details of Arthur's death. "Arthur had returned from house calls and retired to his room that evening as usual. The following morning, we were shocked to hear Arthur had been found in the bell tower at St. Mary's, the church down the street. Inspector Ives took me there to identify Arthur's body."

"Cause of death?" asked Moriarty.

"All the signs pointed towards asphyxiation. Inspector Ives believes it was suicide," said Reginald.

"Arthur would hardly take his own life," said Moriarty. "Reginald, come with us and describe what you saw?"

Reluctantly, the good doctor accompanied us to St. Mary's. The bell tower was several stories tall, with a ladder up to a trapdoor that led into the belfry. The bell's rope dangled through a large opening in the belfry floor.

"The noose was tied to the bell's gudgeon," explained Reginald. "He was dangling six feet off the ground when we found him. He couldn't have kicked away a support, or we'd have discovered one. He must have jumped from the bell chamber."

"He could have pushed off the ladder," observed Moriarty. "But the momentum might have swung his body into the wall opposite. Any bruising on his arms or legs?"

"No," said Reginald.

"A dying man's instinct is to claw at the noose, even if he intended to die. Did you find any scratch marks around his neck?" continued Moriarty.

"No."

"But his hands weren't bound?"

"Correct."

"Then the evidence points towards a sudden drop from above," said Moriarty. "Except that's impossible."

"Why?" asked Reginald, perplexed.

"Mathematics," I explained, remembering Haughton's treatise on hanging. "Given his weight, a rope that exceeded twelve feet would make the force of the drop so great that the noose wouldn't simply snap his neck, it would cut clean through."

Moriarty nodded. "Given the marks on his neck, where was the noose's knot placed, Reginald?"

"Corner of his left jaw."

"A knot placed there would throw the head back upon falling, resulting in a fracture or dislocation of the neck. He would have died of a snapped neck, not strangulated," Moriarty concluded. "We're faced with contradictory facts. Arthur couldn't have jumped from that height without decapitation, but neither could he have hung himself in a manner consistent with asphyxiation."

"A vorpal paradox indeed," I agreed.

"That leaves but one conclusion: that Arthur Doyle was dead before someone strung him up," said Moriarty.

"Perhaps he was strangled in his sleep? Marks from a garrote would have been hidden by the bruising of the noose," I suggested.

"Perhaps. His room may yield more clues," said Moriarty.

In Arthur's room, Moriarty moved a familiar red, leather-bound book gilt in gold off the desk, and rifled through the young man's papers.

"Here's a draft of a paper he was writing for the British Medical Journal," said Moriarty. "*The Uses of Gelseminum As A Poison*, by Arthur Conan Doyle. Arthur had been experimenting on himself with gelseminum, also known as jessamine, in the interest of medical research. We have our poison, gentlemen."

"Poisoned! I thought his death was consistent with respiratory failure," I said.

"Do you know what gelseminum does, Reginald?" asked Moriarty.

"It's efficacious against spasmodic disorders, like epilepsy and hysteria, inhibiting nerve control and respitory functions," replied Reginald. "A large enough dose would paralyze a man, even arrest his breathing and stop his heart! I naturally assumed it was strangulation by hanging, and never considered poison. You *are* as brilliant as Arthur said, Moriarty!"

Moriarty cracked a thin smile. "It takes only observation to tell truth from lie."

"But who would kill him, and why?" I asked.

"I suspect if Reginald inventories his medicinal store, he'll discover narcotics missing," said Moriarty, with utter confidence. "Suppose Arthur was blackmailed into stealing the drugs. He might have threatened to go to the police, forcing his blackmailers to eliminate him quietly with an overdose of gelseminum, of which Arthur had in sufficient quantity to kill. To conceal their crime, they hoisted up his body in the bell tower to suggest suicide."

Reginald paled. "Arthur, embroiled in such dreadful business?"

"Appearances can be deceiving," said Moriarty. "Let us check the dispensary." They left, but I stayed behind to say a prayer for the lad.

Moriarty's analysis seemed plausible, but I didn't believe it of Arthur. I observed two peculiarities. Arthur's violin case was missing, and the book on the desk was a copy of *Through the Looking Glass*, not *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. I had chosen the different gilt decorations for each myself. I flipped open the cover and found a forgery of my signature, but not a good one: my name was misspelled. It read: *C.L. Dodgson (alias Lewis Carlool)*.

Why would Arthur go to the trouble of forging my signature, but spell it wrong? I came to the conclusion that Arthur left that clue for me alone. No one else would know I hadn't signed *Looking Glass*.

Reginald checked his inventory and discovered that drugs were indeed missing. Further forensic examination of Arthur's body confirmed he died of gelseminum poisoning, and the police started a search for Arthur's killers. Moriarty returned to his college, but I stayed behind in Acton to investigate the lead of the forged autograph. I made some quiet inquiries and found Herr Gleiwitz, who welcomed me into his home.

"Mr. Doyle had been kind to us, God rest his soul," said Herr Gleiwitz. "Once, when I couldn't pay for the medicine, he gave me his watch and said I should sell it. I tried to give it back, but he wouldn't have it. Several days ago, he gave my eldest a violin and made the boy promise to learn how to play." He brought the instrument for my examination.

I could find no hidden compartments in the violin case, but I discovered a folded piece of paper inside the violin through its F-holes. It took several frustrating tries to get it out intact. It was a torn page written in code in Moriarty's hand, and it must have been worth killing for. For the first time, I suspected that James Moriarty murdered Arthur Doyle in cold blood.

I was certain that Arthur had done what he promised: he had deduced Moriarty's key by observation alone. But the younger Moriarty was proud, and would have taken great risks to protect his secrets. And so he orchestrated Arthur's murder, with the perfect alibi—he was in London with me. He then hid his own involvement by playing detective to his own crime. What better way to throw the police off his scent?

I asked Herr Gleiwitz never to speak of my visit, and returned to Oxford. I worked in frenzy to solve the code, but to no avail. Finally, I decided to visit Moriarty, to observe him as Arthur had, look into his eyes, and hope to find a soul.

I called on Moriarty in late September, bringing pages for my next book, *Curiosa Mathematica,*

Part Two, as pretext. Soon we were discussing math problems over tea in his den.

Moriarty's taste in books was eclectic: art, algebra, music, astronomy. There were so many texts that could be his Vigenère key, it would have taken months just to check the coded page against the first few pages of each book!

Moriarty remained the confident and controlled gentleman he always was. But when I mentioned that he never did express his views on capital punishment, a sneer crept onto his face. "Death is the only punishment." He smirked, then turned the topic to eighteenth-century painters. It was enough to convince me that he hid the heart of a villain.

Yet I had no evidence. If I went to the police with only an unsolved page of code, I too would have been marked for death. I resolved to engineer Moriarty's fall in secret. So I wrote anonymous letters to key figures in his university town, hinting at shady dealings. The vile rumours spread, and soon Moriarty resigned his chair, retiring to London to become an army coach.

I thought the loss of the professorship would have taught him a lesson, but I was wrong. Instead, he built a veneer of self-effacement after his resignation, and became supremely cautious. I wonder what hand I had in his perfection as a criminal mastermind?

Reverend Dodgson stopped there, and I poured him another cup of tea. "Why didn't Arthur tell someone? Or write a letter detailing what he discovered?" I asked.

"Moriarty would have silenced anyone who knew. Written declarations might have been found and destroyed. I suspect the forgery of my name was the only clue left intact," said Dodgson.

"And still unsolved, I gather," I said.

"You have it, Doctor Watson," agreed Dodgson. "I was hoping we could solve the key together."

I was about to suggest enlisting Mycroft's aid, but young Arthur Doyle had meant the message for Dodgson, so it must draw upon the Reverend's personal knowledge. Perhaps all he needed were my insights into the problem, as wrong as they might be, to help him arrive at the right answer.

"The misspelled name, *Carlool*. Was that the key word?" I asked.

"No. It has to be a long text, as Moriarty said, to foil simple decoding."

"Could the code be based on *Wonderland* or *Looking Glass*?"

"Doubtful. Moriarty used the notebook while he was writing his dissertation, which was years before I wrote those books."

What would Holmes say? He'd ask me how I'd send a message to a mathematician. With numbers, I'd reply.

And there was the answer. "The point of departure from your *nom-de-plume* comes after *Car*. It isn't *lool*, but one-thousand and one!" I cried triumphantly.

Dodgson's eyes widened. "I never thought of that."

"Moriarty used Burton's *The Book of the Thousand Nights and a Night* as his key, then," I said, remembering Dodgson's list of Arthur's books.

"But that was published in 1885, years after Arthur's death. He would only know of Burton's travel writings," argued Dodgson.

I thought about it further. "Poe write a story called *The Thousand-and-Second Tale of Scheherazade*? Not an exact match to one-thousand and one, and I'm certain it was published in 1845. Didn't Arthur have a copy of Poe on his shelves?"

"Books? Wait, Arthur read Leibniz!" said Dodgson excitedly. "Gottfried Leibniz invented the binary number system. In binary, *one-zero-zero-one* is the number nine. Also, one-thousand-and-one is the product of three consecutive prime numbers: seven, eleven, and thirteen. They would be consecutive odd numbers but for the conspicuous absence of the number nine. Arthur hid that number twice in plain sight!"

"But how would *nine* be the key?" I asked.

We wrestled over the new question. My thoughts kept drifting back to Holmes. What would he consider next? He'd be fascinated by that violin, of course—

"The violin!" I cried. "It's no accident that the note was hidden in it; it's the missing clue. Moriarty loved music, didn't he?"

"He did," said Dodgson.

"If he wanted to remember a passage as a key, the lyrics of a song might be easiest to remember," I suggested. "And there's one symphony set to lyrics."

"Beethoven's Ninth, *Ode to Joy*!" he exclaimed. "Friedrich von Schiller's poem set to music, in the original German. That's why Moriarty was confident that a Kerckhoffs statistical analysis of his key would fail. Letter frequencies differ from language to language."

We immediately set about deciphering the page using *Ode to Joy* as the key. It took many tries to determine how the key aligned to the code, but we barely noticed the passage of time. At last, Dodgson finished deciphering the entire page.

"What does it say?" I asked, breathless.

"It alludes to Moriarty's triumphant murder of his mentor, someone who was as devilish as he was." Dodgson handed me the coded page and its solution. "Alas, the name does not appear on this page, but the rest of the notebook should reveal who made Moriarty what he was, how he died, and why."

"And perhaps other crimes, other accomplices," I added. Now that we had the right key, we would learn at last about Moriarty and the trials that shaped him. "I'll let Mycroft Holmes know. Thank you, Reverend."

"No, thank you for restoring a man's good name, Doctor Watson. Holmes would be proud," said Dodgson. "At long last, we've put Arthur Doyle's ghost to rest."

Merridew of Abominable Memory

by Chris Roberson

William Faulkner wrote, "The past isn't dead. It isn't even past." The past is always with us, the only guide we have for judging how we should act in the present and in the future. And yet our understanding of even our own pasts is gravely limited by our memory. Many people would likely be shocked to be confronted with just how unreliable their memory can be. Eyewitness testimony is often hopelessly confused, and many innocent people have gone to prison on the basis of false memories of childhood abuse. On the other hand there are people with staggeringly precise memories, who can recite pi to thousands of decimal places, or remember what they were doing on any day for the past several decades. Often such exceptional memory comes at the price of some other cognitive impairment. Sherlock Holmes, upon his return from the dead in "The Adventure of the Empty House," remarks on various criminals of his acquaintance whose names begin with M. "Moriarty himself is enough to make any letter illustrious," says Holmes, "and here is Morgan the poisoner, and Merridew of abominable memory." What follows is the story of this Merridew—a tale you won't soon forget.

The old man reclined on a chaise-longue, warmed by the rays of the rising sun which slanted

through the windows on the eastern wall. In the garden below, he could see the other patients and convalescents already at work tending the greenery with varying degrees of attention. The gardens of the Holloway Sanatorium were the responsibility of the patients, at least those tasks which didn't involve sharp implements, and the nurses and wardens saw to it that the grounds were immaculate. Not that the patients ever complained, of course. Tending a hedge or planting a row of flowers was serene and contemplative compared to the stresses which had lead most of the patients to take refuge here, dirty fingernails and suntanned necks notwithstanding.

