

# A RANDOM TETRALOGY

*A Series of Pastiche (Pastiche in the worst way)*

By Jack Brazos III

## LITERARY PURPOSE

This is a fun writing distributed to the Sherlockian fans of the Crew of the Barque Lone Star for teaching, scholarship, and research of the writings of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. The nature of the work is distributed solely for nonprofit Educational and Instructional Purposes and is not for commercial publication.

## TRIBUTE

This work is Pastiche honoring the writings of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, author of the sixty Sherlock Holmes creations collectively identified as the "Canon". This "Sherlockian Pastiche" is in appreciation for his contribution to the literary world that has helped fill the empty lives of world-weary souls with entertainment, suspense, surprise and bewilderment around the globe.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENT

A special debt of gratitude is owed to the Members of The Diogenes Club of Dallas and Crew of the Barque Lone Star, who so generously and graciously helped, assisted, and encouraged with editing, commentaries, suggestions and recommendations toward this humble effort.

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# "The Cat N' The Code"

The 1st of A Random Tetralogy of Sherlockian Pastiche

## PROLOGUE

The Calico cat would not move. No matter what rustle the policemen made, she calmly rested on a small table. The crunched-up stack of papers under her, seemed to not discomfort her one whit. I, however, did want to look at them.

Lestrade groused around the study like he was hoping some telltale clue would leap from the rubble and instantly give us the name of the killer. The room was a mess. Something had happened here, but at this point it was difficult to tell exactly what.

"There is murder in this room, I can feel it," grumbled Lestrade.

Holmes was methodically peering down the pried-open throat of the deceased, meticulously cataloguing every odor, smell, aroma and scent that seeped from the decaying corpse. I, John Watson, veteran of the 2nd Afghan War, survivor of the battle Maiwand, escapee of numerous dangers and cheater of death several times over, on this day found myself totally defeated when attempting to dislodge a scrawny and apparently lazy Calico cat from her comfortable repose on an ordinary writing table. Lestrade was over-worked as usual. Hence, his request for the assistance of Sherlock Holmes. My invitation was an extension of an ongoing debate that Holmes and I were engaged in concerning blood splatter patterns in cold temperatures. Then abruptly and for no reason, the Calico cat rose and slowly strolled away. On top of the stack of papers, where she had been comfortably reclining, lay a crumpled paper. The writing made no sense. The jumble of letters and numbers was as follows;

**SVMIB WRW RG, YZMP LU VMTOZMW 10-3-4-11**

"Holmes, you must look at this. I do not recognize this language."

My struggle to recall every foreign dialect my travels had exposed me to yielded nothing.

"Perhaps some form of dying middle-eastern tribal idiom," I ventured.

Holmes said nothing. Instead, he took a notepad from his pocket and made an exact copy of the writing; a precise copy, including the irregular folds of the crumpled paper itself. Shoving the copy into his pocket and handing the original to Lestrade, Holmes turned toward the door. The Calico cat watched all of this with great interest.

"Watson, did you notice how that Calico cat drew your attention to the crumpled paper on the late Baron's writing table?"

"I noticed how she refused to move until it quite suited her fancy."

"But you did take note of her behavior."

"Clearly." I was becoming irritated. Holmes merely smiled.

"Watson, we are quite finished here, would you agree?"

And with that we had finished our investigation of the crime-scene of the late Assistant Vice-President of the London Branch of the Bank of England, Baron George Tollenham.

On our way to the street, in search of a hansom, I was puzzled as to why Sherlock Holmes was making such an issue over a mere feline that I considered a nuisance.

## INQUIRY

Back at 221-B Baker Street, Holmes relaxed in his favorite chair, after reaching for the Persian slipper and preparing his clay pipe for a long evening. With his notepad and the exact copy of 'crumpled paper' he had duplicated at the crime scene, he stared at the jumble of letters and numbers, totally fixated on the scribbling before him. He remained that way for hours. I had a drink of whisky and went to bed.

Holmes was gone when I arose the following morning and did not return until sundown. Without a word, he returned to his chair and immediately opened a packet of notes that he had gathered from somewhere. I did not disturb him. I did, however, catch a glimpse of several scribbled papers on *Calico cats*. This went on for three days without a symbol of any communication from him at all. Late in the evening, when he did decide to speak, it was very stilted.

"Watson, did you know that the Old English word *catt* is thought to have originated from Late Egyptian *caute*, 664-332 BC; and apparently the Latin term *cattus*? As a side note, and singular in itself, is the fact that a group of cats is called a *clowder* or *glaring*, and a group of kittens is called a *kindle* of kittens."

"What is your sudden interest in cats?"

"The Calico cat will help us solve this puzzle," he replied.

With that, I needed more whisky. I was at my wits end trying to do something with the jumble of letters and numbers scribbled which provided our only clue.

"Holmes, should we not be focused on trying to interpret what the scrambled writing on the crumpled paper means?"

"Yes, that too. *Cryptography* (the process of writing or reading secret messages or codes) began thousands of years ago. The earliest known use of cryptography is found in hieroglyphs carved into monuments from the Old Kingdom of Egypt around 1900 BC. Historical records show that clay tablets from Mesopotamia were meant to protect information. Reportedly, a tablet dated near 1500 BCE was found to encrypt a craftsman's recipe for pottery glaze. Hebrew scholars made use of substitution ciphers (a method of *encoding* [a system of converting information from a source into symbols] such as the *Atbash cipher* for the Hebrew alphabet) reportedly began around 500 to 600 BC."

"All of that is very enlightening, but what does the scribbling mean?"

"Watson, the mysterious death of Baron George Tollenham is proving to be more interesting than first presented."

"There are things that are important without being interesting," I replied.

"The writing, the jumbled letters and numbers, what do they mean?" I blurted. I cannot make heads or tails of them. You discovered something. What is it? Is it a code? A jumbled mess? What is it?" I demanded.

"It is a code. Actually, a very simple code. It works like this.

"It is a *'Backwards Alphabet Code'* that is simple. Make a list of all the letters in the alphabet, then beside it, make another list in reverse order (backwards).

When you write a coded message, every time your message calls for an A, write Z and so forth throughout the message which produces this:

**SVMIB WRW RG, YZMP LU VMTOZMW, 10-3-4-11**  
Translated: ***HENRY DID IT, BANK OF ENGLAND, 1870***

Just remember, it is just as simple to decode the same message; just reverse the process."

"Watson, you are totally focused on the scribbled paper with the code. I should remind you that there were other papers in the stack, concerning rather mundane subjects. There is nothing so unnatural as the commonplace."

The writing table held a moderate number of papers in the stack, including several pages of notations, unidentified and fragmented:

\* ...an unnatural affinity for wearing gloves, most of the time and always in public.

\* .....partial missing appendage.....said it was a minor accident onboard ship when he was young.

Further scribbled notations consisted of fragments of thoughts or impressions.

".....Ravishing blond....."I shall love you always.....Signed, Margaret.

Letter from a Margaret Alexander.....1/2 dozen of them another woman, another love???

Who was the ravishing blond?

Who was Margaret Alexander?"

In spite of the other leads, I returned to studying the translation of the code closely and then began to ponder what exactly the message was actually revealing to us.

"Holmes, it appears to me that the question now becomes, what does the now-decoded message really tell us?"

"*HENRY DID IT* -- Did what? To whom? Where?"

*BANK OF ENGLAND* -- What about the Bank of England?

1870 -- Something apparently happened in the year of 1870. What?"

"Life is infinitely stranger than anything the mind of man can invent," commented Holmes.

"The broken code tells us that 'HENRY DID IT', and since our immediate challenge is determining who poisoned Baron Tollenham, then good police work dictates that we question bank Vice-President Henry Sutherland about the Baron's death."

"Very good, Watson. Someone named Henry is involved in this mystery and the singular person identified as 'Henry' is that closest to the case is one Henry Sutherland. Shall we go?"

And with that we were on our way to the Bank of England offices of Vice-President Henry Sutherland.

"I know nothing about the death of George Tollenham," Henry Sutherland roared. Clearly he was disgusted with the way we were handling his inquiry regarding the death of Baron George Tollenham.

"But you do admit that you and the Baron had a heated argument three days ago, do you not?"

"Yes, we had a heated argument. That does not mean that I killed him."

"I resent this line of questioning. As a matter of fact, I resent the subject even being broached with me or about my whereabouts. Just because the poor man was a fellow bank officer does not make everyone in the Bank of England a suspect," he thundered.

Henry Sutherland would be considered ordinary, with few distinctions. Average height, average build, full head of dark hair, no facial hair, he was a man that you could meet and yet an hour later be unable to describe him. Ordinary. The bankers conservative grey suit, he wore it like it was his creation and in a way it was. Perfectly tailored from the finest English wool, grey in color, it looked natural on him. He was more than neat, he was immaculate. Nothing could exceed the whiteness of his linen. His accessories were the finest, but conservative. He wore no jewelry, nor anything that would draw attention to himself except for one peculiarity. He wore very expensive soft gloves. He looked like a banker. He was married, but few people ever saw his wife, except at church, which she attended faithfully. Even fewer people knew she was the former Margaret Alexander.

"Thank you for your time Mr. Sutherland. You understand that his is a murder case of a high profile man of integrity and a pillar of the community. We can leave no stone unturned," replied Holmes calmly.

"I shall speak to Scotland Yard about this unwarranted intrusion," he fumed.

"Thank you again for your time," replied Holmes as we departed his office.

"The gentleman doth protest too much, methinks." I posited to Holmes. He smiled slightly at my misquoted reference to Shakespeare, shuffled through his notes, gazed out the window of the hansom for a bit and then stated;

"I think this warrants further inquiry into the Public Records concerning Mr. Henry Sutherland and the Bank of England," Holmes stated almost to himself.

"The Medical Examiner thinks Baron George Tollenham died the victim of poison. However, the tests are vague and uncertain. The Baron died yesterday. This is 1890. What does that have to do with 1870? How does this help us with the murder of Baron George Tollenham?" Holmes muttered. Then shaking off his deep thought, he began to function.

"Watson, would you care to accompany me in looking into the Baron's social life, friends and family? Let us say, back as far as 1870?"

"My pleasure."

"We shall begin with the person who knew him best, his wife."

Baroness Ruth Tollenham had aged gracefully. Her perceptive brown eyes retained a youthful twinkle, subdued only by the sadness of her husband's death. High cheek bones framed a face whose delicate lines contained every memory of her 75 years. Her posture and carriage told me that this

woman, though saddened by her husband's passing, was still very much in control of her life.

"Baroness Tollenham, I am very sorry for this tragedy," began Sherlock Holmes. "Dr. Watson and I are investigating the death of your husband on behalf of

Scotland Yard in an attempt to determine who is responsible for his demise. Who could have done such a horrible thing?"

"That would be difficult to imagine," she replied in a distracted manner. Then, composing herself, she looked Holmes over and responded,

"Thank you for coming, it is a bit puzzling. It is a bit puzzling," she repeated.

"George had no enemies. As far as I know, he never offended anyone. Colleagues at work were professionally envious of his steady hand and consistent manner of handling the ups and downs of the banking business, but I always felt that was of minor consequence."

A Calico cat appeared out of nowhere and circled the room, as though monitoring everything that went on. An eerie feeling came over me. Perhaps there was something wrong here. Is she telling us everything? It was all very sinister.

"Baroness, there is evidence of poison, that someone wished him harm. Is there anything that you can recall, that might cast some light on this mysterious death?"

"I am afraid not," she replied calmly. "My husband was a complicated man in spite of his austere appearance."

"And what complication would that be?" delicately inquired Sherlock Holmes.

"Well, there was our busy social life that required a continual attendance to many social and political functions, his service on the committees of several charitable organizations and our lifelong devotion to the Church of England that demanded a considerable amount of his time and attention."

"Do you mind sharing some of the particulars of his religious work?"

"Much of it was theological, justice for the people and all that. Details however, I am afraid that I am a bit lacking in that when working with parishioners, much of it is confidential. I am sorry."

"Do not be. I understand," replied Holmes.

"Would there be anything else, Mr. Holmes?" she asked politely but pointedly.

Holmes smiled. "Thank you and good day."

As we made our way to the street I noticed the Calico cat staring straight at the door where Baroness Tollenham had been standing. Her gaze was fixed and unblinking, like there was unfinished business here. Signaling for a hansom, Holmes looked at me with a peculiar expression.

"Watson, does it strike you as strange, that the Baroness is rather unruffled concerning the matter of her husband's death? Almost like she knows something that we have yet to discover."

