

*This PDF is a simplified English version of the source text below. It has been rewritten by ChatGPT for intermediate English learners.

Source text:

The Project Gutenberg eBook of His last bow

Available at Project Gutenberg:

<https://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/2350/pg2350.txt>

Arthur Conan Doyle, His Last Bow (Simplified Edition by ChatGPT)

The Adventure of Wisteria Lodge

Part 1

It was near the end of March in the year 1892. The wind blew hard that day, and the sky was cold and gray. I remember that Holmes and I were sitting at our lunch when a telegram arrived. Holmes read it without speaking. He wrote a short answer and sent it back at once. After that he stood by the fire with his pipe, deep in thought. From time to time he looked again at the paper in his hand. I knew that something in it had caught his interest.

At last he turned to me with a quick light in his eyes. "Watson," said he, "you are a man who writes books. How would you define the word 'grotesque'?"

"Strange," I answered. "Remarkable. Odd."

He shook his head. "That is not enough. There is often something dark behind it. Something that may turn into crime. Think of those cases you have written. The strange often becomes the dangerous. When I hear that word, I pay attention."

"Is that word in the telegram?" I asked.

Holmes read it aloud. "Have just had most incredible and grotesque experience. May I consult you? Scott Eccles. Post Office, Charing Cross."

"A man," said Holmes at once. "A woman would not send a paid telegram. She would come herself."

"Will you see him?" I asked.

Holmes smiled. "My dear Watson, you know how dull life has been since our last case. My mind is like a strong engine with no work. I am ready for anything. And here, I believe, comes our visitor now."

We heard a heavy step upon the stairs. A moment later Mrs. Hudson showed in a tall, stout man with gray whiskers and a serious face. His clothes were good but in disorder. His hair was not brushed, and his face was red with anger and trouble. He began to speak at once.

"Mr. Holmes," said he, "I have had a most strange and unpleasant experience. Never in my life have I been placed in such a position. It is improper and shocking. I demand an explanation."

Holmes motioned him to sit down. "Pray be calm, Mr.—"

"Scott Eccles," said the man.

"Mr. Scott Eccles," Holmes continued gently. "May I ask why you came to me?"

"It did not seem to be a matter for the police. Yet I could not let it rest. I do not like private detectives, but I have heard your name."

"And why did you not come at once?" Holmes asked, looking at his watch. "It is now a quarter past two. Your telegram was sent about one. Yet your appearance shows that your trouble began when you woke this morning."

The man touched his rough chin and untidy hair. "You are right. I thought of nothing but escape. I went first to the house agents. They told me that the rent at Wisteria Lodge was paid. Everything was in order."

Holmes smiled. "You tell your story backward, like my friend Watson. Please begin at the beginning."

Mr. Scott Eccles drew a deep breath. "Very well. I am a bachelor and have many friends. Among them is a retired brewer named Melville in Kensington. At his table I met a young man named Garcia some weeks ago. He was of Spanish blood and said he was connected with the embassy. He spoke perfect English and was very pleasant."

Holmes listened with close attention.

"He seemed to like me at once," Eccles went on. "Within two days he visited me at my home in Lee. Soon he invited me to spend a few days at his house,

Wisteria Lodge, between Esher and Oxshott. Last evening I went there.”

“He told me he lived with one servant, a man from his own country, who managed the house. There was also a cook, a half-breed, he said, who could prepare an excellent dinner. I thought it strange to find such a household in Surrey, but I went.”

He paused, as if the memory troubled him.

“The house was old and in poor repair. It stood back from the road behind high bushes. When I arrived, Garcia opened the door himself and greeted me warmly. The servant took my bag. He was a dark, silent man. The place felt gloomy at once.”

Holmes leaned forward.

“Dinner was served for the two of us,” Eccles said. “Garcia tried to be pleasant, but he seemed nervous. He tapped his fingers and bit his nails. His thoughts wandered. The food was not good. The servant stood silent behind us. Many times I wished to leave.”

“Did anything unusual happen?” Holmes asked.