No one had asked John Watson to help tend the garden, but then, he could hardly blame them. Entering the middle years of his eighth decade of life, his days of useful manual labor were far behind him, even if he wasn't plagued by ancient injuries in leg and shoulder. But it was not infirmities of the body that had led John here to Virginia Water in Surry; rather, it was a certain infirmity of the mind.

John's problem was memory, or memories to be precise. The dogged persistence of some, the fleeting loss of others. Increasingly in recent months and years, he had found it difficult to recall the present moment, having trouble remembering where he was, and what was going on around him. At the same time, though, recollections of events long past were so strong, so vivid, that they seemed to overwhelm him. Even at the best of times, when he felt in complete control of his faculties, he still found that the memories of a day forty years past were more vivid than his recollections of the week previous.

John had been content to look upon these bouts of forgetfulness as little more than occasional lapses, and no cause for concern. When visiting London that spring, though, he had managed to get so befuddled in a fugue that he'd wandered round to Baker Street, fully expecting his old friend to be in at the rooms they once shared. The present tenant, a detective himself as it happened, was charitable enough about the episode, but it was clear that Blake had little desire to be bothered again by a confused old greybearded pensioner.

After the episode in London, John had begun to suspect that there was no other explanation for it than that he was suffering from the onset of dementia, and that the lapses he suffered would become increasingly less occasional in the days to come. In the hopes of finding treatment, keeping the condition from worsening if improvement were out of the question, he checked himself into Holloway for evaluation.

Warmed by the morning sun, John found himself recalling the weeks spent in Peshawar after the Battle of Maiwand, near mindless in a haze of enteric fever, something about the commingling of warmth and mental confusion bringing those days to mind.

His reverie was interrupted by the arrival of an orderly, sent to fetch John for his morning appointment with the staff physician, the young Doctor Rhys.

As the orderly led him through the halls of Holloway, they passed other convalescents not equal to the task of tending the emerald gardens outside. There were some few hundred patients in the facility, all of them being treated for mental distress of one sort or another, whether brought on by domestic or business troubles, by worry or overwork. Not a few of them had addled their own senses with spirits, which brought to John's mind his elder brother Henry, Jr., who had died of drink three decades past.

There were others, though, who had seen their senses addled through no fault of their own. Some of the patients were young men, not yet out of their third decade, who seemed never to have recovered from the things they did and saw in the trenches of the Great War. Their eyes had a haunted look, as they stared unseeing into the middle distance.

John well remembered being that young. If he closed his eyes, he could recall the sounds and smells of the Battle of Maiwand as though it had occurred yesterday. As he walked along beside the orderly, he reached up and tenderly probed his left shoulder, the sensation of the Jezail bullet striking

suddenly prominent in his thoughts.

Finally, they reached Doctor Rhys's study, and found the young man waiting there for them. Once John was safely ensconced in a well-upholstered chair, the orderly retreated, closing the door behind him.

"And now, Mr. Watson, how does the day find you, hmm?"

"Doctor," John said, his voice sounding strained and ancient in his own ears. He cleared his throat, setting off a coughing jag.

"Yes?" Rhys replied, eyebrow raised.

"*Doctor* Watson."

Rhys nodded vigorously, wearing an apologetic expression. "Quite right, my apologies. How are you today, then, *Dr*. Watson?"

John essayed a shrug. "No better than yesterday, one supposes, and little worse."

Rhys had a little notebook open on his knee, and jotted down a note. "The staff informs me that you have not availed yourself of many of our facilities, in the course of your stay."

It was a statement, though John knew it for a question. "No," he answered, shaking his head.

In the sanatorium, there was more than enough to occupy one's day. Those seeking exercise could use the cricket pitch, badminton court, and swimming pool, while those of a less strenuous bent could retire to the snooker room and social club. In his days at Holloway, though, John had been content to do little but sit in an eastern-facing room in the mornings, in a western-facing room in the afternoons, sitting always in the sunlight. It was as though he were a flower seeking out as many of the sun's rays as possible in the brief time remaining to him. The less charitably minded might even accuse him of seeking out the light through some fear of shadows, since by night the electric lights in his room were never extinguished, and when he slept it was in a red-lidded darkness, never black.

"Tell me, Dr. Watson," Rhys continued, glancing up from his notes, "have you given any further thought to our discussion yesterday?"

John sighed. Rhys was an earnest young man, who had studied with Freud in Vienna, and who was fervent in his belief that science and medicine could cure all ills. When John first arrived in Holloway weeks before, he had taken this passion as encouraging, but as the days wore on and his condition failed to improve, his own aging enthusiasms had begun to wane.

Had Watson ever been so young, so convinced of the unassailable power of knowledge? He remembered working in the surgery at St. Bartholomew's, scarcely past his twentieth birthday, his degree from the University of London still years in his future. The smell of the surgery filled his nostrils, and he squinted against the glare of gaslights reflecting off polished tiles, the sound of bone saws rasping in his ears.

"Dr. Watson?"

John blinked, to find Rhys's hand on his knee, a concerned look on his face.

"I'm sorry," John managed. "My mind . . . drifted."

Rhys nodded sympathetically. "Memory is a pernicious thing, Dr. Watson. But it is still a wonder and a blessing. After our meeting yesterday I consulted my library, and found some interesting notes on the subject. Are you familiar with Pliny's *Naturalis historia*?"

John dipped his head in an abbreviated nod. "Though my Latin was hardly equal to the task in my days at Wellington."

Rhys flipped back a few pages in his moleskin-bound notebook. "Pliny cites several historical cases of prodigious memory. He mentions the Persian king Cyrus, who could recall the name of each soldier in his army, and Mithridates Eupator, who administered his empire's laws in twenty-two languages, and Metrodorus, who could faithfully repeat anything he had heard only once."

John managed a wan smile. "It is a fascinating list, doctor, but I'm afraid that my problem involves the *loss* of memory, not its retention."

Rhys raised a finger. "Ah, but I suspect that the two are simply different facets of the same facility. I would argue, Dr. Watson, that nothing is ever actually forgotten, in the conventional sense. It is either hidden away, or never remembered at all."

"Now I am afraid you have lost me."

"Freud teaches that repression is the act of expelling painful thoughts and memories from our conscious awareness by hiding them in the subconscious. If you were having difficulty recalling your distant past, I might consider repression a culprit. But your problem is of a different nature, in that your past memories are pristine and acute, but your present recollections are transient and thin."

John chuckled, somewhat humorlessly. "I remember well enough that I described my own condition to you in virtually the same terms upon my arrival."

Rhys raised his hands in a gesture of apology. "Forgive me, I tend to forget your own medical credentials, and have a bad habit of extemporizing. But tell me, doctor, what do you know of Freud's theories concerning the reasons dreams are often forgotten on waking?"

John shook his head. "More than the man on the Clapham omnibus, I suppose, but considerably less than you, I hazard to guess."

"Freud contends that we are wont soon to forget a large number of sensations and perceptions from dreams because they are too feeble, without any substantial emotional weight. The weak images of dreams are driven from our thoughts by the stronger images of our waking lives."

"I remember my dreams no better or worse than the next man."

"But it seems to me, based on our conversations here, that the images of your past *are* stronger and more vivid than those of your present circumstances. The celebrated cases in which you took part, the adventures you shared. How could the drab, gray days of your present existence compare?"

John rubbed at his lower lip with a dry, wrinkled fingertip, his expression thoughtful. "So you think it is *not* dementia which addles my thoughts, but that I forget my present because my past is so vivid in my mind?"

Rhys made a dismissive gesture. "Dementia is merely a name applied to maladies poorly understood. The categories of mental distress understood in the last century—mania, hysteria, melancholia, *dementia*—are merely overly convenient categories into which large numbers of unrelated conditions might be dumped. More a symptom than a cause." He closed his notebook and leaned forward, regarding John closely. "I think, Dr. Watson, that you forget because you are too good at remembering."

Rhys fell silent, waiting for a response.

John was thoughtful. He closed his eyes, his thoughts following a chain of association, memory leading to memory, from this drab and grey present to his more vivid, more adventure-filled past.

"Dr. Watson?" Rhys touched his knee. "Are you drifting again?"

John smiled somewhat sadly, and shook his head, eyes still closed. Opening them, he met Rhys's gaze. "No, doctor. Merely remembering. Recalling one of those 'celebrated cases' you mention, though perhaps not as celebrated as many others. It involved a man who could not forget, and who once experienced a memory so vivid that no other things could be recalled ever after."

We have spoken about my old friend Sherlock Holmes, *John Watson began*. It has been some years since I last saw him, and at this late date I have trouble remembering just when. I saw little of Holmes after he retired to Sussex, only the occasional weekend visit. But as hazy as those last visits are in my mind, if I close my eyes I can see as vividly as this morning's sunlight those days when Victoria still sat upon the throne, and when Holmes and I still shared rooms at No. 221B Baker Street.

The case I'm speaking of came to us in the spring of 1889, some weeks before I met the woman who was to become the second Mrs. Watson, god rest her, when Holmes and I were once again living together in Baker Street. The papers each day were filled with stories regarding the Dockside Dismemberer. He is scarcely remembered today, overshadowed by other killers who live larger in the popular imagination, but at the time the Dismemberer was the name on everyone's lips.

At first, it had been thought that the Ripper might again be prowling the streets. Holmes and I, of course, knew full well what had become of *him*. But like the Ripper before him, the Dismemberer seemed to become more vicious, more brutal, with each new killing. By the time Inspector Lestrade reluctantly engaged Holmes's services in the pursuit of the Dismemberer, there had been three victims found, each more brutally savaged than the last. On the morning in which the man of prodigious memory came into our lives, the papers carried news of yet another, the Dismemberer's fourth victim.

By that time, we had been on the case for nearly a fortnight, but were no nearer a resolution than we'd been at the beginning. The news of still another victim put Holmes in a foul mood, and I had cause to worry after his mood. Holmes was never melancholic except when he had no industry to occupy his thoughts, but to pursue such a gruesome killer for so many days without any measurable success had worn on my friend's good spirits.

"Blast it!" Holmes was folded in his favorite chair, his knees tucked up to his chest, his arms wrapped tightly around his legs. "And I assume this latest is no more identifiable than the last?"

I consulted the news article again, and shook my head. "There is to be an inquest this morning, but as yet there is no indication that the authorities have any inkling who the victim might be. Only that he was male, like the others."

Holmes glowered. "And doubtless savaged, as well, features ruined." He shook his head, angrily. "The first bodies attributed to this so-called 'Dismemberer' had been killed and mutilated, with the apparent intention of hiding their identities. These more recent victims, though, appear to have been killed by someone who took a positive delight in the act itself."

I nodded. We'd had opportunity to examine the previous three victims, or rather to examine what remained of them, and Holmes's assessment was my own. Even the Ripper had only approached such degradations in his final, and most gruesome killing.

I turned the pages of the paper, searching out some bit of news which might raise my friend's spirits, or distract him for the moment if nothing else. It was on the sixth page that I found what I was seeking.

"Ah, here is an interesting morsel, Holmes," I said as casually as I was able. "It is an obituary notice of an Argentinean who, if the story is to be believed, was rather remarkable. Ireneo Funes, dead at the age of twenty-one, is said to have had a memory of such singular character that he could recall anything to which it was exposed. Witnesses are quoted as saying that Funes could recall each day of his life in such detail that the recollection itself took an entire day simply to process."

Holmes still glowered, but there was a lightening to his eyes that suggested my gambit had met with some small success. "Have I ever told you about Merridew, Watson?" I allowed that he hadn't. "He was a stage performer I once saw, while traveling in America as a younger man. A mentalist performing under the name 'Merridew the Memorialist,' he appeared to have total recall. I myself saw him read two pages at a time, one with each eye, and then a quarter of an hour later recite with perfect accuracy texts he had glimpsed for only a moment."

Had I but known of Pliny's list of prodigious memories, Doctor Rhys, I might have suggested this Merridew for inclusion in the rolls. As it was, Holmes and I mused about the vagaries of memory for a brief moment before our discussion was interrupted by the arrival of a guest.