"Her behavior was not what I expected," I stated bluntly. "Almost like his passing was a foregone conclusion. And the cat. That cat was still staring at her in an accusing manner."

We returned to 221-B Baker Street in silence as the hansom maneuvered rapidly through the afternoon traffic.

The next morning I found Holmes tinkering with some samples that he had absconded with from the crime scene. He

failed to mention what he was so diligently looking for. He had been working with them for several days now.

The following morning at breakfast, Holmes laid out a plan of investigation that required my assistance which was really a relief, as at the moment, my practice was very slow.

"Watson, I hope you will be available because it appears that this case will require many hours of research, lengthy review of public records and an accumulation of facts and information."

"It would be my pleasure."

The building had the same musty smell of a Public Records Building anywhere. Files and papers stacked for decades under stagnate circumstances created the atmosphere of some importance simply because they were a record of human activity. Real people, living or dead, tread these lands in days of yore, paupers and kings, a place for all. This Public Records Building was where it all came together.

"Watson, if you will be good enough to review the records concerning the Bank of England in the years of 1869 through 1872, it should be helpful to our investigation."

"I shall address the subject of our good friend, Vice-President of the London Branch of the Bank of England, Henry Sutherland."

"I should like to review the records you have concerning the Bank of England in the years of 1869 through 1872," I told the clerk.

"There will be many, come this way."

And then I was buried in files and records for the next several hours. Holmes and I found ourselves referring to the same files frequently. Book keeping in the 1870's was very informal, to say the least. The background of Mr. Henry Sutherland was noticeably convoluted. Later in the evening we began to compare and merge notes which produced some interesting bits of information. The notes and scraps of information were a jumbled mess, as reflected below.

The Public Records Library reveals that the Liverpool Branch of the Bank of England was the target of an armed robbery in 1870 during which a young bank guard was killed defending the bank customers. The thieves got away and have never been caught or identified.

"Watson, if you will be good enough to take this stack, while I shall work on this one. Anything referring to a Henry Sutherland in or around the year 1870, we should review. The jumble of information yielded the following."

A notation, with author unknown, mentions the name of a woman, *Audrey Ellen Margay* as a close companion of one Henry Sutherland who was interviewed at length, but few notes were kept. A photo was included in the file of *Audrey Ellen Margay*. Clearly not a police photo, as it was of remarkably good quality, portraying a young woman with coils of rich brown hair that tumbled gently down to a pencil-thin waist. Tempting brown eyes peered from the photo that conveyed a life-like sensation. Perfectly arched brows over a proportionally slender nose complimented full pouty lips accentuated by a single dimple on her left cheek. This woman would command the attention of any man.

Margaret Alexander reportedly was contacted but not interviewed. Described as quiet, interesting to be around, a woman that few people knew much about. A nice looking blond, well groomed and pleasant company. Subdued in

nature, it was thought that much of that was because she came from a very poor background.

An unidentified officer's field notes: One of the robbers had a "missing 1st joint of his left ring finger."

"Young Henry went to sea briefly while a young man. Three tours on a cargo ship with The East India Company involving cotton, silk and indigo dye."

"A young Henry Sutherland had his father arrested for physically endangering his mother by habitually winding up every meal by taking out his false teeth and hurling them at the child's mother. It says here, the people were poor, living in squalor."

"Interestingly, a brief mention is in the files from an officers field notes, mentioning a Calico cat that caused a ruckus that alerted a young bank guard, upstairs assisting one of the bank officials, that on the bank's lower floor, a robbery was taking place. This is the same young bank guard who lost his life protecting customers during the robbery and was later identified as the nephew of Baron George Tollenham."

\*....daring daylight robbery.....bank just closing....4 men...appeared young & strong.....well planned....two short....two tall... All wore watch cap style head coverings.. bank probably observed for days..... staked out.....very fast.

\*.....one of robbers had part if his left-ring finger missing....one appeared to be bald..

"An Officer Pugh's field notes from the robbery: one of the robbers had a missing first joint (fingertip) of his left ring-finger. "

I felt at this point, a bit of medical explanation would be helpful.

"Holmes, the three bones in each finger are named according to their relationship to the palm of the hand. The first bone, closest to the palm, is the *proximal phalange*; the second bone is the *middle phalange*; and the smallest and farthest from the hand is the *distal phalange*. The thumb does not have a middle phalange. This missing *distal phalange* is significant to our investigation." I patiently explained.

"Watson, I do recall that Henry Sutherland worn expensive gloves when we interviewed him in his office?"

"It is curious how a young man can go from being an itinerant seaman to a person having enough money to buy a substantial amount of stock in the Bank of England in a relatively short period of time." Holmes noted.

Ravishing blond....."I shall love you always.....Signed, Margaret.

Letters from a Margaret Alexander.....1/2 dozen of them another woman, another love???

Holmes decided that we should see what Lestrade had discovered from his end of the investigation. On the way to Scotland Yard I commented;

"Holmes, do you realize that this has been one of the sloppiest investigations by Scotland Yard that we have ever encountered. And now, it seems this woman, Margaret Alexander, in some way managed to walk away with little information gathered about her. Almost like she was a 'questionable' friend of the police."

We met Lestrade leaving Scotland Yard on the way to another crime scene. He looked aggravated.

"Gentlemen, I am afraid you are going to have to look for another suspect. Mr. Henry Sutherland was in the presence of

Scotland Yard Chief, Glen Hawkins all evening, on the night of the death of Baron Tollenham. They were attending the Policeman's Ball on Custom House Parkway with about 50 people present, a number of whom met and talked to Henry Sutherland."

"There is nothing that connects Henry Sutherland to the death of Baron Tollenham."

Back at 221-B Baker street, Holmes once again returned to the samples from the crime scene. He continued working with them, for several hours.

"Watson, the deceased in question died from arsenic poisoning. I have studied the evidence in detail, but there is more work to be done. I have verified that Baron George Tollenham had cancer. It appears that the Baron had used the arsenic as a pain medication."

"Your research seems to be producing more information than my inquiry of Miss Audrey Ellen Margay. It is like the woman is a phantom. It is certain that she was in Liverpool at the same time as Henry Sutherland. I shall go to Liverpool tomorrow."

The photo of Miss Margay was made by *Ellington Brothers Studio, Ltd.*, a prominent photography studio in Liverpool. There was no difficulty in locating *Ellington Brothers* as it was one of the earlier of the public studios.

"I am Charles Johnson, may I be of assistance?"

"Yes, I am John Watson. I am assisting Scotland Yard on a very old matter and am inquiring as to whether anyone here can remember this young woman or anything about her? The photo is over twenty years old," I added, handing a copy of the photo of Miss Margay to him.

"Oddly, yes I can. It was an unusual situation and I personally, handled the photo taking on a special order. It was at the request of one of the public officials, a Mr. Charles Gilmore. He came with her. Quite a caring soul."

"That long ago, you have a very good memory" I commented.

"Not easy to forget. They were murdered in his flat that very evening, the day the photo was taken. The killer was never found. Rumors circulated that it was in some twisted way related to the bank robbery of the Bank of England earlier that year, but it was just rumors, nothing more. Two murders, terrible mess. All over the papers for weeks. It was a real tragedy. Was there anything else that I can help you with?"

"No, but thank you for your time, Mr. Johnson."

Not seeing how this was going to help me in the investigation into the poisoning death of

Baron George Tollenham, I boarded the next train back to London. Holmes again worked with the samples that he had borrowed from the crime scene. This had been going on for days on end.

"Watson, I have verified that the deceased in question died of a special blend of arsenic poisoning. I have revisited all of the evidence several times and have finally arrived at a conclusion. I should notify Lestrade. Our investigation has reached its limits.

Vice-president Henry Sutherland, however, is another matter all together."

## SUMMARY

Sherlock Holmes began his summary in a small room at Scotland Yard, attended by over-worked Inspector Lestrade and two assistant detectives with heavy schedules.

"Gentlemen, a review of the initial facts leading up to our investigation illustrates that this is not the investigation of one death, but of two. The first occurred in 1870 in the city of Liverpool. The second, a few weeks ago, here in London."

"Henry Sutherland is Vice-President of the London branch of The Bank of England and has been for the last eighteen of his twenty year career as a successful banker. He was promoted to Vice-President of the London branch one year after a substantial investment in Bank of England securities.

"Baron George Tollenham was one of the Assistant Vice-Presidents when Henry Sutherland arrived at the bank and has served on the Personnel Enforcement Committee for almost forty years, most of his banking career.

"In 1870, the Liverpool branch of The Bank of England was robbed by armed men, during which a young bank guard lost his life. The guard was later identified as the nephew of Baron George Tollenham. The thieves have never been caught or identified.

"In 1871, Henry Sutherland made a large purchase of stock in The Bank of England and soon after became Vice-President of the London branch, a position he held for the last 18 years and continues to do so today."

The Calico cat came from nowhere. I looked up and she was strolling nonchalantly around looking for a place to lay down. She was still following this case, I suspected.

"Baron Tollenham, as one of the long-term Assistant Vice-Presidents serving on the Personnel Enforcement Committee was familiar with all activities involving the Bank of England employees and its security owners.

The Baron had always been suspicious of the source of now Vice-President Henry Sutherland's wealth and over the years gathered small bits of more questionable information. For example, he wears fashionable dress gloves almost all of the time, even when there is no apparent need or social requirement. More important, how could a young man go from being an itinerant seaman to a person having enough money to buy a substantial amount of stock in the Bank of England in a remarkably short period of time? Early on, Baron Tollenham had contacted a young investigator Lestrade, new at his job and very over worked. Young Investigator Lestrade was unable to discover any material evidence during his brief inquiry. In the course of our present investigation, the inquiry of one Margaret Alexander produced additional but fragmented facts concerning Miss Alexander.

"It is my opinion that the former Margaret Alexander, now Mrs. Henry Sutherland, is very much aware of the events of the early 1870s and now faithfully enjoys the status of wife of a successful banker. Two young people, who escaped a life of poverty, are diligently living up to their present day duties, commitments and expectations as model citizens."

"The years passed and near the end of a full and rewarding life, Baron Tollenham became a cancer victim. After seeking treatment from several medical experts, it was determined that there was no cure and little relief. Learning

recently that his condition was terminal and with a short time to live, he devised a plan to have the 1870's activities of Henry Sutherland investigated more thoroughly.

"The Baron's aged wife knew of her husband's plan, his late-life pain, discomfort and agony and his recent decision for suicide by poison, all prompted by the terminal cancer. She and her husband decided that she would let these events unfold, answering only to a formal investigation after the fact, in an effort that justice would finally be done for their nephew, the young bank guard who had lost his life in the 1870's robbery. The London Medical Examiner verified that Baron George Tollenham died of a special blend of Arsenic poisoning. I have revisited the crime scene twice, performed numerous tests in my personal laboratory, conducted hours of research and have concluded that the poison was self-inflicted; Baron George Tollenham died by his own hand. He knew he was dying of cancer and was suffering great pain."

"During the investigation of Baron George Tollenham's death, a coded message was discovered in his study as a result of the strange behavior of a Calico cat. This coded message focused a further detailed investigation by myself and with the assistance of Dr. Watson. The first step was to decipher the coded message."

**SVMIB WRW RG, YZMP LU VMTOZMW, 10-3-4-11**  
Translated: **HENRY DID IT, BANK OF ENGLAND, 1870**

"Baron George Tollenham had hoped his death would lead to an investigation that would prove that Henry Sutherland participated in and was responsible for the 1870s bank robbery that took the life of his nephew, but that is not yet to be. The only facts that we have to connect Henry Sutherland to the 1870s bank robbery in Liverpool are (1) he was allegedly living in Liverpool at the time of the bank robbery and (2) he has a missing appendage of his left ring-finger which he explains, was the result of an accident onboard ship in his youthful sailing days and that due to personal embarrassment, he wears gloves in public to conceal the deformative feature of his left ring finger. We cannot place him at the scene of the crime or show that he even knew anything about it."

"I am afraid that is where the investigation places us. It is not enough to make a case. There is simply not enough evidence."

"You are saying we cannot prove he was one of the robbers?" asked Lestrade through clenched teeth.

"At this time, no. I am afraid this is where the evidence leaves us." replied Holmes.

Lestrade stormed out in a fit of disgust at all of the time, effort and manpower wasted on not one but two unprovable cases.

"But Holmes, what about the Calico cat? Where does she fit into this quandary?"

"Dear Watson, that, for the time being, will remain a mystery."

And then, all I saw was his crane-like silhouette and the back of his Deerstalker passing through the door. The Calico cat stared at me, unblinking, as I followed Holmes into the street.