“Yes. Near the end of dinner a note was brought in. After reading it, Garcia became more strange. He stopped talking. He smoked many cigarettes. He said nothing of the message.”

Holmes nodded slowly.

“About eleven I went to bed,” Eccles continued. “Later Garcia came to my door. It was dark. He asked if I had rung. I had not. He said it was nearly one o’clock and apologized. After that I slept.”

He stopped and looked at us with wide eyes.

“When I woke, it was bright daylight. It was nearly nine. I had asked to be called at eight. I rang the bell. No answer. I rang again and again. Nothing.”

“I dressed quickly and went downstairs. There was no one in the house. I called out. Silence. I went to Garcia’s room. The bed had not been slept in. He was gone. The servant was gone. The cook was gone. They had all vanished in the night.”

Holmes rubbed his hands softly.

“What did you do?” he asked.

“I was angry. I thought it a joke. I packed my bag and left. I went to the agents in Esher. The rent was paid. I went to the Spanish embassy. They did not know Garcia. I visited Melville. He knew little more than I did. At last I sent you the telegram.”

At that moment there was noise outside. Two men entered the room. One was Inspector Gregson of Scotland Yard. The other was a country inspector named Baynes.

Gregson looked at Mr. Scott Eccles. “Are you Mr. John Scott Eccles of Lee?”

“I am.”

“We have followed you this morning.”

“Why?” cried Eccles.

“We wish a statement concerning the death last night of Mr. Aloysius Garcia of Wisteria Lodge.”

The color left Eccles’s face. “Dead? You say he is dead?”

“Murdered,” said Gregson.

Eccles stared at him in horror. “Murdered? And I am suspected?”

“A letter from you was found in his pocket. It said you would stay the night.”

Holmes raised a hand. “Mr. Eccles was just telling us his story. Let him finish.”

Gregson opened his notebook.

“Proceed,” Holmes said calmly.

Eccles swallowed and went on.

“I know nothing of this crime. I slept in my room. I heard Garcia’s voice at nearly one. That is certain. I did not leave the house until morning.”

Gregson exchanged a glance with Baynes.

“The body was found on Oxshott Common,” said Gregson. “His head was beaten in. There was no sign of robbery.”

“But that is impossible!” cried Eccles. “He spoke to me at one o’clock.”

Holmes smiled slightly. “Remarkable,” he murmured.

Baynes then produced the note that had been found in the fire at Wisteria Lodge. It had not burned fully. He read it aloud.

““Our own colours, green and white. Green open, white shut. Main stair, first

corridor, seventh right, green baize. Godspeed. D.”

Holmes examined it closely. “Interesting,” he said softly.

The room was silent. Outside, the wind beat against the windows. I felt that we stood at the edge of something dark and dangerous.

Holmes leaned back in his chair and closed his eyes for a moment. When he opened them again, they shone with quiet fire.

“This,” said he, “is indeed grotesque.”

And I knew that the game had begun.

Part 2

The inspectors watched Holmes closely as he examined the note. He held it near the light and studied the paper, the ink, and the seal with care. His face was calm, but I knew from long habit that his mind was very active.

“The seal,” he said quietly, “was made with a sleeve link. The scissors used to cut the paper were small nail scissors. The writer is a woman. The address, however, is written by another hand.”

Inspector Baynes gave a short nod. “That agrees with my view, Mr. Holmes.”

Mr. Scott Eccles moved uneasily in his chair. “I am glad you found that note,” he said. “It proves that I have told the truth. But I still do not understand how Mr. Garcia came to his death.”

Inspector Gregson answered. “His body was found on Oxshott Common, nearly a mile from his house. His head had been beaten with a heavy object. There were no signs of robbery. It was a fierce attack.”

“Then I am involved in a murder,” said Eccles weakly. “This is terrible.”

“You are not accused,” said Gregson, though his tone was firm. “But your letter places you in the matter. You will come with us to the station and give a full statement.”

“Of course,” Eccles replied. He turned to Holmes. “I beg you to take up my case. Spare no effort.”

Holmes inclined his head. “You may rely upon me.”

When the three men had gone, Holmes stood silent by the fire. I waited, knowing he would speak when ready.