Our housekeeper Mrs. Hudson ushered the man into our sitting room. Holmes recognized him at a

glance, but it wasn't until our visitor introduced himself as one Mr. Dupry that I knew him. A baronet and scion of a vast family fortune, Dupry was one of the wealthiest men in London, and in fact in the whole of the British Empire.

"Mr. Holmes," Dupry said, dispensing with any pleasantries. "I want to engage your services to investigate a theft."

Holmes leaned forward in his chair, his interest piqued. "What is it that's been stolen, Mr. Dupry?"

"Nothing," Dupry answered. "Not yet, at any rate. I'm looking to you to make sure that remains the case."

Holmes uncrossed his legs, his hands on the armrests of his chair. "I'll admit that you have me intrigued. Please continue."

Dupry went on to relate how a number of his peers and business associates—Tomlinson, Elton, Coville, Parsons, and Underhill—had in recent months been the victims of bank fraud. Someone had gained access to privileged financial information and used it against their interests. The amounts stolen from Tomlinson and Elton had been so relatively small as to remain unnoticed for some time, while the funds taken from Coville and Parsons were more substantial, but poor Underhill had been rendered all but destitute. After seeing so many of his contemporaries fall victim to the machinations of parties unknown, Dupry felt certain it was only a matter of time before he himself became a target, and thus his interest in securing the services of Sherlock Holmes.

Suffice it to say, Holmes took the case.

I explained to Dupry that we were still engaged in the matter of the Dockside Dismemberer, and so would have to continue to address matters relating to that investigation while beginning to look into his own concerns. We had the inquest of the fourth victim to attend that morning, after which we would meet Dupry at his home to survey the grounds and make a preliminary assessment.

At the inquest we were met by Inspector Lestrade, who seemed even more foul-tempered than Holmes at the lack of progress so far accomplished. Of substantive findings relating to this fourth victim, there were scarcely any. The body had been recovered from the Thames near Temple Stairs, in a state of early decomposition. Aside from a tattoo on the victim's upper arm, depicting an anchor ringed by a rope of intertwining vines, there were no distinguishing marks. It was the opinion of New Scotland Yard that the killer was not the so-called "Torso Murderer," who had been depositing body parts around the greater London area for the better part of two years, given the markedly different nature of the wounds and the condition of the remains, and the suggestion in the popular press that it was Jack the Ripper walking abroad once more was not even merited with a response.

Following the inquest, Holmes and I accompanied Lestrade to the chamber in New Scotland Yard in which the remains had been laid. In all my years, both as a medical man and as a seeker after criminals, I have seldom seen so gruesome a sight. The condition of the wounds suggested that the victim had been alive for some time before expiring from them. The oldest of the wounds had begun partially to heal over, while the newest were ragged an unhealed. The police surgeon and I agreed that the killer may well have taken a period of days inflicting cuts, severing digits, and slicing off appendages, one by one, before finally delivering a killing blow.

Insult was added to injury by the innumerable tiny incisions all over the body, which could be nothing but the bites of fish who had attempted to make a meal of the remains as it drifted in the Thames.

I had seldom seen so gruesome a sight. Little did I realize then that it would pale in comparison to what came after.

With our business at New Scotland Yard completed, Holmes having made a careful study of the victim's tattoo for future reference, the two of us traveled across town to Kensington, to the home of

Dupry.

"Have you come about the position?" asked the servant who answered the door.

"What can you tell us about it?" Holmes said, carefully phrasing his response neither to confirm or deny.

The poor man seemed haggard. He explained that the under-butler had run off in the night, and that the house steward was now in the process of interviewing candidates. The servant at the door was normally occupied in the livery, and so was unaccustomed to dealing with visitors, a task which normally fell to the under-butler. When we revealed that we were not, in fact, applicants for the position, the servant apologized profusely, and ushered us into Dupry's study.

"A damn nuisance," Dupry blustered, when Holmes mentioned the missing under-butler. "He seemed a stout enough fellow, and here he's disappeared without warning. If I can't hire a trustworthy man for twenty pounds a year, where *am* I to find good help, I ask you?"

"I'm afraid I have no idea, Mr. Dupry," Holmes answered as solicitously as he was able. "Now, with your permission, may we examine your home? In particular, can you show me where you keep materials of a, shall we say, sensitive nature?"

For the next three quarters of an hour, Dupry showed us around his home, paying particular attention to his study, and to the wall safe there. When it was opened, though, revealed to contain neatly bound stacks of pound notes, bullion, and other valuables, Dupry held up a single piece of paper as the most valuable item in his possession.

"This, gentleman," he said, careful to keep the document's face away from our view, "is the key to my fortune. You see, the vast majority of my liquid holdings are held in an account in Geneva."

I was confused, but Holmes nodded in understanding. "You see, Watson," he explained, "Swiss bankers are obliged by law to keep a numerical register of their clientele and their transactions, but are prohibited from divulging this information to anyone but the client concerned. You and I might need our balance books to access our account at Child & Co., but one would only need the appropriate register numbers to access a Swiss account, as not even the bank clerks themselves are made aware of the identities of the clients they serve."

"Quite right," Dupry said, appearing impressed. He returned the document to the wall safe, careful to keep the printed side from our line of sight, and then closed the door, spinning the combination to lock it. Even with his precaution, though, I managed to glimpse the paper's front for the briefest second, though I couldn't begin to call to mind the words and numbers I'd seen in that instant. "And if that information were to fall into the wrong hands, I would be ruined. I suspect that my colleagues who have seen their fortunes plundered allowed information regarding their own Swiss accounts to be learned, and that the thief took advantage of the anonymity of the Swiss system." He turned and fixed Holmes with a stare. "I keep my information safely under lock and key, Mr. Holmes. I am hiring *you* to ensure that it remains there."

After we had completed an initial investigation of Dupry's home and its locks, bars, and other security features, Holmes suggested that we visit some of the men whom Dupry indicated had fallen victim to the thief before.

First on our agenda was Underhill. The younger son of a well-established family, Underhill lived in a large Cubitt-designed home in Pimlico. If the state of the residence when Holmes and I arrived was any indication, though, it was clear that Underhill would not be in residence for much longer. The man answered the door himself, dressed only in shirt sleeves, harried almost to the point of tears. After we explained who we were, and our connection to his associate Dupry, Underhill admitted us, and explained that he was now all but destitute. He had been forced to let the majority of his household staff go, having lost the funds with which to pay them. It had been difficult to keep them even before,

though, having lost two men from the staff in as many months before his fortune was even lost.

From there, we visited the homes of Coville, Elton, and Parsons who, if they were not as badly off as Underhill, seemed hardly much better. All three, too, mentioned having lost members of their domestic staffs in recent months.

When we called at the home of Tomlinson, we found him not in, having left the city to visit the continent. We were instead welcomed by his house steward, a man named Phipps.

"What is it I can do for you, gentlemen?" Phipps asked, with more urgency than seemed necessary. Standing in close proximity, I detected a strangely familiar but confusing scent wafting from him, which it took me a moment to recognize as an exceptionally strong cleaning agent, such as those used to clean tiles in large houses. Given the size of the staff apparently on hand in the Tomlinson home, it seemed odd that the house steward, the head of the staff, would lower himself to cleaning kitchen tiles.

Holmes explained that we had been engaged by Dupry, and that in connection with that engagement were investigating the rash of bank fraud whose victims had included Phipps's employer, Mr. Tomlinson.

For the briefest instant, I fancied that panic flitted across the steward's face, but as quickly as it had come it had passed, and he treated us to a friendly, open smile. "I'm happy to help in any way I can, of course." Still, I couldn't help but notice the sunken quality of his cheeks, the sallow coloration of his skin. He was clean scrubbed, for all that he smelled like bleach and lye, but I could not escape the impression that he was less than entirely healthy.

"Tell me, Phipps, have any members of your staff gone unaccountably missing in the recent past?"

The house steward continued smiling, but shook his head. "No, sir," he said, his voice even and level, "not a one." He paused, and then chuckled. "I took a brief vacation myself, this past winter, to visit family abroad, but returned to my post just as expected, so can hardly be considered 'missing.'"

As the day ended, we returned to Baker Street, to find Inspector Lestrade waiting for us.

"We've identified the tattoo," Lestrade said, without preamble, "and the man."

Holmes nodded. "So you have found a man who sailed the Atlantic Ocean as a deckhand onboard a ship of Her Majesty's Navy, I take it?"

Lestrade's eyes widened, and as I smiled he began to glare at Holmes. "Blast it, Holmes, how did you know that?"

"Simple observation, my dear fellow," Holmes answered. "Now, who was our late seaman, and who was it identified him?"

Lestrade grumbled, but answered. "His name was Denham. Until a few weeks ago, he was employed as a footman in the Parsons household."

Holmes and I exchanged a glance. "Parsons?"

Lestrade nodded. "I spoke to the house steward myself. Seems Denham just stopped showing up to work some weeks back. Stranger still, his replacement, an American chap, went missing a short time after."

"Was this before or after Parsons discovered a portion of his fortune had been stolen?"

Lestrade raised an eyebrow. "Now how did you know about *that?"*

Holmes explained in cursory detail our other ongoing investigation, and in particular the fact that we had earlier questioned Parsons himself.

"Well, the steward *did* mention the theft, at that, and said that for a brief time he'd suspected the two missing men of playing a part. But Parsons had felt sure that there was no way that a retired sailor or an addled American could possibly have been responsible, and had instead blamed the whole mess on a conspiracy of the Swiss."

That certainly was in line with what Parsons had told us earlier that day.

"Why addled?" Holmes asked. "Why did Parsons regard the American as addled?"

Lestrade lifted his shoulders in a shrug. "Something about him becoming easily distracted. The American had come highly recommended, but seemed a poor hand at his duties, always staring at a patch of sunlight on the wall, or counting the number of trefoils on a rug, or some such, and his conversation rambled all over the place." Lestrade chuckled. "Of course, it seems to me the steward had little room to talk, given how long he banged on about the whole matter. Seemed hungry for conversation, I suppose."

I failed to see the significance of any of this, save that several of the men on Dupry's list had lost members of their domestic staffs before their fortunes were ransacked, and that one of the missing servants had apparently fallen victim to the Dockside Dismemberer. But Holmes appeared to divine a much subtler truth for it all.

"Come along, Watson," Holmes said, slipping back into his great coat and making for the door. "You'd better come, too, inspector. Unless I'm mistaken, we have only a short time left to prevent another fortune being stolen, and perhaps even another murder from being committed."

It was late afternoon, the sun still lingering in the western sky, when we reached Dupry's house. The unfortunate stable-hand had evidently been sent back to his duties, as Dupry's butler answered the door.

"Can I help you gentlemen?"

"Where is Mr. Dupry?" Holmes asked, abandoning all courtesies.

"Interviewing a prospective applicant for the under-butler position, sir." The butler sniffed, haughtily. "I am confident that by this interview's conclusion the position will be filled."

"Why does everyone take me for a domestic?" Holmes fairly snarled. "Tell me quickly, man! This applicant? He comes to you well recommended, seemingly perfectly suited for the task and able to start immediately?"

The butler was a little taken aback. "W-why, yes," he stammered. "We had the most glowing report of his services from the house steward at the Tomlinson estate . . . "

"Take me to Dupry right away," Holmes interrupted, shouldering his way into the door. The butler, a portrait of confusion, merely bowed in response and hurried to do as he'd been bid. Lestrade and I followed close behind, neither of us any more aware of what Holmes was about than the other.

We came upon Dupry in his office, interviewing a man of middle years. The interviewee was speaking as we entered unceremoniously, and I detected a distinct accent to his speech, Canadian or possibly American.

"What's the meaning of this?" Dupry blustered.

Before the butler could answer, the interviewee in the chair turned, and when his eyes lit on Holmes it was with visible recognition.

After only a moment's pause, Holmes's own face lit up, and he snapped his fingers in sudden realization. "Merridew!" he said.

I recalled the name of the mentalist Holmes had reported seeing in America, years before.