# *The Case of The Thief, or Not*

The 2nd of A Random Tetralogy of Sherlockian Pastiche

## PROLOGUE

Dr. Watson could barely see twenty feet in front of him, the snow was falling so heavily. This would be a blizzard if the wind were stronger, but fortunately there was little wind, just enough to make him feel how cold he really was. He snuggled deeper into the Ulster and hunched his shoulders a bit more. He almost did not see the man in the doorway. It was the flash of metal that caught his eye.

The horrid battlefield experiences of *Maiwand* kicked in as he instinctively grasp the butt of his revolver. Quickly parrying the knife lunge, he managed to get the barrel of the revolver clear of his coat and fired. Shocked, his attacker staggered and tumbled into the freshly fallen snow.

Watson took a deep breath and surveyed the scene. Within a fleeting moment, he had been transformed from 'death-defying victim' into that of 'treating physician' as his training compelled him to attempt to keep the man alive. It was true, there was no other place like the streets of London.

## AFTERMATH

Still shaken over the attempt on my life and having to shoot my way out of the incident, Lestrade' sent a patrolman to notify Sherlock Holmes who immediately dressed and came to Scotland Yard headquarters. It seems my treatment at the scene had prevented the culprit from suffering any long-term damage as the bullet had passed through the edge of his ribcage and was lost somewhere in the snow. The hospital emergency doctor had treated him briefly, established a minor amount of blood loss and released him to the officers of Scotland Yard who now held him in the local jail pending charges. Holmes arrived sometime after Lestrade began to question him.

"We owe you a salute of gratitude, Dr. Watson. We have been searching for Lewis Van Horn, *The Count*' for over three years. He is wanted for art theft in Sweden, of *The Bathers*' by *Renoir*, from the Viking Museum. It took quite some time to discover the theft was the work of *The Count*." All we have to do now is get him to tell us where it is." Lestrade' said, smiling for the first time in a month while he explained there would be no more questioning about my shooting in self-defense.

"We are really glad to have this fellow in custody," continued Lestrade. "Dr. Watson, you should go home to your wife now. I will keep him and I will make him confess his guilt of the other thefts," vowed Lestrade' with a determined expression that was almost demonic.

I recalled the way I had met my wife. She had come to see Sherlock Holmes a few years ago to help her report to Scotland Yard she had discovered her fiancé was stealing expensive art pieces and reselling them to private collectors. Even when nervous and frightened by threats should she expose him, she still retained an alluring presence. It was later discovered her former cohort is well known in Europe as an international art thief.

Holmes was curious about what *The Count* might say and was present when Lestrade returned to his interrogation.

"Sherlock Holmes and John Watson have been charging me with this crime for the last two years." *The Count* ranted.

"This is nonsense. I did not do this. I left this life six years ago. They claim it was me because I enjoy the nudes. Most men do. For that reason, Renoir's nude paintings are very popular. It is no secret *Renoir* paints excellent nudes. Besides, I can prove it was not me. The lock, it was damaged. And also the entry door. There was lots of exchange of paintings. I NEVER damage!" he argued forcefully.

"Without admitting anything at any time, I have never damaged any painting, any place of entry nor any place where they are secured. A master can do things so well it will take months before anyone realizes an *'unorthodox collector'* was ever there. After all, in some circles, there are reputations to uphold." He stated emphatically, but evasively. His manner also reflected a certain kind of unique pride that is not often seen.

"Also, a closer, in-depth, professional investigation will prove I was not even in the country at the time of the unfortunate loss."

"I will be back." Lestrade' stated in no uncertain terms.

Lestrade' tried to summarize to Holmes where he was in the interrogation.

"The matter he is arguing to Scotland Yard at this point is he claims the he is not guilty of this theft. He did not steal *'The Bathers'* by *Renoir* from the Viking Museum in Sweden. This time it was someone else, and he says he can prove it."

"The Count claims he has never stolen anything, while on the shores of the British Commonwealth. He makes an argument since he has committed no crime on British soil, he should not be returned to Sweden until he has had an opportunity to prove his innocence in the British Courts where he believes he has a fair chance at justice, rather than in the European Courts who have already made up their minds."

"What about his attempt upon Watson's life?" inquired Holmes.

"As to the matter of his skirmish with Dr. Watson, he dismisses that as just a heated dispute between two men over a woman, the attempted murder charges should be dropped and the authorities ignore the pedestrian matter of two men fighting over a woman. As a matter of fact, he has requested your assistance and more strangely, the assistance of Dr. Watson in his search for justice concerning the false accusation of the theft of *'The Bathers'* by *Renoir*."

"This is a new twist to wiggle out of an airtight case," mused Lestrade', as he was clearly taken aback.

"Watson is going to explode," he predicted with a wry smile.

"He just tried to kill John Watson. This man has gall." He smiled, shaking his head in disbelief.

221-B BAKER STREET

"He what?" I recoiled in complete disbelief at the words coming out of Holmes's mouth.

"Only a lunatic would believe such a story. Of course he did not do it," I screamed.

"Even he is smart enough to deny any guilt or any knowledge of the entire matter. What, are we back to private school, nine year old school boys and everybody is innocent, yet the place is a wreck?"

"As far as my attack in the street, that was a brazen assassination attempt from a concealed hiding place, unprovoked and unjustified! And that is a fact and it is final!"

Summary of Metropolitan Police Report:

*"Dr. John Watson, on his way home from his medical office, was attacked on the street by a man wielding a knife in an attempt to cause irreparable harm, personal injury and imminent death. The attacker has been identified as 'Count' Lewis Van Horn, the former suitor of the doctor's wife and is currently being held in the Metropolitan jail on charges of attempted murder and intent to do bodily harm."*

After several hours of police questioning, the following conclusions were drawn.

*His decision to punish Dr. Watson was two-fold. One, he felt Watson, knowing of his former relationship with his wife, would put forth a special effort to put him in jail out of pure jealousy. The other was Watson was unjustly pursuing him for a crime he did not commit and wanted to ensure he never saw Helen Louise again.*

### **THE FOLLOWING DAY**

Back in the interrogation room, Lestrade' was going after *The Count* about possible places the *Renoir* could be sequestered away. They discussed a number of places where it might be hidden, but his subject was clearly being uncooperative. Holmes had been listening and indicated he would like to ask a few questions.

"He is all yours," muttered a disgusted Lestrade'.

"*Count Van Horn*, if you were going to hide 'The Bathers' by *Renoir*, where would you hide it?" Holmes asked directly.

*The Count* blinked, thought a few moments, then replied, "I would hide it in plain sight."

"And in exactly what manner would this be executed?"

"Now we must negotiate," replied *The Count*, with a tight smile.

Holmes raised an eyebrow. *The Count* smiled openly.

"Mr. Holmes, by reputation, you are a widely known consulting detective that is independent of any government and select only the cases that interest you and are in the interest of justice. Consider sir, I beg you, my circumstances are such a case. I did not steal '*The Bathers*' by *Renoir*. To insure no miscarriage of justice will occur, I am humbly requesting that since you are already investigating the theft of '*The Bathers*' by *Renoir*, that you also do so in my behalf."

"Investigate and prove I did not steal the *Renoir*, in return, I will help you locate its whereabouts."

Holmes stared coldly at *The Count* as he considered this unforeseen turn of events. The silence and the chilling expression created an almost fog-like atmosphere engulfing the entire room. He surveyed the person of questionable character in front of him for quite some time, then finally spoke.

"You make a point, Mr. Van Horn," Holmes responded, deliberately not using his title. "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. In seeking justice in the missing *Renoir* case, we should be able to accommodate your interests and test your argument of innocence."

"That is enough of an agreement to satisfy me," replied *The Count*, expressing noticeable relief someone would listen to his plea. It was unclear just how comfortable Holmes was in making a pact with a man who had just tried to kill his only friend as at that point the discussion turned to how best to use the skills of an alleged European art thief. Two people were not going to like this liaison, Lestrade' and most assuredly, John Watson.

"Assuming things are as you say, who knew of your movements in Sweden?" asked Holmes.

"No one."

"Someone did. Think."

"Tell me how you can prove you were out of the country of Sweden at the time of the *Renoir* theft."

"I have a lady friend in Hamburg. I was with her at the time of the theft."

"Who knew you had a lady friend in Hamburg?"

"No one. I am very discreet."

"Someone knew," Holmes pressed.

Holmes studied *The Count* closely, this time from a different viewpoint. He was an impressive man in appearance. Aside from his slightly pale complexion, he was what many women would call handsome. Muscular and fit, he was a tailor's dream. His suit was made of the finest English wool and chosen for its fiber diameter, crimp, yield, color and staple strength. It was selected from the finer grades and perfectly tailored. The fit, fabric and general appearance were made for him. The collar of his coat nestled gently on his broad shoulders, with no wrinkles, buckles or folds. It simply settled lightly being neither loose nor tight. The rich fabric was such he could sit all day and it would never wrinkle. When he moved, the richness of the fabric moved with him, comfortably and naturally. The side vents of his jacket were carefully notched as there was no 'build up' when sitting or standing. His cuffs, both shirt and jacket, were perfect in length and stitching with lapel facings correctly matching his tie. His accessories were carefully chosen including a gold watch and lengthy chain accompanied by a matching key chain. His full head of silver hair topped off an elegant ensemble. No doubt, this was an art thief who knew how to dress.

"Who is your tailor and how frequently do you see him?" inquired Holmes.

*The Count* stared blankly, trying to assess the question.

"*Count Von Horn*, tailor shops, haberdashers and pubs are places where men talk freely. They hear things, they know things. Think back carefully, of all of your idle comments or discussions, and tell me what comes to mind."

*The Count* continued with the blank stare, trying to catch up to the breadth of the questioning.

"Think back, your tailor knows you very well, does he not?"

"Yes, but.....he.....he.....Oh good Lord."

"This information could easily be shared with 'third parties'," Holmes stated. "We are going to need more



information about this tailor. For instance, we should start with his name," Holmes stated, staring straight into his eyes."

"I can tell you this," replied the frustrated Count, "the two most distinctive qualities about Allen Herrington are, first he is a superb tailor in every way with skills that are a gift. Second, he is always overwhelmed with debt. A large, smiling affable man, he is very good at handling people."

"Thank you, we will take matters from here," commented Holmes as he buttoned his coat and turned toward the door. On the way back to 221-B Baker Street, Holmes began speaking.

"*The Tailor of Linkoping*, Sweden owes many debts and many favors, and for that reason he trades in 'information' he "hears" and buys, sells and trades it for his benefit. A terrible businessman, he made good money, but could never seem to manage it. No matter what his income for the month, he always managed to spend more," concluded Holmes.

"Watson, are you free to travel to Linkoping, Sweden?"

"Yes, this should be interesting, but I must ask, how do you know these things about a Swedish tailor?"

"I am a former client," Holmes smiled.

### INVESTIGATION

Holmes passed through the fashionable doors of the upscale "*The Tailor of Linkoping, Ltd.*" as though he had been there yesterday.

"Mr. Holmes, Mr. Holmes, it is an honor to see you again," gushed a large smiling man as he ambled forward to shake hands with his unexpected guest. "What can I do for you?"

"You have gained five pounds since we last met, Allen."

"Actually, five and one half but, details, they are minor."

"Allen, you are very good at 'details'," smiled Holmes.

"But yes, there is a matter you can help with. My colleague, Dr. Watson and I are trying to verify a rumor you may have some insight upon. A man's freedom depends upon our verification."

"The details, Mr. Holmes?"

"A certain client of yours, one Count Lewis Von Horn, is in dire need of verification he was visiting a lady in Hamburg, Germany upon a certain date last year. Any passing information that would cast light upon his presence in Hamburg on January 15, 1887 would be helpful, without betraying any confidentiality of course."

"Well, I am at liberty to say yes, there was a harmless discussion about who *Count Van Horn* was '*dressing for*' and it turns out, who would have thought the wife of one of the members of the Hamburg Admiralty would find favor with *The Count*, all very hush, hush of course. Secret meetings ensued. Gossip around town has it the time and place of the ladies secret rendezvous somehow fell into the hands of one *Whittington J. Smith*, rumored to be a quietly successful art thief who indulged himself from time to time in the stimulating illegal activity of 'appropriating' fine paintings for himself. His view, apparently was, why should this time be any different? All of this is pure speculation and hearsay, you understand," responded Allen guardedly. And with that little piece of information properly placed, for value of course, Allen Herrington managed to keep his creditors at bay for yet another month, thought Sherlock Holmes.

"Does the gossip mill have a name for 'the lady' in Hamburg?"