"The Hippodrome Theatre, Baltimore, January 5th, 1880," the man said in a strangely sing-song voice. Then, the syllables running together like one elongated word, he recited, "What art thou that usurp'st this time of night, Together with that fair and warlike form, In which the majesty of buried Denmark, Did sometimes march? By heaven I charge thee speak!"

"It is some years since I trod the boards," Holmes said, not unkindly. "You have gotten yourself mixed up in some messy business, I fear, Merridew."

The American lowered his eyes, looking somewhat shamed. "Horatio, thou art e'en as just a man,

As e'er my conversation cop'd withal."

"What is this, Holmes?" Lestrade demanded, pushing forward. "What the devil is he talking about?"

"Memories, inspector," Holmes explained. "This is a man who trucks in memories."

"See here," Dupry said, slamming his hand down upon his desk, "I demand an explanation."

Holmes clasped his hands behind his back. "A moment, Mr. Dupry, and a full accounting will be presented." He turned to the American in the chair. "You didn't hatch this one yourself, Merridew. You haven't the stomach for the darker work this scheme requires. So who was it?"

Merridew, surprisingly, did not even attempt to dissemble. He calmly and patiently explained that he had come to England some months before with an eye towards performing his mentalist act on the English stage, but that he had fallen in with another passenger on the ship, a man who gave his name only as Stuart. When Merridew had demonstrated his ability for total recall, Stuart had hit upon a scheme. It appeared that he had recently come into a considerable amount of money, having gotten hold of confidential financial information belonging to his employer. The sum Stuart had embezzled was scarcely large enough to be noticed by his wealthy employer, but was a small fortune to him. And now he was hungry for more. Stuart could not take much more from his employer without tipping his hand, though, and so he would need to gain similarly sensitive information from other wealthy men.

Stuart identified their targets by looking over his employer's business transactions to locate those with the largest fortunes invested in the appropriate ways. Once the target was chosen, Stuart would select a member of their household staff, and eliminate them. With a position vacant, Stuart would equip Merridew with a flawless resume and sterling recommendations, put in perfect position to be hired as the missing man's replacement. Then Merridew would simply wait for the chance to get even the barest glimpse of the target's financial documents. Only an instant was needed, and then he would be able to recall all of the information in perfect detail.

"And this man Stuart," Holmes said, "which doubtless was merely an alias? Where did you meet with him?"

Merridew gave an address in the East End, and said that he'd been instructed by Stuart to meet him there at the conclusion of each assignment.

Holmes turned to me and Lestrade and smiled. "Gentlemen? Anyone fancy a trip to the East End?"

We hired a growler in the street outside Dupry's home, and the four of us rode east, Holmes and Merridew on one side of the carriage, Lestrade and I on the other. There was a strange, almost childlike quality to Merridew. He seemed lost in a world of his own, and would answer truthfully any question put directly to him, unless he had some prepared answer already provided. It appeared that was how this "Stuart" had been able to work Merridew's skills to his advantage, training him to act and speak just enough like a household domestic that he could pass a few days in the wealthy households, just long enough to catch a fleeting glimpse of a piece of paper such as the one Dupry had shown us. And with eyes that could read an entire page of text in a single glance, it was a task of complete ease to recall only a string of digits and a few words. And with that information, this Stuart would have complete access to the target's Swiss account.

As we rode west, away from the setting sun, Holmes played the alienist, asking Merridew questions about the man in pursuit of whom we rode. It was hard for me not to feel sorry for this idiot savant, who seemed little more than a dupe in this business. But as Merridew described the man with whom he worked, I was reminded that four men lay mutilated and dead at this Stuart's hands, and that in a just world some of the blame for that carnage had to be laid at Merridew's feet as well. His hands may not have been red with their blood, and he claimed never to have seen the men whom he was positioned to replace, alive or dead, but he was still implicated in their deaths.

Urged by Holmes's questioning, Merridew explained that Stuart appeared to have grown unsettled in recent weeks. Stuart had arranged a set of signals by which he and Merridew could communicate, without ever coming face to face unless necessary. There was a north-facing window on the top floor of the building in which they met, visible from the street, at which hung two drapes, one red and one black. If the window was curtained in black, Merridew was to mount the stairs and enter, where he would find Stuart waiting for him. If the red curtain was instead drawn, Merridew was to stay away, and not to approach under any circumstances.

"Red curtain," Merridew said as we stepped down from the growler to the street. "Stay away."

"Come along, Merridew," Holmes said, taking the American by the elbow and steering him towards the door. "The signal suggests that your Mr. Stuart is in, and he is a man that my friends and I would very much like to meet."

When we reached the top of the stairs, in the deeply shadowed gloom of the ill-lit interior, I caught a strong smell of bleach and lye, overlying something stronger, ranker, more unsettling. Through the flimsy wooden door at the landing, I could hear faint moaning, somewhere between the cry of a child and the mewling of a drowning cat.

"Red curtain, stay away," Merridew repeated, looking visibly shaken.

"You've been here before," I said, feeling the irresistible urge to cheer him, if possible. "What is there to be afraid of?"

Merridew shook his head, and fixed me with a pathetic gaze. "When I came before, it had always been cleaned. Now, I think, it is still dirty."

"Enough of this nonsense." Lestrade pushed ahead of us, and pounded on the door. "Open up in the name of Her Majesty!" He pounded again, louder. "It'll only go harder on you if you resist."

The moaning on the door's far side took on a different quality, and I could hear the sound of scuttling, feet pounding against wooden boards, as if somewhere were trying to flee. But the room occupied the entire floor of the narrow building, and the only out would be through the window.

"He's trying to scarper," Lestrade said.

"Not today, I think," Holmes said. Stepping back, he carefully studied the door in the dim light. "There, I think." He pointed to a spot midway up, near the jamb. Then, after taking a deep breath, he lashed out with his foot, kicking the door at the point he evidently felt the weakest. He'd been right, as it happened, for the thin door flew inwards, shattering into three pieces.

The stairway and landing had been darkened, a gloaming scarcely lighter than a moonless night, but in the room beyond candles burned in their dozens, in their hundreds. Their flickering light cast shadows that vied across the walls and floor, shifting archipelagoes of light and darkness. The room itself might once have been suitable for a human dwelling, but had been transformed into an abattoir. Bits of viscera hung like garlands from the rafters, and blood and offal painted the walls and floor. A pair of severed limbs had been transformed into grotesque marionettes, strung up on bits of intestine tied with ligaments, a kind of macabre Punch and Judy awaiting some inhuman audience.

It took an instant for me to recognize the figure that lay stretched on the floor as being that of a human being at all, so little was left of him, the rest having been spun out and excised to decorate the room. And a further instant to recognize as human the figure crouched by the now-open window, his arms and face covered with blood as red as the curtain he'd torn out of his way. In one hand, the man held a knife, in the other what appeared to be some severed piece of human anatomy. The blood-covered man regarded us with crazed eyes, lips curled in a snarl baring red-stained teeth, his cheeks sunken.

"Don't do it, Phipps," Holmes shouted, taking a single step forward, and only then did I recognize the steward of the Tomlinson household.

There must have been some confusion when Merridew and the man first met, and the American's strange recall had fixed on a term he'd misunderstood. Phipps had simply never corrected him when Merridew assumed his *name* was Stuart, not his *profession* that of steward.

Phipps snarled like an animal. "Money is power, blood is power, both are mine." He threw one leg over the window's sash. "You cannot stop me, nothing can."

I don't know whether Phipps truly believed in that moment that he could not be hurt, or even that he might be able to fly. When he struck the cobblestones below a heartbeat later, though, he quickly learned that neither notion was true.

While Lestrade rushed to the window, already too late to do anything about Phipps, Holmes and I turned our attention to the man on the floor. He was alive, but only barely, and would doubtless perish before any help could arrive, or before he could be transported anywhere else.

"Dupry's under-butler," Holmes said, his hand over his nose and mouth to block the worst of the smell.

"Poor fellow." I held a handkerchief over my own nose, but still the fetid stench of the place threatened to overwhelm me.

Lestrade stepped over from the window, his expression screwed up in distaste. "The man 'removed' so that Merridew could take his place, I take it."

"The most recent of five," Holmes corrected. "Most recent and final victim of the so-called Dismemberer."

It was only then that I thought to see where Merridew had got to. I turned, and saw him standing there in the doorway, just as he had been when Holmes had kicked the door down. The American idiot savant had not moved, but had stood stock still with his eyes wide open and fixed on the scene before him, his mouth hanging slightly open, slack-jawed.

"Merridew?" I said, stepping towards him.

But it was clear that Merridew would not be answering, not then, not ever. He could not look away from the horrible carnage that his erstwhile partner in crime had wrought, and for which he in some sense at least had been responsible. Eyes that could recall entire books in a single glance, that could find untold levels of detail in the patterns of shadows' falling or the curve of a cloud, took in every detail of the grisly scene. And having seen it, Merridew would never see anything, ever again. He would live, but his mind would be so occupied by that macabre sight in all its untold detail that his mind would refuse to allow any other sensations or impressions to enter. He would live forever in that moment, in the horrible realization of the horrors he had, however inadvertently, helped to accomplish.

I remember that day as if it were yesterday, and yet I know that I can not recall even a scintilla of the detail that Merridew retained. But even that tiniest amount, even that small iota of recollection, is enough to haunt me to the end of my days.

Doctor Rhys regarded John Watson, his eyes wide with sympathetic horror.

"I can't help but think of all those young men," John continued, waving towards the door and indicating the whole of Holloway Sanatorium beyond, "those tending the garden, or around the snooker table, or else just lounging in the corridors. So young, with so much life ahead of them, and yet their minds are fixed on the horrors of the trenches, their attentions forever fixed on the Great War."

John leaned forward, meeting the doctor's gaze.

"If it were up to me, doctor," John went on, "you would spend less time studying how it is that we remember, and marveling over the prodigious memories of the past, and instead devote your attentions to discovering how it is that we *forget*."

John closed his eyes, and eased back in his chair.

"Memory is no wonder, Dr. Rhys, nor is it a blessing."

John pressed his lips together tightly, trying to forget that awful day, and the smells that lingered beneath the scent of bleach and lye.

"Memory is a *curse*."

The Adventure of the Green Skull

by Mark Valentine

A revenant is a visible ghost or animated corpse that returns to terrorize the living, often in retribution for some wrong visited on that person in life. Wrongs done create ghosts, and many wrongs were committed against the workers of London in the early days of industrialization. Many of these deprivations were chronicled by the author Charles Dickens, who was so traumatized by the time he spent working in a dangerous, squalorous blacking factory that for the rest of his life he wore gloves and washed his hands constantly. The Sadler Committee once interviewed a young man named Matthew Crabtree, who testified that he had started work in a factory at the age of eight, commonly worked sixteen-hour days, and was beaten severely for the slightest infraction. He also testified that in all his years in the factory, not an hour had passed that you couldn't hear one of the child workers wailing. Many people don't realize that the thick, impenetrable London fogs that we associate with Sherlock Holmes were a result of terrible air pollution. The Victorian Age was romantic, but it was also a dark time, when business interests were totally unrestrained.

I have mentioned before the three massive manuscript volumes that contain my notes on our cases for the year 1894. Circumstances now allow me to reveal the details of one of these, as weird and tragic a case as any we encountered. It was, I see, the beginning of November, and Holmes was on capital form, pleased to be back at the hub of matters in London after his long incognito wanderings in the East and elsewhere. There had been a high wind wailing outside our rooms and throughout the city, and Holmes was just beginning to become restless for some new matter to whet his keen mind upon. As was his habit, therefore, he was scouring the pages of the *Times* at breakfast, seeking evidence of anything untoward. Today his researches had an especial edge, for he had received word that Inspector Lestrade would call later, if convenient.

"Read that, Watson," he said, passing the paper to me, and pointing to a brief paragraph.