"Nothing has surfaced. Apparently the parties have been very discreet."

"We are going to visit Hamburg. Is there any recommendation you might make in behalf of our efforts?"

"There is a skilled tailor named Bartel, old friend, who dresses gentlemen from the top echelons of business and commerce as well as powerful and not-so- powerful government officials. That is all I can say." Holmes smiled.

"Thank you Allen, always a pleasure."

"Likewise, Mr. Holmes."

On the way back to our hotel, I could not resist asking. "What did you do for him?"

"It is a long story," replied Holmes putting the matter to rest.

Back at the hotel, Holmes received a telegram from Lestrade'. *Count Lewis Von Horn* had managed to post bail, but he was instructed to remain in London, pending the resolution of the charges against him.

### GERMANY

*Bartel Tailors* is owned by Barry Bartel and known simply as Bartel. Bartel was a slim, well built man in his late fifties. Blond and fair, he had warm, brown eyes and was a friendly soul. He dressed impeccably.

"Mr. Holmes and Dr. Watson. Yes, I just this morning, received a letter from Allen in Linkoping referencing you. Investigators for Scotland Yard, I see."

"I am a Consulting Detective," clarified Sherlock Holmes.

"Interesting," he smiled. "Tailoring is a unique occupation in England as in Europe. As I understand it, your wealthy families make trips to London in order to select the most fashionable garments from the major stores like *Swan & Edgar and Harvey Nichols*. They display silks, furs, cashmeres and lace. As the Kingdom is developing rapidly, more people find interest in machine-made linens and modestly priced changing styles. Garments were stitched by hand until mid- century. Then Singer and his sewing machine changed the production of clothing forever. The items are made to special order after the customer has examined a sample garment. Ready-made dresses are becoming fashionable. Ladies underpinnings are offered and petticoats are made from frilly muslin or with a lace trim. Flannel is used for warmth. Silk stockings from Robert Shaw's and a bonnet and parasol from Mrs. Snow's Showroom will complete a ladies regalia. Fashionable accessories include fur muffs, high heeled shoes laced, or buttoned, cashmere or paisley shawls, white muslin or black velvet caps trimmed with tulle. I understand these are only a few. With goods being imported from foreign countries, the custom of 'going shopping' is becoming popular. Since Queen Victoria's wedding, the color white has become the accepted traditional color for bouquets and wedding gowns," Bartel explained.

"English custom has always fascinated me," he continued.

"The English rhyme: "*Something old*, often a family heirloom.

*Something new*, her dress or a gift from her betrothed.

*Something borrowed*, something of value, later returned to the owner.

*Something blue*, a symbol of faithfulness.

*A lucky sixpence in your shoe* is to ensure future wealth.

This is all very clever and very traditional English, in my opinion, of course," explained Bartel.

"And here I am, a German tailor lecturing you on current British customs; my apologies," he finally concluded.

"How can I help you?"

Sherlock Holmes explained once again to yet another tailor, the circumstance of Count Van Horn. Bartel yawned and looked bored.

"*The Count*, that must be Valeria's latest dalliance. Yes, I remember this one has a title. Her mother must be very proud," Bartel responded dismissively.

"As I recall, Valeria Becker is having a photographic event for ladies summer dresses, tomorrow at one of the downtown fashion houses, House of Worth, Fashions, I believe. The runway opens at noon. Should you be interested, you may come as my guests."

Holmes accepted the invitation and we appeared at the House of Worth, Fashions, at the designated time. People were casually coming and going, mingling about. It was strange, but I felt there was something wrong here, very wrong. I just could not put my finger on it, but that old feeling of uneasy anxiety lingered around me. Holmes was arranging an unscheduled interview with Valeria Becker about the whereabouts of *The Count* on the date of the theft of the *Renoir*. Could she supply *The Count* with his desperately needed alibi? Of particular interest was the fact that her memory surrounding the date in question, seemed to be a bit sketchy together with a cloud of uneasiness. Well, the woman was rushed for time. I scanned the crowd, taking note of each person's position and what they were doing. The women appeared to be the expected fashion group with all the gossip and chit chat. My assessment was that I could pretty much focus on the male guests and staff. I had a list of all the men and women invited and those who were working the event. This escapade must have cost someone a fortune as there is a lot of beauty here today.

There was a continuous stream of people circulating around the showroom, many trying to look sophisticated and acting nonchalant. I prowled around looking for anything or anyone suspicious. Nothing so far. The man moved quickly from behind me, shoving the pistol into my left rib-cage. I could feel it well enough to know that the caliber was large enough to permanently damage my vital organs, even if I lived.

"Move toward the corner door, away from the crowd, Dr. Watson, quietly, very quietly," he ordered gruffly.

I felt fear, cold sweaty fear. This character was a professional, I could tell from the way he spoke and moved. I was in trouble. We moved toward the door in the darkened corner like two old friends having a casual conversation. My fear increased. There was a sudden crash behind me that knocked me off balance. I finally managed to turn around to see Holmes battering the man to the ground with his heavy cane as a large pistol fell nearby. Holmes' questioning was vicious and laced with threats of personal violence.

"Who hired you to attack John Watson?" he hammered away, his eyes blazing like a wild animal.

"You attempted to kill Dr. Watson. Tell me, who is your employer or I shall render you a cripple before turning you

over to the German police. Tell me and you shall avoid arrest," Holmes continued forcing the tip of his heavy cane into the helpless man's throat.

"Tell me now and you shall avoid arrest," adding unbearable pressure to the man's throat as he gasped for air.

"A man in London," the man gasped as Holmes relented enough for the man to speak.

"Name?"

"No one ever told me."

"How were you paid?"

"The funds came from someone I do not know. They arrived over the signature of *Van Horn Enterprises, Ltd., President.*"

"Thank you," replied Holmes as he brought the Penyang Lawyer down hard, shattering the collar-bone and surrounding muscle, rendering the man's shoulder temporarily useless.

"Come Watson, we have an interview to finish."

"Yes, I remember the date. God knows Lewis made a big enough issue of it. Yes, he was here with me," she replied slightly irritated that we had burrowed our way into her busy schedule.

"I understand your annoyance, Ms. Becker, but *The Counts'* liberty rests upon your memory and statement thereof. Is there anything else that you can remember that might cast some clarification of this matter?"

"Well, he did receive two different telegrams, a few days later from someone in London. I remember because a funny name was mentioned each time.

*Light Fingers Larry* had taken possession of something and I could not tell if Lewis was happy or sad. I know he swore me to secrecy about the whole matter, but you gentlemen represent Scotland Yard and I do not want to be drawn into something back in London," she said nervously.

"That is quite alright, Ms. Becker. You have done enough. Thank you."

Holmes looked at me as though I might want to ask something, but I was still recovering from my near-death experience. Come to think of it, this was my second unsettling experience within a matter of a few days. On the way back to our hotel, I tried to acknowledge Holmes had probably saved my life, which he brushed aside with a wave of his hand.

"But I do want to know how you knew that I might be in danger?"

"Dear Watson, you know that I am a student and a practitioner of detail and observation. You continued to look back over your shoulder, watched the crowd closely and immediately reacted to unfamiliar sounds. That told me, Watson, that you had a distinct and real feeling that you might be in danger. I simply did a little surveillance of my own and kept tabs on what was going on around you. Simply stated, that is it." he smiled.

"So, it sounds to me like *The Count* did not steal the *Renoir* as he claims, but he certainly knows who did. In my opinion, this case is going in circles, and I suspect it is *The Count* who is calling the shots, one way or the other," I firmly stated feeling that it was his doing that we were being led around in circles. Still, I was puzzled as to why he would raise these issues, knowing we would eventually find out anyway. Was his mind still clouded by the conduct of his former fiancée, now my wife? There were way too many unanswered questions in this quagmire. Holmes was already making

arranges for passage back to London. This told me he had what he wanted from his German contacts.

### BACK IN LONDON

Back in London and at home, I decided to bring my wife, Helen Louise into the circumstances of the investigation.

"John, you have to understand that while Lewis can be very charming and has huge intellect, he is still very sick. As much as I know, much of it can be blamed on a horribly unfortunate childhood. Subconsciously, his mind is very twisted. I just did not see it at first. He is, to say the least, very complicated and also mentally, very fragile."

"Sounds like he is a sociopath."

"I can promise you, he is very likely mentally 'on the edge'. The more I discovered about him, the more I realized there was no hope. I have heard him described as a 'walking stick of dynamite'."

And with that, my wife and I abandoned the subject of her former fiancé and my immediate adversary. I was happy with my wife and I wanted it to stay that way.

### CLOSING IN

Holmes was vigorously hunting *Light Fingers Larry* however, it appeared that Larry had covered his tracks well. His frustration was that he was beginning to run out of leads.

"Watson, I am missing something and it is something big," he grouched.

"*The Count* told you that the place to hide something was 'in plain sight.' Maybe he did," I commented trying to settle him down before the indoor pistol practice began in earnest. He stopped cold, went to the Persian Slipper for his tobacco and retrieved the clay pipe from the mantle. Thank goodness he was going to think rather than shoot his way through this impasse. Holmes was up all night, went to bed at sunrise and awakened just in time for Mrs. Hudson's noon meal. He was in good spirits.

"Watson, you are exactly right. I know where the missing *Renoir* is hidden. '*Hidden in plain sight*', as you suggested, is the answer."

We contacted *The Count Louis Van Horn* at his temporary address. He was not happy. Lestrade had taken the caution to bring along two bobbies, should we need them.

"Count, as you are wearing your very fashionable key chain, we should like to inspect it again," Holmes asked.

"Dr. Watson, since this was your 'deductive reasoning' that has solved the riddle, would you like to pick up the questioning at this point?"

"Your key chain, please Count Van Horn."

### **Footnote:**

'*The Bathers*' by *Renoir* was found in pristine condition, sequestered away in a vault at The Bank of England, entered via one of the keys on *The Counts*' key chain. Count Luis Von Horn's funeral was attended by one *Light Fingers Larry*, who departed with all due haste when members of Scotland Yard dropped by. A beautiful flower arrangement was provided by a woman living in Hamburg, Germany. Helen Louise, my wife only commented in passing, that the man she knew briefly, died many years ago. My nightmares have slightly subsided. Lestrade is overworked. Sherlock Holmes is bored, as there are no immediate interesting cases for him to pursue.

"What is this?" alarmed, he managed to reply.

"We need to inspect the keys on your key chain." I replied.

"Why?" he sputtered.

"You mentioned very early in the investigation, that the place you would hide something was 'in plain sight.'"

"We agree, the keys please," I insisted.

"No."

"Count, we have bobbies just outside. Please do not resist." I cautioned him. Grudgingly, he gave up the key ring containing a half-dozen keys.

"These should not be difficult to match up with their corresponding safes," I commented. *The Count* knew we had him. His own words had betrayed him. His face began to flush. The blood vessels in his temples bulged. He clenched his fists. He knew he was beaten. His anger rose. His breath came in gasps.

"You!" "You again!"

As *The Count* turned toward me, his face darkened, his eyes blazed.

"You have denied me of my revenge for too long," he snarled

"This ugliness has to stop, the pain you have caused me has left me no escape. First my fiancée, now this."

"The point is Lewis, you never understood her," I explained.

"You never loved her, you thought it would be fun to be in love with her. Like stealing the priceless art pieces, just another conquest to fill your empty soul. You kept her torn between terror and hope. You played a cat and mouse game with her and lost. What you are angry about right now is, you have been found out, confronted, stripped of your lies. She was engaged to a stranger."

"Nonsense," he barked.

"You and Sherlock Holmes have falsely accused me for years. You have spread rumors about me. You have poisoned the mind of my fiancée. You have slandered me horribly."

"You could have stopped stealing, that would have helped. But no, you have a sickness, an obsession, a self-centered instinct that you cannot deny. Let us face it Lewis, you are just a natural born crook. It is that simple. Case closed."

His pent up anger exploded as he lunged, the knife coming out quickly with practiced expertise. My revolver barely cleared my coat as the hammer drove the firing pin into the percussion cap. I felt the recoil in my hand. The sound was deafening as the slug struck with a sickening thud, right between his eyes. This would not be an "edge of ribcage, minor blood loss wound."

# *"The Case of Too Many Kidnappings"*

*The 3rd of A Random Tetralogy of Sherlockian Pastiche*

## **PROLOGUE**

Sherlock Holmes savagely thrust the single-stick straight forward into the man's midsection knocking the wind out of him. A half-step, then he brought the short end across, his right foot planted, he put his full weight into the crossing blow which struck the culprit's jaw, shattering bone and teeth. The man was unconscious before he hit the ground. Quickly looking back over his shoulder, he sought to locate Dr. Watson, who had his hands full.