"'Mr Josiah Walvis, 51, an overseer at the Bow-side match-works, met an untimely end on Saturday evening when he fell from a high wall abutting the East India Wharf, and cracked his skull. The cause of his sad accident has not been ascertained. It is understood Mr Walvis had been entertaining friends at the Lamb & Flag public house before making his way home. Interviewed, his associates say the deceased was of his normal disposition upon departing, and was not excessively inebriated. It is considered possible Mr Walvis was contemplating a shorter route to his home but missed his footing. Two witnesses, a watchman and a street boy, aver that they saw the victim pursued some moments beforehand, but this cannot be better corroborated. The proprietor of the Bow match-works reports that Mr Walvis was a diligent and just employee who—well, etc, etc'"

"There is the barest hint of promise in that, Watson: the pursuer, you know. But it is otherwise a drab affair. Yet it is all there is. Inventive evil appears to have quite vanished from London."

Holmes sighed, and began to gather up the dottles for his morning pipe.

The visit of our colleague from Scotland Yard did not at first obviate his gloom. For it seemed Lestrade had indeed nothing better to offer.

"It's the Walvis business, Mr Holmes."

"Oh, indeed? But that happened two days ago, Lestrade. The gales will have rushed all the evidence to the four corners. There is no point in coming to me now."

"Well, it seems a straightforward case that is hardly worth your while. But one of the constables, a keen lad, saw something he didn't quite like."

"Indeed?"

"Yes. Of course, an accident is quite the likeliest explanation. There was no robbery, and no other marks on the body but those caused by the fall. Yet, here is the thing. In the deceased's left hand, between the two middle fingers, protruding outwards, was a spent match."

"Ah. That is singular." I saw my friend's eyes gleam.

"Quite so. A drowning man may clutch at a straw, but—I say to myself—a falling man does not. He splays his fingers, so . . . "

"Therefore, the match was placed there after the fall," I interjected.

"Exactly, Doctor," returned Lestrade. "Now I am inclined to regard it as merely a macabre little joke on the part of the friends who found him. They all worked at the match factory, you know. They were pretty far gone in drink. So they put it there as if to say 'you, Walvis, have struck your last match.' I questioned them pretty fiercely about that, but they deny it. Half didn't notice it at all, the others say it must have blown there . . . "

"You have preserved the match, Lestrade?" Holmes demanded.

"I have, Mr Holmes, and—knowing your ways—have brought it with me." Lestrade produced a twist of paper from his waistcoat pocket and handed it over.

Holmes inspected the exhibit carefully between thumb and forefinger, then handed it back.

"It tells us little. It is a Lyphant & Bray match—the people who have the Bow works. So it could well have come from his colleagues. Or from almost anybody. It is a very popular brand. Yet, someone who has handled it may be an actor."

We both looked suitably astonished, and Holmes favoured us with an explanation. "It is very simple. I have studied the shape, size and composition of over forty types of lucifer or match—the matter complements my researches upon tobacco ash, you know. A combination of a certain ash and a certain match may help to mark a man. But not in this case. No ash, and a very common brand."

"The theatrical connection?" I urged.

Holmes shrugged. "Oh, merely that someone has left a small smudge of greasepaint upon the stick. Not you or your constable, I assume, Lestrade?"

"Indeed not."

"Well, it does not get us very far. But what about this evidence of a pursuer, Inspector?"

Our visitor's face settled into a satisfied smirk.

"The witnesses are not very sound. An aged watchman, half deaf and almost wholly foolish. A street arab, with a lively imagination."

"And what do they say?"

"Well, Mr Holmes, I don't give it much credit. Indeed, I am trying what I can to suppress their little yarn. It doesn't take much to spread unreasoning terror abroad."

There was a brittle silence, Lestrade savouring the matter that had really brought him to us, Holmes quiveringly alert.

"They say they saw Walvis chased down the street by a phantom. It wore a hooded cloak, but they caught a glimpse of its face—if you can call it that. It looked more like, they said, it looked more like—a green skull."

Sherlock Holmes rose from his chair and rubbed his hands together. "Come now," he said. "This

sounds promising."

The case may have caught my friend's imagination, because of its peculiarities, but for some days he made little progress. The scene, as he had anticipated, had been quite wiped clean by the wind and rain of the intervening days, and all the witnesses he interviewed stuck resolutely to the stories they had given the police, even the two who had seen the spectral pursuer. Lyphant & Bray would give nothing but a sound character to Walvis, conceding only that by some he might be regarded as somewhat stern in his duties. There was little more for Holmes to do, and he was succumbing again to his blue devils when, barely a week later, Mrs Hudson ushered in a new client. He was an angular, brisk young man, pale and peremptory in manner.

"Sit down, Mr Reynolds. This is my friend and associate, Dr Watson. What is your business with us?"

"I have read of you, Mr Holmes, from Dr Watson's accounts. I have observed that you see importance in matters others overlook."

"You are very kind. And you think you have a similar matter?"

"I do. My employer, Mr Thomas Mostyn, died last night."

"I see. The cause?"

"Heart failure."

Holmes looked crestfallen.

"It is certain?"

"Yes. His medical man has treated him for years. He has long had indifferent health. I could see this for myself too."

"Then why—"

"That was the cause of his death, Mr Holmes. I am concerned about the occasion of it."

"There is something here that does not satisfy you?"

"A number of matters."

Holmes tapped his fingers upon the arm of his chair. "Pray proceed."

"Mr Mostyn's face in death was distorted most disturbingly. It was a grimacing mask, exhibiting naked fear."

I interrupted. "Rictus, Mr Reynolds. It can give the most distressing effects."

Our client turned to me. "I understand. But there is rather more. Though in his nightgown and dressing-gown, as if prepared for bed, Mr Mostyn met his end in his study. Some matter had taken him there. And in death he was clutching between his middle fingers, pointing outwards—"

"A match."

Mr Reynolds' face was a picture of astonishment. "Great heavens, yes. How did you know?"

Holmes smiled. "No matter. It was used?"

"Yes."

"Well, perhaps he was about to enjoy a cigar before retiring. It is not uncommon."

"Certainly not, Mr Holmes. My employer disapproved of smoking. It was the only matter of disagreement between us. If I wished to smoke, I must do so clandestinely."

"I see. He does not sound very companionable. Well, Mr Reynolds, let us have more of your story. You are his private secretary?"

"I am. I deal—I dealt—with nearly all his business and personal correspondence. He has many financial interests. I have been with him some seven years, since I successfully answered an advertisement he had placed upon his return from Guiana. He was reticent about his wealth, but that he had made a very great deal in the Americas was evident enough to me from his investments."

"And had made enemies, no doubt?"

"I never heard of any. Indeed, all of his affairs appeared to me almost entirely untroubled, until—well, that is, until the particular incident that brings me to you. On Tuesday last week, I opened Mr Mostyn's correspondence as usual, and there was nothing out of the ordinary run of things, but one: an envelope that contained no letter, only a handful of matches. I could not imagine what the sender's purpose was, although sometimes the advertisement men do try the most foolish tricks to engage attention. I threw it in the basket. When I took in the rest of the day's post and went through it with my employer, we dealt with it all well enough, until—at the end—I mentioned the matches, light-heartedly. Quite a remarkable change came over his face. I had never seen him so agitated, except perhaps once when he felt he had been browbeaten by a hothead of a lawyer into some settlement he did not like—the one matter, as it happens, where he did not confide in me."

"I see. The envelope arrived—what, eight days ago? Go on, Mr Reynolds. This may all be more germane than you know."

"In his agitation, Mr Mostyn asked me exactly how many matches there were. I am afraid I laughed and said I did not know. He became vehement and told me to go and count them at once. I could scarcely believe the order, but I did as he bid."

"And?"

"There were nine or ten."

"Nine or ten? Mr Reynolds!"

"Ten, then. It seemed of no moment."

"Do you have them?"

"Well, yes I do. But only because I found them in my employer's desk drawer, next to his appointments diary. I cannot imagine why he kept them."

Our visitor handed them over and Holmes subjected them to scrutiny, separating three from the others.

Mr Reynolds regarded Holmes's actions quizzically, then resumed. "A little later that day, Mr Mostyn gave me a most unusual instruction. He said that business compelled him to go abroad again, it might be for some time. I was to realise as much as I could, and as quickly as I could, of his investments, so that within one week—he was most insistent upon that—within one week, he should be ready to leave."

"He had never done such a thing before?"

"No. I was very much surprised. From what I knew of his business affairs, there was nothing of any consequence to call his attention overseas. But by requiring me to turn his holdings to cash so quickly, he forfeited a great deal of their value. I could not imagine what would impel him to that."

"Is there anything more, Mr Reynolds?"

Our visitor hesitated.

"No."

"Think back very carefully, sir. Over this recent period, has there been any matter whatever at all out of the ordinary?"

"Oh, only foolish talk from the boot-boy. He reads too much sensational literature."

"Indeed? I find it has much to commend it. And what was his prattle? Spring-Heeled Jack? The Wild Boys of the Sewers?"

"Ha, very nearly so, Mr Holmes. He said he saw some figure skulking around the garden at night. He has an attic room that commands a view. He should have been asleep, but no doubt was reading his rubbish. He said he saw Death with a lantern. The maid, superstitious soul, says it had come for Mr Mostyn. I had to speak severely to both of them . . . Of course, there may have been an interloper, but scarcely in that form. Now, Mr Holmes, what is your advice?"

"I should like to visit the scene without delay, Mr Reynolds. And I am concerned for you, sir. You have had an unpleasant experience. Now there is no necessity for subterfuge, help yourself to one of these—a Macedonian—you will find it quite soothing—while we get ready. Now, where are my matches? You have some with you? Good. good. We shall not be long."

Despite the tragedy that had taken place in No 4, Pavia Court, Mostyn's address, I relished our visit, for it was a pleasure to see Holmes prowling throughout the house and its modest grounds in his customary keen-eyed search for any clue that might bring substance to the shadows that had gathered here. I saw him crawling carefully around the garden at the rear, and its narrow entrance gate, examining the sash upon the study window that overlooked it on the ground floor, and walking up and down the small, blind street, itself off a very minor thoroughfare, that comprised the Court, in all these places picking up and examining any piece of unregarded flotsam. I heard of him also in the pantry in animated conversation with Victor, the boot-boy, comparing the merits of various thrilling pamphlets: and in the study, questioning Reynolds closely about his employer's business holdings.

For my part, I sought out Mostyn's doctor, Hawkins, on the pretext that I was a medical advisor to his insurance people. Although, as a matter of form, the district police had been called, they had relied upon his assurance that a heart failure was responsible for the death. He conceded he had quite expected—and indeed hoped, since Mostyn paid well—that his patient would have survived some years longer, but it was still quite within the bounds of medical science that the condition had taken him earlier. Might—I suggested—some additional anxiety in his affairs, even some shock or other, have contributed? Dr Hawkins was affable: yes, of course, it very well might.

It was clear to me that Holmes had some definite line of enquiry in his sights, though I could not tell what. The next day, he was missing from our rooms for much of the time, and would say only that he had paid a call upon one of the new independent lucifer-makers. I was, therefore, a little taken aback when, shortly after our visit to Mostyn's home, the boot-boy Victor presented himself, somewhat wind-ruffled but evidently bursting with news.

"I did 'sactly as you said, Mr Holmes. I took a place in the bun shop opposite this inventor cove's place, Raffles, and watched and watched. I had to eat getting on for a dozen stickies before your mark came out, corst a terrible lot they did—" (a clink) "well, thank you very much sir, anyways after you'd been to see him and he'd shut up shop that day, it was hours and hours after, he looks about him and sets off smartish. But I'm on his track like you told me . . . "

"You see, Watson, nobody ever pays attention to small boys loitering or getting up to mischief. It's what they do. A perfect disguise: behaving naturally. Well, where did (ahem) the inventor Raffles go?"

"He went out Chelsea way, where all the artists and anarchists are, sir, they're always up to plots in The Black Paper, 'sfact."

"So they are, Victor. And who are they are in league with, eh?"

"That's what I was going to find out. He heads for a door in a yard off Blyth Street, and he's looking all around him, see: furtive, that's what they call it. But he doesn't see me. And he knocks and there's a wait and like a judas in the door opens, but I can't see much. And then—then the door opens just a crack, and he talks very excited like, and he gets let in. And he stays there not long, twenty minutes maybe."

"See anything when the door opened?"

"You bet. Woundy—beg pardon sir—scary."