"I should get there swiftly," he thought to himself. Knowing Watson's survival instincts, he might just give up and shoot the ruffian. Holmes really wanted to question the man, but if Watson were so disposed, he would be questioning a corpse.

Holmes turned the corner and there before him, was his friend sitting straddle of the assassin, his revolver barrel halfway down the thugs throat, threatening to hasten his demise, should he fail to reveal his employer.

"We need him alive! We need him alive!" Holmes shouted as loud as he could.

"Of course you shall have something to question, Holmes. I will leave you his voice box and a barely functioning brain." Watson responded angrily.

Holmes tried entering into the interrogation, but Watson was unrelenting in his obsession to find out how we had become targets of this botched murder attempt.

"You do not understand," lamented the big man when he was able to speak.

"Enlighten me," replied Watson through clenched teeth that gave him a fiendish persona. As Watson threatened the very life of the culprit, Holmes looked over the would-be assassin carefully. Like his unconscious colleague, he was a large man dressed in black. His hair was as dark as his garments, shaggy and thick. His features may as well have been cast in stone as he was in no position to smile. He looked back at us grimly, trying to figure out what Watson would likely do next. Hard face, square jaw, high broad cheekbones, his age was indeterminable except he was neither young nor old. It seemed, at the moment, they were the last three men on earth.

"We were only told you were cold-blooded savages and we should kill you quickly."

"Why?" snarled Watson.

"Some shadowy Professor..... Mor....., a Professor Momm....."

"Moriarty!"..... Holmes interrupted, his eyes flashing as his jaw clenched.

"That is it. That is all we know. We never saw anyone else. Paid us handsomely to get you out of the way. There was something this Professor was really concerned about. That is all we were told," he said, struggling to speak, hopeful Watson's attack would stop.

"Who is the woman Delilah?" demanded Watson.

"We do not know any woman."

"Moriarty sent her after me, I know it, I know it," raged Watson. "This was a planned assassination by two hooligans. I am not through with you yet!"

This was going to be a long evening, Sherlock Holmes said to himself.

## **AFTERMATH**

Twenty minutes into the interrogation, Holmes became bored. The first thug had finally regained consciousness, was having trouble standing and still very disoriented. The thugs did not know any more than we learned initially. The attempt by these hooligans to kill us had been a ham-handed direct attack with two purposes.

If the first attempt is successful, we are dead, which is the goal. If not and we survive, then the act delivers a message they are coming after us at any time or place.

After turning the two would-be assassins over to Lestrade, we proceeded back to 221-B Baker Street. As we traveled across the city, I regained my composure and reflected back upon meeting Delilah the week before.

## **DELILAH**

Eyes closed, she purred softly, her steady rhythmic breathing had a hypnotic effect on anyone close by. The relaxed state was restful as well as soothing. There was a slight sound, the creaking of a hinge. Snowflake bolted out the door almost knocking Lady Delilah Thompson off her feet as she ran into the street. Recovering as best she could, Lady Thompson grabbed a shawl off the peg near the door and pursued her cherished Housecat of ten years. With her husband's passing five years ago, Snowflake was her only companion.

Four doors down the street, the basement light was on and curtains carelessly open, clearly displaying most of the large room. Without thinking, Lady Thompson looked in. Stunned, what she discovered, would cost her dearly. This was her frightened recollection she kept repeating, as she struggled to explain to me how she ended up in my surgical office.

When she entered my surgery, it was like the sun came up. I had just discharged a young boy and his mother a few moments before, an arm injury from football practice, and decided to do a bit of writing. He was my only patient for the morning and I had settled into my chair when the door opened and she crossed the threshold with a flourish. A slim young woman with perfect, delicate features.

She was dressed in a beautiful rich, autumn-brown habit with a tailored jacket and smart matching hat with a dyed pen plume. The hat was pulled slightly over one eye, giving her the air of a woman of the world as her hair, a burnished copper, spilled down to her shoulders with wild, lusty abandon. An attractive woman. A sensual woman. Now she had my attention...

"I am looking for Dr. John Watson, former army surgeon."

"Speaking."

"Oh. In that case, I am Lady Delilah Thompson. Call me Delilah," she said, holding out her hand to me. Taking her hand, our eyes locked. My knees felt weak and my mouth dry. Now that I was closer, her eyes seemed enlarged, wider and more luminescent. Her cheeks appeared flushed with excitement. My senses returned in a flash.

"Delilah, are you ill?"

She froze, a concerned expression formed upon that delicate face.

"Here, please sit down," I motioned toward the nearest chair. She eased into it gracefully, her eyes never leaving mine. I handed her a cool compress and poured her a glass of water.

"Thank you, Doctor. I am not physically ill, it is just I have recently witnessed the most frightening scene."

"Please explain," I responded suspiciously.

"I was pursuing my house cat, Snowflake, a dear pet of mine who had bolted from her evening supper out into the street and then up the block. She slowed, then stopped by a light from a basement window of a nearby building. Unusual in my neighborhood, but I looked inside. What I saw was shocking. Four women, young women, stripped of their outer clothing down to their undergarments, all chained together and barefooted. Scared, shaken and crying. When they saw me staring in, they shouted for me to help. They sounded frightened and desperate. Then a burly man entered, looked at the open window and slammed the curtains closed all around. Their cries became muffled. I ran."

"Delilah, you need the police, not a surgeon."

"I went to the police. They said they would look into it. A hurried Investigator Lestrade suggested I see Sherlock Holmes."

"I have heard of your work with Mr. Holmes. Sherlock Holmes was not in, but a surgeon is always treating people in his office. I came to you," her dark green eyes riveting through my puzzled expression.

"He saw me John. He knows what I look like. He can find me!" Her tense grip on my arm relaxed but she did not take her hand away. Her fingers moved to my hand and held it like she would never let go. Shaken and fearful, she remained a stunning woman I could not take my eyes off of as long as she was anywhere near me. This office visit took longer than usual.

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As Ms. Hudson brought breakfast in the following morning, I watched Sherlock Holmes read and twist the message in his hand. Lestrade's message had been direct and to the point.

"Holmes, your assistance would be appreciated. It seems there is a rampage of Kidnappings all over London."

Lestrade'

Sherlock Holmes smiled slightly, his long face reflecting humor was rare, I thought. If you read the papers and listen ever so casually to the barroom chatter, it would seem the newest indoor sport was the kidnapping of young women.

Based upon some of the young women around town, it appeared to me this was a risky form of entertainment.

"Watson, if your schedule permits, it seems our services are requested by Scotland Yard."

I thought I detected a slight air of satisfaction in his voice as I checked my patient appointment ledger and then reached for my hat and coat.

On our way to Scotland Yard, I began to reflect upon my life. I was out of the military, in private practice and had no obligation to anyone save myself. My life should be simple. Instead, my life was very fragmented. Constant interruptions, instead of real surgery, I was treating snotty-nosed youths who were rude, spoiled, undisciplined and delinquent. Occasionally, I met a challenging medical problem. I needed a change.

Or perhaps a woman in my life. I smiled slightly to myself and experienced a brief, warm feeling.

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I woke up just before dawn gasping for breath. Covered with sweat, I twisted and squirmed, trying to get behind something, anything. I realized I was trying to take cover from the rifle fire of the Afghans. Shaking off the nightmare, I counted three this month. As I settled down and looked at the clock for time, I noticed the scented card on the nightstand. My mind flashed back to yesterday.

"Am I going to see you again?" I asked Delilah as she walked slowly toward the door. She turned briefly, smiled and winked. The door closed.

## INCIDENTS

Randall Smith, a medium looking man of fifty, pale faced and quietly dressed, was on his way home from the grocery store two blocks from where he lived. One arm full of bread and sandwich meat and a quart of milk in the other, he made the dreary trudge back to his room on the second floor of the walk-up.

Two teenage girls were playing on the sidewalk ahead of him. He continued toward them, hoping they would not jostle his burden as he really did not want to drop anything. He was only a block away from his room and it had been a long day.

Randall, who worked for the London Times, had spent weeks trying to convince his supervisors to select the Linotype machine over the Paige Compositor. James Paige designed a machine to replace human typesetters with a mechanical arm, but it never worked properly.

Mark Twain invested heavily in the Paige Compositor. Ottmar Mergenthaler invented the Linotype in 1884 before dying in 1889. Until then, no daily newspaper in the world had more than eight pages. This machine revolutionized typesetting, making it possible for a small number of operators to set type for many pages on a daily basis using a 90-character keyboard. Randall had spent many hours explaining the linotype machine which consists of four major sections:

- Magazine
- Keyboard
- Casting mechanism
- Distribution mechanism

The operator interacts with the machine via the keyboard, composing lines of text. The other sections are automatic; they start as soon as a line is completely composed. That was all he could do. A cold sandwich and a glass of milk, scan the Times quickly and then to bed for a long night's sleep that he badly needed.

There was a flash in front of him. An unmarked carriage pulled to the curb next to the two playing girls. A large man moving quickly grabbed the nearest girl and shoved her toward the waiting door of the carriage. Suddenly she was screaming at the top of her voice.

Randall dropped his groceries down on the sidewalk and ran to help the girl. He grabbed to pull her away from her abductor. There was a movement behind him. A brutal blow fell upon the back of his head. It felt like his head had exploded. Another blow and he was on the sidewalk with the back of his head crushed. The last thing he heard was the young girl screaming. The other teenage girl ran like the wind, screaming and escaped into a friendly neighbor's doorway. She cried until midnight.

"I am Sherlock Holmes, this is Dr. Watson. We are working with Scotland Yard investigating the abduction of a young girl last night, a Janie Johnson."

A sleepy unkempt middle aged woman had answered the door. She looked at us through droopy eyes and said;

"Yes, Jamie's mother is here, my daughter managed to escape. It is horrible."

"Thank you for talking to us," replied Holmes.

While Holmes was getting the names straight, I was listening carefully to the shaken teen-age girl explain the kidnapping of her best friend, right in front of her. She was a nervous, crying, hysterical mess. And rightly so. Desperate for clues, I hurried downstairs to the scene of the abduction.

I inspected the curb and sidewalk for any chance of a clue or evidence and was about to give up. Then, as I turned to rejoin the interviewing of the victims, I spotted a piece of torn cloth, unlike anything the young girls would have worn. Significant or not, I placed it into a small pull-cloth container for Holmes to review later. Randall Smith's groceries had disappeared sometime during the night after the incident.

It seemed a minor thing, now that he was a number down at the city morgue awaiting for some lost relative to claim his remains. Holmes would inspect the corpse for clues, later today. Sadly, this was another tragedy in ".....London, the great cesspool into which all the loungers and idlers of the Empire are irresistibly drained."

The following day, we once again were interviewing yet another mother whose daughter was the victim of the latest teenage girl abduction.

"This is not going to happen to us!" Harold Wickerton stated firmly to his wife.

"If I have to walk her home every afternoon myself."

"This police force cannot do anything right," he complained loudly.

Angry about the daily reports of the city wide spree of the kidnapping of young teenage girls and Scotland Yard's inability to stop the senseless and horrible crimes, he was a concerned and angry citizen.

"They will get something they are not looking for," he muttered as he loaded bullets into the revolver chamber of his pistol.

"I am going to the school now, Wanda," he called to his wife as he departed.

Wanda Wickerton looked distraught. Harold Wickerton was a strong medium sized man in excellent physical condition. Not handsome, but not unattractive. His chosen trade kept him in good physical condition equal to that of younger men. He could hold his own in most any brawl and was accustomed to getting his way in most matters. This business of the kidnapping and murders, he considered police incompetence and a flagrant failure to recognize danger on the part of the victims.

His daughter, Susan saw him and spontaneously ran to him. He lifted the girl into his arms, hugged her and then set her down on the sidewalk. They turned and began walking home, hand in hand, side by side. Unbeknownst to Harold Wickerton or his daughter, behind them, in the very spot on which they had just stood, her teenage classmate, Loren Parker, was being physically grabbed off the street and subsequently disappeared. Three people saw this, but did nothing. It was too fast.

Harold Wickerton read about the kidnapping the next morning in the London Times.

"This is insane," I complained to Holmes. "People are being murdered, teenage girls grabbed off the street with all ease and reckless abandon. Scotland Yard cannot keep up. What is this about?"

"Watson, these kidnappings are going on all over town. What is happening?" Holmes asked himself, as he tried to 'deduct' and 'reason' his way through this dilemma. He stared out the window, smoking his clay pipe in deep thought. Carefully, he began to speak.