"You're sure, Victor?"

"Blood honour, sir."

"That's good enough for me."

I looked from one to the other. "Well?"

Holmes raised an eyebrow.

"He saw Death, Watson. Isn't that right? The thing that came to Mr Mostyn's garden?"

The youth nodded solemnly.

Holmes wasted no time. After swift directions from the boy, amply rewarded, we hailed a cab to the hidden, curious quarter he had indicated. In the neighbourhood, my friend enlisted another ragamuffin helper, a blind match-seller. A sovereign and a swift rehearsal of her role ensued. God knows she was battered enough looking, but she made her condition look even more distressing and knocked weakly and repeatedly at the door, imploring help. At the first the face behind the shutter ushered her away, but she swayed and cried and pleaded. The figure within went away a while, and then the door opened very slowly. We then abandoned all subtlety and flung ourselves at the crack. The child ran off, there was a harsh shout and a scurrying, and we burst in.

We were confronted by—a thing at bay. In one corner of the bare, meanly furnished room, there stood glowering at us a figure wrapped around in cloaks from which emerged a hairless, shrunken, bony head, where such meagre flesh as there was had a vile, livid hue.

"I do not know who or what you are," Sherlock Holmes said, "but your business is at an end. I have evidence that will connect you with two deaths."

The creature's eyes were filled with hatred, and cast wildly about for escape. Then they seemed to dim, and the skull sank down, before it looked up at us again.

"You have no evidence that would convince a court. Yet perhaps it is time to let things rest. And I believe you will not speak so harshly when you have heard my story."

I gasped, and I could sense that even the icy Holmes was taken aback. For the voice was that of a gentlewoman, clear and well-modulated. She beckoned us to two rough chairs. We made introductions and looked at her enquiringly.

"My name is of no consequence. I was born in the colony of Guiana, where my mother succumbed young to the foul waters. My father and a native nursemaid looked after me in my infancy, but he was taken too by some disease of the unhealthy conditions there. We had no close kin, but there was a distant cousin who had been once in the colony and had come to know my father before returning to England. I found that I—and my father's wealth—were entrusted to this person, and I was shipped to a land I had never known as home. The next part of my story will hardly surprise you. This cousin and guardian, so called, claimed my father's business affairs were in disorder and it was all he could do to settle his debts, penurying himself in the process. I must be put to work. I was sent to the Lyphant & Bray match factory, and housed nearby in squalid lodgings. From then onwards—I was twelve, mark you—my life was one of unremitting drudgery and callousness, in the most terrible conditions. I saw my guardian infrequently and then, I am sure, he came only to ensure I was secure. The fact that I had been educated and prepared for a gentler place made matters worse. The taskmaster—Walvis—took a hatred of me. I believe he was in league with my guardian, for I saw them confer together when he came. My natural rebelliousness against the conditions meant this creature was able to taunt, scold, fine and beat me. There was not the slightest opportunity I might escape—I was kept under close watch and had no money anyway."

"It is pitiable, Madam," I conceded.

"It is the life of many of your fellow creatures. It would be mine still, had I not taken the one opportunity that came my way. You will recall of course the great match-girls' protest some five or six years ago? I am proud to confess I was one of the agitators. After much hardship, the proprietors permitted a tour of inspection of the factory by some eminent sympathisers—it was all well-managed, of course. But some of the more astute of them realised this, and deliberately looked for an opportunity

to become detached from the party and learn the untutored truth. I told my story hurriedly to Mr Shardlow, the Radical, and he was much affected and promised to see me have justice. I know now that he confronted my guardian and wrung from him some settlement on my behalf—Mr Shardlow is a lawyer and a strong orator, of course. Since this release, I have done what I can for those left behind. The terrible yellow phosphorous that Lyphant & Bray use must be abolished: there are safer alternatives. That was my campaign. But it will be too late for me."

"You have phossy-jaw, Madam? It is a bad business."

"Exactly, Dr. Watson. You may see the symptoms."

I turned to Holmes. "It affects those over-exposed to the noxious chemicals used in the match trade. It brings a green pallor, a sinking of the cheek bones, complete loss of hair, a shrinking of the flesh. It is incurable. But forgive me, madam—yours is an exceptionally severe case. "

"It is well advanced, Doctor. But also, since I cannot disguise its ravages, I decided to accentuate them, to render my appearance still more ghastly. For I had determined to confront my persecutors face to face with what they had done. With the cunning of theatrical make-up, I thought I could strike terror in their hearts and jolt them into some realisation of their evil. My craft was good. It worked somewhat better than I expected. Poor Walvis fled from me in mad panic and plunged to his doom. While—"

She hesitated.

"Mostyn," supplied Holmes.

"Yes, I see you know everything. Mostyn was already full of fear from the little message I sent him."

"The spent matches," I put in.

"Yes, Doctor. You were my accomplice in those, of course."

"I—why, I . . . "

"I read with great relish your account of the Five Orange Pips sent as a sinister warning. And so has half London, I should think. It gave me an idea."

"So I see," remarked Holmes, drily.

"Mostyn was an implacable opponent of the match reforms, and as a chief investor in Lyphant & Bray, was an obstacle to my plans. I had to chase him away. My guardian, I reasoned, would have heard of the strange death of his accomplice, the overseer Walvis. He will not be quite sure if it were the accident it seemed. He will hardly miss the significance of a packet of dead matches delivered to him. And a man less vilely cunning than he would reason that seven matches equals seven days. It was a fair warning. His face when I slid open the sash of his study and advanced upon him was dreadful to behold: yet not, you can see, so dreadful as what he had done to me."

There was a silence.

"And now, gentlemen, what do you intend? You hardly have any case, you know. And it is all one to me. I cannot live much longer: but I would not harm my cause."

Sherlock Holmes stared piercingly at her.

"There must be no more apparitions."

"There will be none."

"Then this matter is concluded. I am my own law, and you are not, as I judge, in default of it."

That the case had shaken Holmes I could tell from the brooding silence he observed on our way back to Baker Street in a cab. But once in our rooms again, and after he had played over Swettenham's sweetly melancholy violin sonata, he became somewhat restored.

"I shall be able to use this case in due course as an exemplar for my monograph on lucifers,

matches, and spills," he observed. "Here are the ones left on the dead men and sent in the envelope—all Lyphant & Bray—see the squared-off stalks and yellow residue at the head. Here are three that Reynolds cast in the waste basket after having several secret cigarettes—they are identical to the one he left here after smoking one of my Macedonians. They are from the Phoebus Match Co, a rounded stem and a more friable head. They led Mostyn to think he had ten days before Nemesis would strike: in fact, he had only a week.

"And here are those I found in Pavia Court. One at the top of the street, by the sign: struck to check it was the right street; one by the gate; one in the garden, for the dark lantern. These were my treasures. They are a very uncommon match indeed—Raphael's Hygienic. An experimental type, to see if some less deadly form of phosphor can be used in match manufacture, one that will do no harm to the poor creatures in the match manufactories. The lady of the skull, Watson, used Lyphant & Bray, the instruments of her oppression as a calling card on those she wished to harm, but in her everyday use she naturally patronised, and indeed part-funded, the safer design. I merely had to make known that I had connected the apparition to the Raphael workshop, and I felt sure the young inventor there would hurry to let her know and warn her off. In the morning, Watson, I shall visit to reassure him: and, after all we have heard, to place our order for matches always with him."

You See But You Do Not Observe

by Robert J. Sawyer

"Where is everybody?" These words, exclaimed by Los Alamos physicist Enrico Fermi in 1950, led to his formulation of what's known as the Fermi paradox: Why haven't we found any evidence of extraterrestrial life, given the seemingly high probability that such life exists? Even if intelligent life evolves only rarely, the sheer scale of the universe would mean that advanced civilizations should be commonplace. (The Drake equation is a well-known model for organizing this line of reasoning.) There ought to be civilizations billions of years older than ours, in which case they should have colonized Earth long ago, or at least built large engineering projects such as Dyson spheres that we could detect with our instruments. But so far, nothing. Many explanations have been proposed, including that intelligence is much rarer than we think, that advanced civilizations tend to destroy themselves or each other, or that advanced civilizations have chosen not to talk to us, perhaps because they don't want to meddle with our development or because we're just too primitive to bother with. Our final tale presents a solution to the Fermi paradox that we can virtually guarantee you've never considered before.

I had been pulled into the future first, ahead of my companion. There was no sensation associated with the chronotransference, except for a popping of my ears which I was later told had to do with a change in air pressure. Once in the twenty-first century, my brain was scanned in order to produce from my memories a perfect reconstruction of our rooms at 221B Baker Street. Details that I could not consciously remember or articulate were nonetheless reproduced exactly: the flock-papered walls, the bearskin hearthrug, the basket chair and the armchair, the coal-scuttle, even the view through the window—all were correct to the smallest detail.

I was met in the future by a man who called himself Mycroft Holmes. He claimed, however, to be no relation to my companion, and protested that his name was mere coincidence, although he allowed

that the fact of it was likely what had made a study of my partner's methods his chief avocation. I asked him if he had a brother called Sherlock, but his reply made little sense to me: "My parents weren't *that* cruel."

In any event, this Mycroft Holmes—who was a small man with reddish hair, quite unlike the stout and dark ale of a fellow with the same name I had known two hundred years before—wanted all details to be correct before he whisked Holmes here from the past. Genius, he said, was but a step from madness, and although I had taken to the future well, my companion might be quite rocked by the experience.

When Mycroft did bring Holmes forth, he did so with great stealth, transferring him precisely as he stepped through the front exterior door of the real 221 Baker Street and into the simulation that had been created here. I heard my good friend's voice down the stairs, giving his usual glad tidings to a simulation of Mrs. Hudson. His long legs, as they always did, brought him up to our humble quarters at a rapid pace.

I had expected a hearty greeting, consisting perhaps of an ebullient cry of "My Dear Watson," and possibly even a firm clasping of hands or some other display of bonhomie. But there was none of that, of course. This was not like the time Holmes had returned after an absence of three years during which I had believed him to be dead. No, my companion, whose exploits it has been my honor to chronicle over the years, was unaware of just how long we had been separated, and so my reward for my vigil was nothing more than a distracted nodding of his drawn-out face. He took a seat and settled in with the evening paper, but after a few moments, he slapped the newsprint sheets down. "Confound it, Watson! I have already read this edition. Have we not *today's* paper?"

And, at that turn, there was nothing for it but for me to adopt the unfamiliar role that queer fate had dictated I must now take: our traditional positions were now reversed, and I would have to explain the truth to Holmes.

"Holmes, my good fellow, I am afraid they do not publish newspapers anymore."

He pinched his long face into a scowl, and his clear, gray eyes glimmered. "I would have thought that any man who had spent as much time in Afghanistan as you had, Watson, would be immune to the ravages of the sun. I grant that today was unbearably hot, but surely your brain should not have addled so easily."

"Not a bit of it, Holmes, I assure you," said I. "What I say is true, although I confess my reaction was the same as yours when I was first told. There have not been any newspapers for seventy-five years now."

"Seventy-five years? Watson, this copy of *The Times* is dated August the fourteenth, 1899—yesterday."

"I am afraid that is not true, Holmes. Today is June the fifth, *anno Domini* two thousand and ninety-six."

"Two thou—"

"It sounds preposterous, I know—"

"It *is* preposterous, Watson. I call you 'old man' now and again out of affection, but you are in fact nowhere near two hundred and fifty years of age."

"Perhaps I am not the best man to explain all this," I said.

"No," said a voice from the doorway. "Allow me."

Holmes surged to his feet. "And who are you?"

"My name is Mycroft Holmes."

"Impostor!" declared my companion.

"I assure you that that is not the case," said Mycroft. "I grant I'm not your brother, nor a habitué of

the Diogenes Club, but I do share his name. I am a scientist—and I have used certain scientific principles to pluck you from your past and bring you into my present."

For the first time in all the years I had known him, I saw befuddlement on my companion's face. "It is quite true," I said to him.

"But why?" said Holmes, spreading his long arms. "Assuming this mad fantasy is true—and I do not grant for an instant that it is—why would you thus kidnap myself and my good friend, Dr. Watson?"