"Most of the Metropolitan Police Force and many of the smaller forces are overcome by the Murder/Kidnapping crime wave."

"We are missing something. Something big, I fear."

"Presently, there are no extra officers to look at any other crimes."

"We are very near a complete breakdown of law and order. It is like some sinister force has floated down upon the city." I complained.

"That is fifteen girls within the last ten days."

The expression on Holmes face changed noticeably. His expression became dark and apprehensive.

"We are on the brink of something, something big," he replied gloomily.

## STRATEGY

"NO! I said heavy carriages. Carriages and horses that can handle unusually heavy weights for a lengthy time. What? Yes! Like carrying military equipment and ammunition? Yes, something like that, you might say."

"I want six carriages, four horse teams of good stock. Assemble them at "The Farm" as soon as possible. Yes, I am aware of the cost. Not to worry, you will be paid handsomely as soon as they are assembled and delivered. No. I will provide drivers."

"From this point on, 'Big George, the German,' will be in charge. I have a meeting in Paris. Remember, secrecy and silence are the watchwords. If anyone talks, they will not live

thirty days. Of course I have a team in place, all professional killers. That is all. Go!"

'One-Thumb Tommie' Lujack shook his head. He had worked for Professor Moriarty before simply because he pays very well. But the Professor is just plain dangerous. He shot a bloke in the back of the head for just looking at a bird and winking, while on the job. He has street rules and enforces them without mercy. I guess that is why they call him "The Napoleon of Crime." Tommie shrugged and then went back to work.

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"You asked to see me again, John; well, here I am."

And there she was. Lady Delilah Thompson looked gorgeous. Full breasts, small waist, and long legs. She had creamy white skin, no freckles and long burnished copper hair pulled back and up with two long tendrils spilling down each side of her face. Then she smiled. It was like someone turned the lights on a Christmas tree. I had to catch my breath.

"Do you have patients here, John?"

"No, the last one left a half hour ago."

"Good," she said never breaking that slow seductive stride as she walked directly up to me. When she stopped, we were almost touching. Our eyes met and held each other. Not quite touching, but almost, her beauty radiated a tantalizing aura. I could smell the fragrance of her clothing, the aroma of her freshly brushed hair. Her breath was steady and deep. Her smile barely changed as her full lips parted slightly and then she kissed me, slowly, sensually full on the mouth.

My mustache caused her to twitch slightly as her mouth settled comfortably with mine. I think I was dizzy, but I am really not sure. My hands touched her tiny waist and then my arms encircled her as I gently pulled her closer. It was hypnotic, like a hazy dream. We stood like that for.....it seemed like time stood still. Finally we parted. She stepped back a half-step and smiled. I could not say anything. It was like my brain was mush.

"You are adorable," she whispered. I could not speak.

"Tomorrow John. Three PM at Charing Cross Hotel. Three o'clock in the lobby." I regained my senses five minutes after the door closed behind her.

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That evening, Holmes had one more interesting piece of news.

"The piece of torn cloth that you found in the street at the abduction scene yesterday, Watson, has been matched with a local tailor known to be used by Professor Moriarty in the past. It is part of a sample swatch for a man's suit," stated Holmes as he continued to study the swatch.

"This is a new low for Moriarty, do you not think?"

Holmes did not immediately reply. I could tell that he was in deep thought. A few minutes later, he seemed to have reached a cross-road.

"Watson, Moriarty has used the services of this tailor many times during the last decade, but that simply proves he has good taste in tailors. It places him no closer to any of the recent criminal activity. At best, it is a swatch of cloth he likes. Nothing more. We need something to connect him

directly with any or all of the crimes. This continues to be difficult."

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I arrived at Charing Cross Hotel and waited. It was two-thirty PM and we had plenty of time. Three PM approached and nothing.

She was not there. I was alone. At three-thirty I stood up to go to the bar when a young messenger approached me.

"Are you Dr. John Watson?"

"Yes."

"This is for you," the lad stated, handing me a card. I was puzzled.

It was her writing, I could tell. My hands shook. I steadied myself and opened the card.

"John, I am sorry." That was all. She was gone.

Instinctively, I knew she was gone forever. I was hurt, but this passed quickly. Then I became angry. Very angry.

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At ten AM the following morning, we interviewed yet another kidnap victim's mother.

Melva Van Meter was the young girl's name. Described as shy and very pretty, she was liked by all who met her.

"She did not deserve this," wept her mother wringing her hands incessantly.

The remainder of the interview was almost identical to what we had heard for a week now. Grabbed off the street suddenly, large men were the attackers, very fast and well organized. If there was any help available nearby, it was cut down immediately with brutal force.

It was as if there was a shadow military out there, wandering the streets at random, taking whoever they wanted, whenever they wanted. We gleaned what evidence we could from the grieving parents, but it was all much the same. They did not know who or why and there was no reason for their daughters to be taken.

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We concluded the interview and walked to the street to summon a hansom. Two hooligans came out of nowhere.....

Sherlock Holmes savagely thrust the single-stick straight forward into the man's midsection knocking the wind out of him. A half-step, then he brought the short end across, his right foot planted, he put his full weight into the crossing blow which struck the culprit's jaw, shattering bone and teeth. The man was unconscious before he hit the ground. Quickly looking back over his shoulder, he sought to locate Dr. Watson, who had his hands full.....

## IMPACT

Exactly on time, the heavy trucks lined up on the street. In the street, work crews set up "REPAIR" signs and blocked off a sizeable section of the entire block. Men in overalls with "MAINTENANCE" marked on the back of the coveralls swarmed the area. Pedestrians passing by, made casual comments like

"about time the city does something," and so forth. Business and commerce continued unimpeded.

No one really thought anything about it. Big George, the German executed his plan quickly and efficiently. Large containers moved from inside the impregnable building into the large trucks without any delay. Two patrolling bobbys had noticed the unusual activity in front of The Bank of England, but it appeared to be a normal maintenance project, well needed, they concluded. One thing did linger, however, the crews were far more active and more efficient than ordinary city employees. They wandered over and inquired about the project.

"Orders from above," the foreman said. "We are to finish this today 'or else', he replied with resignation. The bobbys strolled on. In less than an hour, the transfer was complete. The crew dispersed their trucks with care, pulled down their signs, picked up their equipment and supplies and were gone. In exactly one hour and ten minutes, the street looked normal. Unless you had seen it, you would have never known they were there. One hour later, panic struck.

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The next morning Holmes opened his copy of the Times. The bold headlines splashed across the front page chilled him to the bone. His jaw clenched, his fists doubled as he threw the paper across the room. One-half hour later, he regained most of his composure. Calmly, he addressed the issue.

"Watson, he has done it again. Now, after the fact, we know the answers to our many mysteries."

The headlines of the Times said it all:

#### "GOLD BULLION STOLEN FROM THE BANK OF ENGLAND IN BROAD DAYLIGHT"

On page two, a news release stated that several kidnap victims had been released. Terrified, traumatized and slightly undernourished but otherwise unharmed, fifteen young teenage girls were discovered in the basement of a downtown building based upon a tip via messenger to Scotland Yard early this morning. The girls were being treated by physicians and released to their parents as this news comes to press.

Quietly, Homes observed, "It seems that the entire City of London has been the victim of distraction and deception."

"She was a diversion, Holmes; she was a diversion!" I screamed.

"He sent her! He sent her!" I cried.

"She was a bloody diversion all of the time. Moriarty! That evil serpent! It was his plan all along. She was a mere tool.....a mere tool.....An implement. I was a mere tool.....Something to be used and then cast aside. I am going to kill him. I am going to kill him ten times over!" I shrieked at the top of my voice.

#### REVIEW

Inspector Lestrade dropped by in the afternoon. With the sudden drop in murders and the almost drying up of

kidnapping cases, it seemed he finally had time to catch his breath. He was also interested in what Sherlock Holmes thought of all of this. Holmes responded.

"Gentlemen, this entire episode turns upon diversion, distraction and deception.

We now know what Moriarty tried to prevent us from finding out."

"He seemed to think it was important enough that he tried to kill us," I replied.

"We know now that the underlying plan was to steal the gold bullion from The Bank of England," Holmes continued.

"The low level of interest rates in the 1890's, associated with large gold inflows, had a huge impact on the economy. The result was a surge in industrial and home construction. Home building, a booming stock market and the demand for bullion and gold coin resulted in robust British economic activity. Great Britain rose to the status of monetary dominance in 1871 with widespread adoption of the Gold Standard. During the gold standard of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, Britain became the greatest exporter of financial capital.

"London became the center of the world gold, money, and financial markets. In order for Paris, Berlin, and other financial centers to attract the lucrative financial business from London, it was necessary for them to adopt the Gold Standard, for it reduced costs, provided an example for credit worthiness, and a sound financial policy from the government. The city of London was the leading supplier of both short term and long term credit, which was channeled abroad. Records show that between 1870 and 1913, sterling bills and short-term credits financed as much as 60 percent of world trade during these years.

"The world had never before seen one nation committing so much of its national income and savings to foreign investment. British loans to foreigners were made in sterling, which allowed the borrowing country to service the debt more conveniently with its sterling reserves, and Britain's use of written instructions to pay or bill exchanges were drawn in London to finance international trade.

"James Moriarty saw this as the perfect time to abscond with enormous amounts of gold held in the vaults of the Bank of England. The grand design was to keep Scotland Yard, myself and Dr. Watson searching for murders and kidnapers. The abduction of teenage girls was certain to inflame the press. Taking an extra precaution, Moriarty sent Lady Delilah Thompson to distract Dr. Watson in a very real way.

"With the overwhelming case workload and the very effective distraction by Delilah, our focus was far away from the larger unfolding plan. Everyone forgot about the huge inflow of gold. It was a perfectly executed plan. Outright theft and moving that much bullion would be difficult, but with Scotland Yard, myself and Dr. Watson busy trying to solve murders and find kidnapped young girls, it was an ideal time for him to make his move. There were too many kidnappings. The diversion worked perfectly."

"This plan was what he went to so much trouble to conceal. Truly, life is a trial by fire," uttered Holmes with resignation.

He had once again been outwitted by Professor Moriarty.



# *"The Case of The Women of Haggerton Hill"*

*The 4th of A Random Tetralogy of Sherlockian Pastiche*

## **PROLOGUE**

"Do not go there! Do not go anywhere near there!" warned the old man. Unconsciously he wiped his nose on his sleeve and spat into the street. I felt lucky that he had first turned his head away. The lung disease was obvious.

"Why?"

And I wished that I could take that back even as I spoke. His expression changed abruptly. The transformation was frightening. His wrinkled face turned to pure horror, almost like he saw the devil himself.

"It, it, be dangerous!" he sputtered. Almost unable to speak, the fear overcame him so quickly that I then began to hope I had not caused a stroke by asking.

"Is it haunted?" I foolishly continued.

"There is something wrong with those women, bad wrong, really bad wrong!"

"Are they sick?"

"They are the devil!"

Looking past the old man to the right, I saw a church steeple. Perhaps I could get some reasonable answers from the clergyman. Very little was known about The Women of Haggerton Hill, I was discovering. Sherlock Holmes was out of the country at the present time and as the case had come up unexpectedly, he had wired me to begin the investigation in our behalf.

"Yes, they are a quaint group of souls," the minister replied as he carefully looked me over.

"Of course, there are the rumors, folklore as it is called around the local countryside. I have been here eight years and only once met two of the women a few years back. They were pleasant enough, but very distrusting. They were courteous, but brief. Friendly, but did not seem to care much for socializing with anyone. Of course, that was just the way they struck me. I have been told the local Sheriff has periodic contact with them, but he is not much for sharing information."

"None of them ever worshipped with you?"

"Actually, about two years ago, three of them attended one of my Sunday services. They stayed for about an hour after the service and visited, but I thought really just observed, as though they wanted to know who was attending the services. Just curious, I suppose."

"Where is the Sheriff's office?" I inquired.

The Sheriff was not much help. Actually, he seems disinterested in the whole matter.

"Yes, they are a secretive lot. However, you must understand, these are battered and molested women and children, all female. They wish to be left alone to heal. They cause no trouble, stick to their own affairs, are pretty much self-supporting with some assistance from the churches in the area. They are no danger to the public and more importantly, they are no trouble to me. Now, what do you want?"

And that pretty well sums up my inquiry about the mysterious women who lived up on the hill. I was going to have to do this without the Sheriff's help.

## **INSPECTOR GREGSON'S CASE**

Inspector Gregson lingered as the bobbies finished with the crime scene involving the burglary of a local haberdashery. Holmes and I were about to leave, when he approached us with a concerned look.

"A word, if you please, Mr. Holmes."

"Of course, Inspector, how may I help you?"

"It is a private matter that I was asked about after church service last Sunday."

"Should you not be speaking to a priest?" replied Holmes looking puzzled.

"Actually, no. It is a missing persons case. No crime suspected, just that the interested party cannot find the person in question."

"And that would interest me why?" replied Holmes with a bored expression.

"First, the woman disappeared years ago and second, there is a generous fee involved as the circumstances involve the finding of the beneficiary for settlement of a substantial estate."

"Likely already dead, I would imagine," replied Holmes, more interested in the arrival of a hansom than one of the hundreds of persons gone missing in England each year.

"There is more to it than that."

"Then see me tomorrow before noon," as a hansom finally pulled up before us.

"I will be there at nine AM," Gregson replied to the closing door of the cab and the crack of the driver's whip.

"I am a consulting Detective, not an Estate Settlor," muttered Holmes as he settled himself into the seat for the ride back to 221-B Baker Street.

## **A BALANCE OF ACCOUNTS**

He was frightened. His hands shook so badly that he shoved an open palm underneath each armpit and squeezed, trying to get the nerves in his lower arms and hands to relax enough so that he could use them to hold his lightweight briefcase with one hand and with the other, grasp something, anything, to keep his legs beneath him. Walter Nelson was scared.

Terror radiated from his eyes. The wide-eyed horror caused a passing child to clutch his mothers skirt so tight she almost tripped. Frantically, he rushed toward the vacant end of the boarding platform at Leyton Station. The few people present boarded the last car and then it sped away. The platform and the surrounding area were empty of any human presence.

"It doesn't matter. I'm going to kill him anyway. This place is as good as any."

With one fluid motion she attached the homemade noise suppressor. Three hundred sixty degrees, check. They were alone. Everyone was gone. Slight breeze at forty degrees, sun just off her left shoulder at about seven o'clock. She picked him up in her sights. He was pale, sweating like it was mid-July. Sensing that she was nearby, he looked back, directly toward her and blinked. In the middle of that blink, she squeezed the trigger gently, like she was adjusting a baby's diaper. The big gun bucked slightly. The target slid to the ground like he had suddenly dropped off to sleep. Instinctively she picked up her brass, dropping the single spent shell casing into the pocket of her blouse and policed the area. Within less than a minute, no one could tell that she had ever been there. Five miles away, the tension left her body. The Royal Marine had trained her well. The sinking sun was an expanse of beauty as the golden rays softly melted into the peaceful horizon. Mother Night reigned over her kingdom. All the world was in order.

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The next morning The Women of Haggerton Hill somberly moved about, making coffee and breakfast. Lorene, one of the senior of the group, quietly commented.

"Sarah has balanced her accounts."

The group listened respectfully, almost reverently. There would be no questions. There would be no details.

"Peace be upon Sarah," she added.

"Peace be upon Sarah," the group replied in unison.

The youngest of the new arrivals whispered to her 'Counseling Sister';

"What does it mean, 'She balanced her accounts'?"

Her 'Counseling Sister' looked directly into her eyes and replied sternly,

"Justice has been done."

## **INSPECTOR LESTRADE'S CASE**

"A white male of late middle age was found shot to death at the Leyton Station." explained Lestrade to a bored and still sleepy Sherlock Holmes.

"A routine occurrence in that part of town," came the disinterested reply.

"Holmes, the deceased was a suspect in a child slave trade ring that we had under surveillance for the last six months. He was our best lead."

"It appears, my good man, someone has solved your problem for you. Have some breakfast, mix yourself a whisky and get some rest," counseled Holmes as he searched for his morning 'London Times.' Lestrade glared.

"We had a man following him. There were none of the usual thugs nearby. It was not his competition. Someone got in past our surveillance, shot him and got out without leaving a whisper of evidence. I cannot put my finger on it, but this is different. It is too neat, too clean, too something I just cannot grasp. No robbery, no messy bludgeoning, no nothing. Just clean and crisp from a distance. There was no one anywhere near him. Only a group of children earlier, on their way home from school with a few women chaperoning them. Even they were interviewed."

Sherlock Holmes was listening. I could see something had pricked his interest. He was silent.

"I have to go." stated Lestrade.

"Holmes?"

Holmes looked over his coffee cup at Lestrade.

"I travel to France tomorrow. I will discuss the matter with Dr. Watson."

"I am right here, Holmes," I reminded him.

Lestrade slammed the door as he left, startling Ms Hudson as she was bringing in breakfast.

## **BENEFICIARY**

I reviewed the file on Gregson's estate case. There was not a lot to go on. It seems that a professional seafaring man, who spent most of his life in Southeast Asia, had lately discovered that he had a niece he had never seen, living in England. He had never had an occasion to return to the British Isles as he had made his home in the far east. Knowing his brother, the father of the child, was a man without morals, ethics or any redeeming characteristics, he chose to leave a large part of his estate to the niece here in England, one Sarah Nelson. Holmes, for reasons yet to be disclosed, had chosen to accept this case, promptly left the country and turned over all inquiry, investigation and search for the heir to me to deal with. In spite of the substantial fee, this case would be difficult. And now, I soldier on.

A search of records tells me that Sarah Nelson was born in Liverpool, was 29 years old and had run away from home at an undetermined age. Liverpool records say Sarah had attended one of the many Ragged Schools (so called because of the tattered clothes worn by poor pupils). Very likely, she had been kept away from school by her worthless parents who would rather have her earning money. From what I could find at that point, she had fallen off the face of the earth. She was found wandering the streets of Liverpool appearing to be insane. She was referred to a Doctor who had her transferred to The Haggerton Hill Home For Wayward Girls and Women. This however cannot be verified and the Home discloses very little information by request. There seems to be a rule of silence, fierce loyalty to each other and an unbelievable hate toward outsiders.

## **INVESTIGATION**

In order to get Lestrade settled down, I decided to do some work on his case before starting off on the estate search. I returned to the crime scene. Lestrade was right, there is nothing here, I concluded after looking around for close to an hour. I combed over every square foot of Leyton Station with an eagle eye. The only thing that caught my interest had nothing to do with murder. Over near a corner, out of the way, I stepped on to a few soil particles that gave off a kind of greenish glow, if you held it just right in the light. Fragments from some type of decoration, no doubt.

## **SOME YEARS BEFORE**

Sarah Nelson woke up slowly. What ever it was, the drugs, the physical beating she took resisting the orderlies or just the strain of the transfer, it had taken all of the energy out

of her. She felt like a shapeless glob. She tried to roll over, but the restraints held her, painfully if she pulled against them. She just lay there, her mind completely blank. Sometime later, she heard a harsh cough.

"No. This is alright. Thank you."

It was a deep male voice, strong but not mean. Slowly she opened her eyes, twisted and looked in the direction of the speaker. He was sitting up in bed, in an odd position looking at something behind her. High forehead, dark brown eyes, perfect cheekbones and a strong jaw. His skin was pale and he needed a haircut. Clearly military, then she noticed. There was nothing beneath the sheet where his legs should be.

"Good morning, sunshine," his voice rumbled.

He would be handsome if he were not so sad, she thought. Suddenly she was aware of what she looked like. Hair, unkempt and tangled, no make-up and unbathed for two days.

"Hello yourself," she managed to mumble.

Where, for crying out loud, was she and why was she messed up like this? She looked around as best she could. Everywhere there was a jumble of patients in various stages of illness, jammed together in no apparent order.

"We are not supposed to be on the same floor. You cannot mix men and women. Why are you here?"

"We have been dumped here. We are the misfits. They do not care where they put us. I got blown in half," he responded bitterly.

"You are here because you are insane. It says so on your chart in big letters." Through the anger, there was a warm quality in his voice that was covered by all of the hostility.

"They do not care, get over it," he replied, looking away with continued seething through every word.

"They think we are all crazy."

The following day, life's misery began all over again. Sarah lived like a robot, mechanically tolerating each day of what the nurses identified as noticeable recovery. She did, however, take note that the young marine, Royce (Roy) Turner, was actually more sane than most everything going on around her. Bitter as he was over his injury, he managed to be encouraging to other patients and also to the staff of nurses and orderlies that attended them.

"What is it with you Roy, you keep fighting to be lighthearted, like we had something to live for?"

His eyes blazed. She noticed that he was exceptionally well muscled above the waist. In an unkempt way, he looked strong, fearless, afraid of nothing.

Gathering his mental strength, he looked her over closely, as he had done every day since she had arrived in his section of the ward. He realized that he liked looking at her.

"After what I have seen and lived through, I am just lucky to be here. If they wanted me dead, they did a poor job. I am going to recover as best I can, just to show that I refuse to go quietly in the night. 'I am the wrath of God, Ali, and the Devil incarnate. Vengeance is mine, sayth the lord, but until he gets here, they will have to deal with me.' I refuse to lay down and die. Stop whining, you have two more legs than I do, but I promise you, I can still be effective," he declared.

"Really, show me." Her rebuke was harsh and angry. He smiled at her disbelief and helplessness. Then his eyes became soft, understanding and strangely attractive to her. At this point she did not know what to think.

"Get some rest," he said gently.

"Tomorrow we begin. We will find out what is behind all of that defeat and anger."

Six months later, things were different for both of them.

"Move over Roy, I am getting into bed with you."

"Sarah, I am a cripple. I cannot ....."

"I do not care, I will show you how, just get the rails out of the way."

"I am a wreck, you can see, you know I have no legs. I am nothing. I....."

"Hush! I do not care. You are the only man who never tried to hurt me. You are the only man who ever showed me any respect. You are the only man who ever helped me. You are the only man who showed me how to get my life back. Now get those damn rails out of the way. I am going to make you feel like the man you are."

A nurse and an orderly were randomly checking on their assigned area of the hospital which included this shut-away sector of the ward. Aimlessly, they came into view of the preoccupied patients and for a brief moment, curiously watched. They looked at each other. The nurse spoke first, in a whisper.

"So what? He has been blown half in two. And her, she is a nut case, insane, from day one. Besides, we are busy with all the others. So what?"

"Ugh, six months ago, he was suicidal, days to live. And she, a mangled psychological disaster. We need to check on No. 23 on the third floor anyway," replied the orderly as they moved on with their allotted duties.

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Two years before the Boxer Uprising, the British government, in anticipation of local unrest in North China, sent a small contingent of Royal Marines to gather intelligence on The Big Swords Society, a peasant self-defense group, famous for their reckless courage.

While gathering intelligence before the attack known as the Juye Incident, the marine contingent was discovered and a gun battle broke out. During the fight, a young marine tried to rescue a fallen comrade. He was shot twice by enemy fire and while struggling for cover, the corner of a stone building collapsed, crushing Pvt. Royce Turner. Emergency medical treatment was of no avail resulting in the loss of both his legs.

## THELMA

The woman looked like any other of the appealing young actresses that were attracted to the stage and theater culture. Flashing smile, piercing blue eyes and lustrous brown hair that tumbled down to her shoulders shaping an almost baby face, cute nose and perfect complexion. Her regalia was tempting but not vulgar and centered by a simple but perfectly tailored print dress. She was pretty. Not so obvious, there was a hard feature about those piercing blue eyes.

Her last boyfriend, for an extended time, was a sailor, well-traveled and ten years her senior. His associates were rough company for much of his life, but he had a soft touch when it came to Thelma Masters. They parted on good terms. They still exchanged letters from him from time to time and still cared for each other in some strange way. Tonight she was on a different kind of stage. Each time she came here, her

hair was different, her dress definitely slutty and her disguised voice was deep and gravelly. The man had danced with her a few weeks ago and readily approached her. Little did he know that she was his long lost daughter. The daughter that he had molested many times as a child, sold into child labor every time he could. He had not a clue

"Hi sweetheart. How about you and I try the dance floor for a bit?"

She smiled and twisted, showing a bit of excess cleavage. Two tunes later and he suggested something more personal. She smiled. They departed, through a side door into the darkness. A few minutes away into the trees, he stopped and turned. The specially modified seaman's knife skidded off a rib and then easily penetrated his heart. He gasped. This time a harder thrust stuck the point into a rib and it took all of her strength to pull it loose and then thrust again going all the way through the target's eye socket. He tried to respond, but a high-heeled boot crushed the top of his foot. Four times more, she cut him and then caught the jugular in strong slicing motion. His attempts to cry out resulted in only a gurgling sound. He fell to the ground, dying. She quickly checked the surrounding area for any sign of evidence. Satisfied, Thelma straightened her clothing and returned through the side entrance to the dance hall. Inside the Ladies Powder Room, she noticed blood on her sleeve.