"Because, Holmes, the game, as you used to be so fond of saying, is afoot."

"Murder, is it?" asked I, grateful at last to get to the reason for which we had been brought forward.

"More than simple murder," said Mycroft. "Much more. Indeed, the biggest puzzle to have ever faced the human race. Not just one body is missing. Trillions are. *Trillions.*"

"Watson," said Holmes, "surely you recognize the signs of madness in the man? Have you nothing in your bag that can help him? The whole population of the Earth is less than two thousand millions."

"In your time, yes," said Mycroft. "Today, it's about eight thousand million. But I say again, there are trillions more who are missing."

"Ah, I perceive at last," said Holmes, a twinkle in his eye as he came to believe that reason was once again holding sway. "I have read in *The Illustrated London News* of these *dinosauria*, as Professor Owen called them—great creatures from the past, all now deceased. It is their demise you wish me to unravel."

Mycroft shook his head. "You should have read Professor Moriarty's monograph called *The Dynamics of an Asteroid*," he said.

"I keep my mind clear of useless knowledge," replied Holmes curtly.

Mycroft shrugged. "Well, in that paper Moriarty quite cleverly guessed the cause of the demise of the dinosaurs: an asteroid crashing into earth kicked up enough dust to block the sun for months on end. Close to a century after he had reasoned out this hypothesis, solid evidence for its truth was found in a layer of clay. No, that mystery is long since solved. This one is much greater."

"And what, pray, is it?" said Holmes, irritation in his voice.

Mycroft motioned for Holmes to have a seat, and, after a moment's defiance, my friend did just that. "It is called the Fermi paradox," said Mycroft, "after Enrico Fermi, an Italian physicist who lived in the twentieth century. You see, we know now that this universe of ours should have given rise to countless planets, and that many of those planets should have produced intelligent civilizations. We can demonstrate the likelihood of this mathematically, using something called the Drake equation. For a century and a half now, we have been using radio—wireless, that is—to look for signs of these other intelligences. And we have found nothing—*nothing!* Hence the paradox Fermi posed: if the universe is supposed to be full of life, then where are the aliens?"

"Aliens?" said I. "Surely they are mostly still in their respective foreign countries."

Mycroft smiled. "The word has gathered additional uses since your day, good doctor. By aliens, I mean extraterrestrials—creatures who live on other worlds."

"Like in the stories of Verne and Wells?" asked I, quite sure that my expression was agog.

"And even in worlds beyond the family of our sun," said Mycroft.

Holmes rose to his feet. "I know nothing of universes and other worlds," he said angrily. "Such knowledge could be of no practical use in my profession."

I nodded. "When I first met Holmes, he had no idea that the Earth revolved around the sun." I treated myself to a slight chuckle. "He thought the reverse to be true."

Mycroft smiled. "I know of your current limitations, Sherlock." My friend cringed slightly at the overly familiar address. "But these are mere gaps in knowledge; we can rectify that easily enough."

"I will not crowd my brain with useless irrelevancies," said Holmes. "I carry only information that

can be of help in my work. For instance, I can identify one hundred and forty different varieties of tobacco ash—"

"Ah, well, you can let that information go, Holmes," said Mycroft. "No one smokes anymore. It's been proven ruinous to one's health." I shot a look at Holmes, whom I had always warned of being a self-poisoner. "Besides, we've also learned much about the structure of the brain in the intervening years. Your fear that memorizing information related to fields such as literature, astronomy, and philosophy would force out other, more relevant data, is unfounded. The capacity for the human brain to store and retrieve information is almost infinite."

"It is?" said Holmes, clearly shocked.

"It is."

"And so you wish me to immerse myself in physics and astronomy and such all?"

"Yes," said Mycroft.

"To solve this paradox of Fermi?"

"Precisely!"

"But why me?"

"Because it is a *puzzle*, and you, my good fellow, are the greatest solver of puzzles this world has ever seen. It is now two hundred years after your time, and no one with a facility to rival yours has yet appeared."

Mycroft probably could not see it, but the tiny hint of pride on my longtime companion's face was plain to me. But then Holmes frowned. "It would take years to amass the knowledge I would need to address this problem."

"No, it will not." Mycroft waved his hand, and amidst the homely untidiness of Holmes's desk appeared a small sheet of glass standing vertically. Next to it lay a strange metal bowl. "We have made great strides in the technology of learning since your day. We can directly program new information into your brain." Mycroft walked over to the desk. "This glass panel is what we call a *monitor*. It is activated by the sound of your voice. Simply ask it questions, and it will display information on any topic you wish. If you find a topic that you think will be useful in your studies, simply place this helmet on your head" (he indicated the metal bowl), "say the words 'load topic,' and the information will be seamlessly integrated into the neural nets of your very own brain. It will at once seem as if you know, and have always known, all the details of that field of endeavor."

"Incredible!" said Holmes. "And from there?"

"From there, my dear Holmes, I hope that your powers of deduction will lead you to resolve the paradox—and reveal at last what has happened to the aliens!"

"Watson! Watson!"

I awoke with a start. Holmes had found this new ability to effortlessly absorb information irresistible and he had pressed on long into the night, but I had evidently fallen asleep in a chair. I perceived that Holmes had at last found a substitute for the sleeping fiend of his cocaine mania: with all of creation at his fingertips, he would never again feel that emptiness that so destroyed him between assignments.

"Eh?" I said. My throat was dry. I had evidently been sleeping with my mouth open. "What is it?"

"Watson, this physics is more fascinating than I had ever imagined. Listen to this, and see if you do not find it as compelling as any of the cases we have faced to date."

I rose from my chair and poured myself a little sherry—it was, after all, still night and not yet morning. "I am listening."

"Remember the locked and sealed room that figured so significantly in that terrible case of the Giant Rat of Sumatra?"

"How could I forget?" said I, a shiver traversing my spine. "If not for your keen shooting, my left leg would have ended up as gamy as my right."

"Quite," said Holmes. "Well, consider a different type of locked-room mystery, this one devised by an Austrian physicist named Erwin Schrödinger. Imagine a cat sealed in a box. The box is of such opaque material, and its walls are so well insulated, and the seal is so profound, that there is no way anyone can observe the cat once the box is closed."

"Hardly seems cricket," I said, "locking a poor cat in a box."

"Watson, your delicate sensibilities are laudable, but please, man, attend to my point. Imagine further that inside this box is a triggering device that has exactly a fifty-fifty chance of being set off, and that this aforementioned trigger is rigged up to a cylinder of poison gas. If the trigger is tripped, the gas is released, and the cat dies."

"Goodness!" said I. "How nefarious."

"Now, Watson, tell me this: without opening the box, can you say whether the cat is alive or dead?"

"Well, if I understand you correctly, it depends on whether the trigger was tripped."

"Precisely!"

"And so the cat is perhaps alive, and, yet again, perhaps it is dead."

"Ah, my friend, I knew you would not fail me: the blindingly obvious interpretation. But it is wrong, dear Watson, totally wrong."

"How do you mean?"

"I mean the cat is neither alive nor is it dead. It is a *potential* cat, an unresolved cat, a cat whose existence is nothing but a question of possibilities. It is neither alive nor dead, Watson—neither! Until some intelligent person opens the box and looks, the cat is unresolved. Only the act of looking forces a resolution of the possibilities. Once you crack the seal and peer within, the potential cat collapses into an actual cat. Its reality is *a result of* having been observed."

"That is worse gibberish than anything this namesake of your brother has spouted."

"No, it is not," said Holmes. "It is the way the world works. They have learned so much since our time, Watson—so very much! But as Alphonse Karr has observed, *Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose*. Even in this esoteric field of advanced physics, it is the power of the qualified observer that is most important of all!"

I awoke again hearing Holmes crying out, "Mycroft! Mycroft!"

I had occasionally heard such shouts from him in the past, either when his iron constitution had failed him and he was feverish, or when under the influence of his accursed needle. But after a moment I realized he was not calling for his real brother but rather was shouting into the air to summon the Mycroft Holmes who was the twenty-first-century savant. Moments later, he was rewarded: the door to our rooms opened and in came the red-haired fellow.

"Hello, Sherlock," said Mycroft. "You wanted me?"

"Indeed I do," said Holmes. "I have absorbed much now on not just physics but also the technology by which you have re-created these rooms for me and the good Dr. Watson."

Mycroft nodded. "I've been keeping track of what you've been accessing. Surprising choices, I must say."

"So they might seem," said Holmes, "but my method is based on the pursuit of trifles. Tell me if I understand correctly that you reconstructed these rooms by scanning Watson's memories, then using, if I understand the terms, holography and micro-manipulated force fields to simulate the appearance and form of what he had seen."

"That's right."

"So your ability to reconstruct is not just limited to rebuilding these rooms of ours, but, rather, you could simulate anything either of us had ever seen."

"That's correct. In fact, I could even put you into a simulation of someone else's memories. Indeed, I thought perhaps you might like to see the Very Large Array of radio telescopes, where most of our listening for alien messages—"

"Yes, yes, I'm sure that's fascinating," said Holmes, dismissively. "But can you reconstruct the venue of what Watson so appropriately dubbed 'The Final Problem'?"

"You mean the Falls of Reichenbach?" Mycroft looked shocked. "My God, yes, but I should think that's the last thing you'd want to relive."

"Aptly said!" declared Holmes. "Can you do it?"

"Of course."

"Then do so!"

And so Holmes and my brains were scanned and in short order we found ourselves inside a superlative re-creation of the Switzerland of May 1891, to which we had originally fled to escape Professor Moriarty's assassins. Our re-enactment of events began at the charming Englischer Hof in the village of Meiringen. Just as the original innkeeper had done all those years ago, the reconstruction of him exacted a promise from us that we would not miss the spectacle of the Falls of Reichenbach. Holmes and I set out for the Falls, him walking with the aid of an alpenstock. Mycroft, I was given to understand, was somehow observing all this from afar.

"I do not like this," I said to my companion. "'Twas bad enough to live through this horrible day once, but I had hoped I would never have to relive it again except in nightmares."

"Watson, recall that I have fonder memories of all this. Vanquishing Moriarty was the high point of my career. I said to you then, and say again now, that putting an end to the very Napoleon of crime would easily be worth the price of my own life."

There was a little dirt path cut out of the vegetation running halfway round the falls so as to afford a complete view of the spectacle. The icy green water, fed by the melting snows, flowed with phenomenal rapidity and violence, then plunged into a great, bottomless chasm of rock black as the darkest night. Spray shot up in vast gouts, and the shriek made by the plunging water was almost like a human cry.

We stood for a moment looking down at the waterfall, Holmes's face in its most contemplative repose. He then pointed further ahead along the dirt path. "Note, dear Watson," he said, shouting to be heard above the torrent, "that the dirt path comes to an end against a rock wall there." I nodded. He turned in the other direction. "And see that backtracking out the way we came is the only way to leave alive: there is but one exit, and it is coincident with the single entrance."

Again I nodded. But, just as had happened the first time we had been at this fateful spot, a Swiss boy came running along the path, carrying in his hand a letter addressed to me which bore the mark of the Englischer Hof. I knew what the note said, of course: that an Englishwoman, staying at that inn, had been overtaken by a hemorrhage. She had but a few hours to live, but doubtless would take great comfort in being ministered to by an English doctor, and would I come at once?

"But the note is a pretext," said I, turning to Holmes. "Granted, I was fooled originally by it, but, as you later admitted in that letter you left for me, you had suspected all along that it was a sham on the part of Moriarty." Throughout this commentary, the Swiss boy stood frozen, immobile, as if somehow Mycroft, overseeing all this, had locked the boy in time so that Holmes and I might consult. "I will not leave you again, Holmes, to plunge to your death."

Holmes raised a hand. "Watson, as always, your sentiments are laudable, but recall that this is a mere simulation. You will be of material assistance to me if you do exactly as you did before. There is

no need, though, for you to undertake the entire arduous hike to the Englischer Hof and back. Instead, simply head back to the point at which you pass the figure in black, wait an additional quarter of an hour, then return to here."

"Thank you for simplifying it," said I. "I am eight years older than I was then; a three-hour round trip would take a goodly bit out of me today."