"That door, It had a nasty snag. They should do something about it," she commented to anyone listening. She washed her arm and sleeve with cold water.

"I warned them about that door last week," another woman stated from an adjoining stall. Ten minutes later, Thelma Masters was in a hansom on her way home.

## INVESTIGATION

Right now, I did not see how I could help Inspector Lestrade with his growing number of murder cases. There appeared to be no evidence at all. The Sarah Nelson estate case was tucked in the other side of my briefcase. There was no way around it. With little solid information to go on, I was going to have to see if I could visit The Women of Haggerton Hill.

When I started up the roadway, the only entrance to Haggerton Hill, was through a simple but strong gate. Inside the gate roamed packs of dogs, apparently friendly except when you tried to touch the gate, then unbelievable hostility came over them. Eventually an older woman would come and look. If she liked what she saw, you were admitted entry to the brief outer parameter where you were questioned about your intentions. Then if found favorable, escorted to a small guard shack. You waited there until the member agreed to see you. Then she came down to the guard shack with an escort and a dog. It seemed they knew nothing of a Sarah Nelson. While waiting for all of this to develop, I practiced Holmes's habit of observing everything around him. One thing stood out about my surroundings. The soil of the roadway and around the base of the hill was so rich in minerals that particles in the soil gave out a green glow. Nonchalantly, I scooped up a sample, wrapped it in my handkerchief and dropped it into my front pocket. This unique kind of rock was the only thing that caught my attention. That and the fact that even at home, it was very difficult to remove. The stuff just stuck to my boots.

## INTERNAL NOTES

Thelma looked refreshed. Like a new woman. Her younger comrades were puzzled. The older of the group glanced at each other with knowing expressions. A nod, a satisfying glimpse around the supper table aroused the curiosity of the newest of the group.

"Why is everyone looking so satisfied? Did I miss something important?"

"Justice has prevailed." Replied the oldest of the group.

The conversation moved on to the detailed planning of the next day's activities.

## CRIME SCENE INVESTIGATIONS

I had just sat down for breakfast and the morning copy of the Times when Inspector Lestrade arrived.

"When is Holmes coming back?" were the first words out of his mouth.

"Inspector, I am afraid that I do not know."

Lestrade's jaw clenched and I felt I should say something.

"Perhaps I can help."

Lestrade looked me over with a dubious stare.

"Perhaps you can," he finally replied.

"You are good with details. I have not one, but two new murder cases that need the crime scenes investigated before evidence is lost. Maybe you can help."

"I will do my best."

"Here are the addresses: 125 Converse Lane, a Mr. Fredrick Masters has met with a brutal demise," reluctantly divulged Lestrade.

"Also, a Mr. Lawrence Eldridge lies dead at 356 Haines Street. Report to me as soon as possible."

I was unable to tell whether he thought I could really of help or just try to rescue what evidence was available.

"I shall leave shortly," I replied as he gave me a stern look and then walked out the door.

The first crime scene was the death of one Fredrick Masters. Now I know why Lestrade turned the crime scene investigation over to me. The crime scene called for an experienced investigator, but due to the victim's reputation, Investigator Lestrade was perfectly happy to let me go through the motions. One less child-pervert on the street. When I arrived the officer who had secured the scene was talking to an old woman who was very upset.

"That man is no good," she almost shouted at the officer. He was scribbling on a notepad as fast as he could.

"He takes those children into that old house. I have seen it time after time. I call the police, no one comes." Her face was now flushed and she was breathing hard.

I identified myself to the officer and advising him that I was there at the request of Investigator Lestrade of Scotland Yard and would take over the crime scene.

"I am glad to hear that Dr. Watson," he replied, looking very relieved. Glancing toward the old woman, he said,

"She is all yours."

By now the old woman had caught her breath, was breathing normally and ready to start again with her raving. It seems that Fredrick Masters had been molesting young girls in the neighborhood for a very long time. She had complained to anyone who would listen and now was glad he was dead.

"It riddled the neighborhood of a pervert."

I strolled around slowly, looking over the grounds as I listened to her continue to complain. In a bare area under one of the large trees, I thought that I caught a greenish reflection from the bare ground. Dark greenish, like something off of a decoration. I interviewed two more people, then turned to leave and looked at my boots. That dark greenish glitter was on my boots again. Hopefully the next crime scene will be less dramatic, I noted, still looking at my boots.

Arriving at 356 Harris Street with a sigh of relief, I was thankful to get away from the old woman. Hank, an old partially blind ex-soldier, was absolutely sure that Lawrence Eldridge was kidnapping young boys and girls, killing them and selling their bodies to Medical Students for surgical practice.

"I cannot prove it, I am not fast enough to catch him, but medical students come here regularly and leave with bodies. I know my eyes are bad but I know this is what is happening, I swear. Most of the corpses are young girls about puberty age, and no one cares," he said shaking his head hopelessly.

I searched the area, he pointed to, and found nothing, then out of recent habit, looked at my boots. There again, a whisper of dark green decorative flakes of soil clung to my boots.

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"I have not seen Martha for almost a month. I am concerned. Where could she be? Who? Martha Eldridge  
"She is taking back some of her own." was the tacit reply.  
"Peace be upon Martha," she added.  
"Peace be upon Martha," the group replied in unison.  
"Her own"? What does that even mean?" a new girl asked.

Suddenly there were severe looks from all around the room. Some even hostile.

"Oh."

Still, there had been whispers about a bad man who had been stabbed to death somewhere over the county line. Details were very sketchy. Silence engulfed the room. Activity in these areas was never questioned. Should the party choose to share the events and information, others listened quietly and certainly with understanding. No writing, no records, no remembrance. Everyone understood. Total and unquestioned secrecy. Total and unquestioned confidentiality.

Periodically, vague information like this would arrive. The occurrences were random and unannounced. These were The Women of Haggerton Hill.

## DISPOSITION

I scheduled the entire afternoon to consult with Sarah Nelson as I suspected it would be a lot for the woman to absorb, recognize and adjust to. Once I identified that she was actually the party that I was searching for and identified her, things began to progress at a better pace. As a doctor, once I had gained her confidence and she understood my mission, she began to speak freely. I was very much interested in her reaction, so I quietly listened, at length, to anything she had to say. This is her story, fragmented, at times, in her own words.

"I apologize for being so difficult Dr. Watson but you must understand that I have had difficulty with strangers and

news of any civil relatives is hard for me to understand. As you know, from searching into my past, life has not been kind to me and there are certain things that I am still dealing with, that still trigger desperate feelings. It is just that.....

I felt different. It was a break, a tearing apart, like walking away from a bad car wreck or from a battlefield. Like getting out of prison, scarred and injured, but determined to make a different life, resolving to carve a better path for myself. I am escaping the wreckage.

I felt in some way I could see myself from outside of myself, as though in some way I was an observer. Yet I could still feel all of the feelings, very acutely. I ran and kept running until I felt clean and pure and safe. I washed myself, cleansed as much as I could, from all of the bad. Like a physician performing a physical exam on a patient, two arms, two legs, ten fingers and ten toes. I checked every inch of my body. I felt better, I was physically intact."

Her words were staggered as they lurched from her damaged soul. Disjointed as her speech was, I was beginning to understand the mental trauma that she had experienced. Catching her breath, she continued.

"My own father, whom I had loved dearly and trusted to care for me had done this. I was thirteen. He came into my room one night. It was a Wednesday night, the weather was cold, it was December. He said he wanted to talk. His voice was ragged from the whiskey. He reached over to kiss me and then his hands were underneath my night gown. He pushed it up. Then he was on top of me. I didn't know what was happening. After that night, it was a regular occurrence, every night over and over again. My own father."

She started crying. It came in convulsive spasms that shook her entire body until she could hardly breathe. She steadied herself and continued.

"I have hated him ever since. It was a break, a death of trust. I cried every night for a year, lived within myself, lonely and wondering what I had done wrong. Then one Sunday at church, I heard a woman speak about rebirth, a new beginning. On the way home, I began running as fast as I could until I felt washed clean and free of the nightmare."

"I control my own life now. What do you want?"

It was a forceful question, from this dainty woman. It radiated strength, like she was now made of steel, unyielding and in control. There was no way that I was going to underestimate the willpower of this woman and there was no question in my mind that all that had happened to this woman, she had recreated her life, all of it. She was smarter, better, stronger. Better than she had ever been before.

"I feel that I have some good news for you, Miss Nelson. On behalf of Sherlock Holmes and myself, in your service, it seems that you are the beneficiary of a sizeable estate left to you by an uncle who did not know about you until a few years ago but was unable to locate you. A seafaring man, he spent most of his time in Southeast Asia, never returning to England."

I continued to explain the difficulties that I had encountered in locating her and establishing that she was Sarah Nelson. Of course I left out most of the information of her tragic life. She was very quiet and very attentive. Obviously this was something she had never dreamed would

happen and took her time adjusting to the news of her new found fortune. The estate was substantial. Once she came to grips with the change this brought to her life, she looked as though she had made peace with herself. Toward the end of the meeting, I made an insightful inquiry.

"What are you going to do with all of this money?" I gently asked.

She looked up, thought for a brief moment and then a whisper of a smile began to appear. Her answer was low and with purpose.

"There is a Royal Marine out there....."

## CONCLUSION

"Dreadful, vile, hideous, abysmal and atrocious. These are some of the words used to describe what had happened to every one of these women as a child. Each of these Women of Haggerton Hill was victimized in a bone-chilling manner." This is the way I explained the findings to Sherlock Holmes, who had just arrived home from France and was very much interested in my handling of our assigned case.

"Each, in a particular way that marked them for the rest of their lives. Their childhood was one of misery and fear. Each individual woman was subjected to some vile and despicable event, early in life, that drastically shaped their character in a way that they were forever changed into merciless empty souls seeking revenge and retribution from all who appeared before them. Each in her own time, each in her own way, they were coming back. It is a long trip. There were taking their lives back. One day at a time, one piece at a time, steadily they were regaining their own souls. Soon it grew into an avalanche of restoration. This was not pretty. These were The Women of Haggerton Hill."

It was tragic for these women, but it was not within my power to correct all of the wrongs of this world. It was too much. I had no interest in pursuing all of the damage surrounding these women. Sherlock Holmes and I had been commissioned to locate only one of the women, not engage in a war of redemption. The Almighty is in charge of redemption and revenge, not us. However, I still had questions and concerns about how this should be reported to the authorities.

Using Holmes' 'attention to detail' doctrine in its most primitive form, led me to deduce that the presence of glowing green soil particles, at every crime scene inspected by me, was a conclusively strong clue that each of the murders was linked back to The Women of Haggerton Hill and the rich mineral

particles at the base of their hill. I was certain that these women were settling old scores.

The magnitude and intensity of the things that I had discovered were worse than the blunt combat action that I had seen in the Second Afghan War. I could not get past the treachery.

"But how did she learn how to do that? It takes training, discipline, intense focus and practice to use the techniques she used to just kill her father," I asked, totally puzzled at the whole idea.

Holmes reviewed the notes that I had provided for him.

"It says here that she was in several hospitals and then eventually dumped in this shut-away ward in a bed near a Royal Marine who had lost both legs in combat. He was trained in a special company of commandos, to kill at a distance, in close quarters as well as several other ways and then fade into oblivion. Over time, they became close, sharing each others horrors. Two souls comforting each other in an unconventional way. He taught her ungodly things about clandestine warfare, and how to execute them."

Holmes spoke somberly as if marveling at the degree of accomplishment these two handicapped people had achieved.

"But Holmes, you know this woman and many of these other women have taken their revenge too far, as far as murder, on several occasions," I argued, trying to understand his indifferent attitude toward the shameless atrocities that it was certain these women had committed with impunity. He picked up his hat and coat, turned toward me like an old man exercising patience with a small child.

"Watson, justice comes in many forms. For example, as part payment for work on a previous case, I hold in my hands two tickets to tonight's opera, eight PM at the Palace. Would you care to be my guest?"

### End Note:

A freshly tailored and fashionably dressed young woman appeared at the entrance of the ward with two muscular male employees in tow. Self-assured and in full control, she scanned the ward with a knowing eye until she located the familiar bed. The young marine sluggishly began to wake up, puzzled about the stirring around him.

"Saddle up, marine, we are moving out," spoke a clear, confident female voice.

He recognized the voice as she walked toward him, smiling affectionately.

"Where are we going?" He asked, still groggy.

She bent over him and gently kissed him on the forehead.

"Do you really care?"