"Indeed," said Holmes. "All of us may have outlived our most useful days. Now, please, do as I ask."

"I will, of course," said I, "but I freely confess that I do not understand what this is all about. You were engaged by this twenty-first-century Mycroft to explore a problem in natural philosophy—the missing aliens. Why are we even here?"

"We are here," said Holmes, "because I have solved that problem! Trust me, Watson. Trust me, and play out the scenario again of that portentous day of May 4th, 1891."

And so I left my companion, not knowing what he had in mind. As I made my way back to the Englischer Hof, I passed a man going hurriedly the other way. The first time I had lived through these terrible events I did not know him, but this time I recognized him for Professor Moriarty: tall, clad all in black, his forehead bulging out, his lean form outlined sharply against the green backdrop of the vegetation. I let the simulation pass, waited fifteen minutes as Holmes had asked, then returned to the falls.

Upon my arrival, I saw Holmes's alpenstock leaning against a rock. The black soil of the path to the torrent was constantly re-moistened by the spray from the roiling falls. In the soil I could see two sets of footprints leading down the path to the cascade, and none returning. It was precisely the same terrible sight that greeted me all those years ago.

"Welcome back, Watson!"

I wheeled around. Holmes stood leaning against a tree, grinning widely.

"Holmes!" I exclaimed. "How did you manage to get away from the falls without leaving footprints?"

"Recall, my dear Watson, that except for the flesh-and-blood you and me, all this is but a simulation. I simply asked Mycroft to prevent my feet from leaving tracks." He demonstrated this by walking back and forth. No impression was left by his shoes, and no vegetation was trampled down by his passage. "And, of course, I asked him to freeze Moriarty, as earlier he had frozen the Swiss lad, before he and I could become locked in mortal combat."

"Fascinating," said I.

"Indeed. Now, consider the spectacle before you. What do you see?"

"Just what I saw that horrid day on which I had thought you had died: two sets of tracks leading to the falls, and none returning."

Holmes's crow of "Precisely!" rivaled the roar of the falls. "One set of tracks you knew to be my own, and the others you took to be that of the black-clad Englishman—the very Napoleon of crime!"

"Yes."

"Having seen these two sets approaching the falls, and none returning, you then rushed to the very brink of the falls and found—what?"

"Signs of a struggle at the lip of the precipice leading to the great torrent itself."

"And what did you conclude from this?"

"That you and Moriarty had plunged to your deaths, locked in mortal combat."

"Exactly so, Watson! The very same conclusion I myself would have drawn based on those observations!"

"Thankfully, though, I turned out to be incorrect."

"Did you, now?"

"Why, yes. Your presence here attests to that."

"Perhaps," said Holmes. "But I think otherwise. Consider, Watson! You were on the scene, you saw what happened, and for three years—three years, man!—you believed me to be dead. We had been friends and colleagues for a decade at that point. Would the Holmes you knew have let you mourn him for so long without getting word to you? Surely you must know that I trust you at least as much as I do my brother Mycroft, whom I later told you was the only one I had made privy to the secret that I still lived."

"Well," I said, "since you bring it up, I *was* slightly hurt by that. But you explained your reasons to me when you returned."

"It is a comfort to me, Watson, that your ill-feelings were assuaged. But I wonder, perchance, if it was more you than I who assuaged them."

"Eh?"

"You had seen clear evidence of my death, and had faithfully if floridly recorded the same in the chronicle you so appropriately dubbed 'The Final Problem.'"

"Yes, indeed. Those were the hardest words I had ever written."

"And what was the reaction of your readers once this account was published in the *Strand*?"

I shook my head, recalling. "It was completely unexpected," said I. "I had anticipated a few polite notes from strangers mourning your passing, since the stories of your exploits had been so warmly received in the past. But what I got instead was mostly anger and outrage—people demanding to hear further adventures of yours."

"Which of course you believed to be impossible, seeing as how I was dead."

"Exactly. The whole thing left a rather bad taste, I must say. Seemed very peculiar behavior."

"But doubtless it died down quickly," said Holmes.

"You know full well it did not. I have told you before that the onslaught of letters, as well as personal exhortations wherever I would travel, continued unabated for years. In fact, I was virtually at the point of going back and writing up one of your lesser cases I had previously ignored as being of no general interest simply to get the demands to cease, when, much to my surprise and delight—"

"Much to your surprise and delight, after an absence of three years less a month, I turned up in your consulting rooms, disguised, if I recall correctly, as a shabby book collector. And soon you had fresh adventures to chronicle, beginning with that case of the infamous Colonel Sebastian Moran and his victim, the Honorable Ronald Adair."

"Yes," said I. "Wondrous it was."

"But Watson, let us consider the facts surrounding my apparent death at the falls of Reichenbach on May 4th, 1891. You, the observer on the scene, saw the evidence, and, as you wrote in 'The Final Problem,' many experts scoured the lip of the falls and came to precisely the same conclusion you had —that Moriarty and I had plunged to our deaths."

"But that conclusion turned out to be wrong."

Holmes beamed intently. "No, my Good Watson, it turned out to be *unacceptable*—unacceptable to your faithful readers. And that is where all the problems stem from. Remember Schrödinger's cat in the sealed box? Moriarty and I at the falls present a very similar scenario: he and I went down the path into the cul-de-sac, our footprints leaving impressions in the soft earth. There were only two possible outcomes at that point: either I would exit alive, or I would not. There was no way out, except to take that same path back away from the falls. Until someone came and looked to see whether I had re-emerged from the path, the outcome was unresolved. I was both alive and dead—a collection of possibilities. But when you arrived, those possibilities had to collapse into a single reality. You saw that there were no footprints returning from the falls—meaning that Moriarty and I had struggled until at last

we had both plunged over the edge into the icy torrent. It was your act of seeing the results that forced the possibilities to be resolved. In a very real sense, my good, dear friend, you killed me."

My heart was pounding in my chest. "I tell you, Holmes, nothing would have made me more happy than to have seen you alive!"

"I do not doubt that, Watson—but you had to see one thing or the other. You could not see both. And, having seen what you saw, you reported your findings: first to the Swiss police, and then to the reporter for the *Journal de Genève*, and lastly in your full account in the pages of the *Strand*."

I nodded.

"But here is the part that was not considered by Schrödinger when he devised the thought experiment of the cat in the box. Suppose you open the box and find the cat dead, and later you tell your neighbor about the dead cat—and your neighbor refuses to believe you when you say that the cat is dead. What happens if you go and look in the box a second time?"

"Well, the cat is surely still dead."

"Perhaps. But what if thousands—nay, millions!—refuse to believe the account of the original observer? What if they deny the evidence? What then, Watson?"

"I—I do not know."

"Through the sheer stubbornness of their will, they reshape reality, Watson! Truth is replaced with fiction! They will the cat back to life. More than that, they attempt to believe that the cat never died in the first place!"

"And so?"

"And so the world, which should have one concrete reality, is rendered unresolved, uncertain, adrift. As the first observer on the scene at Reichenbach, your interpretation should take precedence. But the stubbornness of the human race is legendary, Watson, and through that sheer cussedness, that refusal to believe what they have been plainly told, the world gets plunged back into being a wave front of unresolved possibilities. We exist in flux—to this day, the whole world exists in flux—because of the conflict between the observation you really made at Reichenbach, and the observation the world *wishes* you had made."

"But this is all too fantastic, Holmes!"

"Eliminate the impossible, Watson, and whatever remains, however improbable, must be the truth. Which brings me now to the question we were engaged by this avatar of Mycroft to solve: this paradox of Fermi. Where are the alien beings?"

"And you say you have solved that?"

"Indeed I have. Consider the method by which mankind has been searching for these aliens."

"By wireless, I gather—trying to overhear their chatter on the ether."

"Precisely! And when did I return from the dead, Watson?"

"April of 1894."

"And when did that gifted Italian, Guglielmo Marconi, invent the wireless?"

"I have no idea."

"In eighteen hundred and ninety-*five*, my good Watson. The following year! In all the time that mankind has used radio, our entire world has been an unresolved quandary! An uncollapsed wave front of possibilities!"

"Meaning?"

"Meaning the aliens are there, Watson—it is not they who are missing, it is us! Our world is out of synch with the rest of the universe. Through our failure to accept the unpleasant truth, we have rendered ourselves *potential* rather than *actual*."

I had always thought my companion a man with a generous regard for his own stature, but surely

this was too much. "You are suggesting, Holmes, that the current unresolved state of the world hinges on the fate of you yourself?"

"Indeed! Your readers would not allow me to fall to my death, even if it meant attaining the very thing I desired most, namely the elimination of Moriarty. In this mad world, the observer has lost control of his observations! If there is one thing my life stood for—my life prior to that ridiculous resurrection of me you recounted in your chronicle of 'The Empty House'—it was reason! Logic! A devotion to observable fact! But humanity has abjured that. This whole world is out of whack, Watson—so out of whack that we are cut off from the civilizations that exist elsewhere. You tell me you were barraged with demands for my return, but if people had really understood me, understood what my life represented, they would have known that the only real tribute to me possible would have been to accept the facts! The only real answer would have been to leave me dead!"

Mycroft sent us back in time, but rather than returning us to 1899, whence he had plucked us, at Holmes's request he put us back eight years earlier in May of 1891. Of course, there were younger versions of ourselves already living then, but Mycroft swapped us for them, bringing the young ones to the future, where they could live out the rest of their lives in simulated scenarios taken from Holmes's and my minds. Granted, we were each eight years older than we had been when we had fled Moriarty the first time, but no one in Switzerland knew us and so the aging of our faces went unnoticed.

I found myself for a third time living that fateful day at the Falls of Reichenbach, but this time, like the first and unlike the second, it was real.

I saw the page boy coming, and my heart raced. I turned to Holmes, and said, "I can't possibly leave you."

"Yes, you can, Watson. And you will, for you have never failed to play the game. I am sure you will play it to the end." He paused for a moment, then said, perhaps just a wee bit sadly, "I can discover facts, Watson, but I cannot change them." And then, quite solemnly, he extended his hand. I clasped it firmly in both of mine. And then the boy, who was in Moriarty's employ, was upon us. I allowed myself to be duped, leaving Holmes alone at the Falls, fighting with all my might to keep from looking back as I hiked onward to treat the nonexistent patient at the Englischer Hof. On my way, I passed Moriarty going in the other direction. It was all I could do to keep from drawing my pistol and putting an end to the blackguard, but I knew Holmes would consider robbing him of his own chance at Moriarty an unforgivable betrayal.

It was an hour's hike down to the Englischer Hof. There I played out the scene in which I inquired about the ailing Englishwoman, and Steiler the Elder, the innkeeper, reacted, as I knew he must, with surprise. My performance was probably half-hearted, having played the role once before, but soon I was on my way back. The uphill hike took over two hours, and I confess plainly to being exhausted upon my arrival, although I could barely hear my own panting over the roar of the torrent.

Once again, I found two sets of footprints leading to the precipice, and none returning. I also found Holmes's alpenstock, and, just as I had the first time, a note from him to me that he had left with it. The note read just as the original had, explaining that he and Moriarty were about to have their final confrontation, but that Moriarty had allowed him to leave a few last words behind. But it ended with a postscript that had not been in the original:

> My dear Watson [it said], you will honour my passing most of all if you stick fast to the powers of observation. No matter what the world wants, leave me dead.

I returned to London, and was able to briefly counterbalance my loss of Holmes by reliving the joy and sorrow of the last few months of my wife Mary's life, explaining my somewhat older face to her

and others as the result of shock at the death of Holmes. The next year, right on schedule, Marconi did indeed invent the wireless. Exhortations for more Holmes adventures continued to pour in, but I ignored them all, although the lack of him in my life was so profound that I was sorely tempted to relent, recanting my observations made at Reichenbach. Nothing would have pleased me more than to hear again the voice of the best and wisest man I had ever known.

In late June of 1907, I read in *The Times* about the detection of intelligent wireless signals coming from the direction of the star Altair. On that day, the rest of the world celebrated, but I do confess I shed a tear and drank a special toast to my good friend, the late Mr. Sherlock Holmes.