“Well, Watson,” he said at last, “what do you think?”

“It seems clear,” I answered, “that the servants were involved and fled after killing their master.”

Holmes shook his head slowly. “That is possible, but not certain. Why would they choose the one night when a guest was present? They had him alone every other night.”

I considered this. “Then why did they flee?”

“That is one of the great questions,” said Holmes. “Another is the strange visit of Garcia to Scott Eccles’s room at nearly one in the morning. We are told that the death occurred before one, yet Eccles heard Garcia’s voice at that hour.”

“Could he be mistaken?”

Holmes smiled faintly. “Mr. Scott Eccles is not imaginative. He is a solid, steady man. I do not think he would invent such a detail.”

He walked to the window and looked out into the gray afternoon.

“Let us examine the facts,” he continued. “Garcia formed a quick friendship with Eccles. Why? Eccles is the very picture of English respectability. Such a man would make a strong witness in court.”

“An alibi?” I said suddenly.

Holmes turned to me with approval in his eyes. “Exactly, Watson. Garcia wanted a witness who could say he was in the house at a certain hour.”

“Then Garcia expected danger,” I said.

“Yes. And the note confirms it. ‘Green open, white shut.’ That is clearly a signal. ‘Main stair, first corridor, seventh right, green baize.’ That describes a room in a large house.”

“And the letter ‘D’?”

“It is the initial of the writer,” Holmes replied. “But the note is in English. That is important. Garcia was Spanish. If the writer were Spanish, she would have written in her own language.”

Holmes paused and then added, “The house must be large. The number of such

houses near Oxshott is limited. I have already taken steps to learn their names.”

He handed me a telegram that had arrived earlier. It listed several large houses in the district.

“One of these,” Holmes said quietly, “must contain the other end of our chain.”

That evening we traveled with Inspector Baynes to Esher. The wind had grown colder, and a fine rain fell as we walked toward Wisteria Lodge. The house stood dark against the sky, with only a small light in one window.

A constable met us at the door. His face was pale.

“It is a lonely place, sir,” he said nervously. “Two hours ago I saw a face at the window.”

“What kind of face?” Baynes demanded.

“Large, sir. Not black, not white. A strange color. Great eyes and white teeth like an animal.”

Holmes at once examined the ground outside with his small lantern.

“A large footprint,” he said. “Size twelve at least. Whoever it was, he was a big man.”

We entered the house. The rooms were bare and showed little sign of personal belongings. In the kitchen, however, we found strange things. On the dresser stood a small object, black and dry, twisted and shriveled. It looked almost human.

“What do you make of it?” Baynes asked.

Holmes bent close. “Very curious,” he murmured.

In the sink lay the torn remains of a white bird, feathers still attached. Beneath the sink stood a bucket half filled with blood. On the table were charred bones.

“A doctor says they are not human,” Baynes explained.

Holmes’s eyes shone. “This case grows more interesting.”

When we left the house, I could see that Holmes was deeply engaged. Yet in the days that followed he appeared to do little. He took long walks and spoke with village people. He visited one large house called High Gable.

After several days, news came in the papers. A man had been arrested. He was described as a huge and savage mulatto, suspected of the murder.

Holmes sprang to his feet when I read the report.

“We must see Baynes at once,” he said.

The inspector greeted us with a smile.

“You have arrested the cook?” Holmes asked.

“Yes,” Baynes replied. “But we all have our methods, Mr. Holmes.”

Holmes watched him carefully. “Take care you are not mistaken.”

Baynes only smiled again.

When we returned to our room, Holmes began to explain his theory.

“Garcia planned a crime,” he said. “He invited Eccles to serve as an alibi. The note came from a woman inside a large house. She was his confederate. Something went wrong. Garcia was killed before he could return.”

“And the servants fled because they were part of the plan?” I asked.

“Yes. They were to escape if Garcia failed. But one returned to fetch something precious—perhaps that strange object in the kitchen.”

“Then what of the woman who wrote the note?” I said.

Holmes’s face grew grave. “That is the most serious matter. She has not been seen since the murder. She may be in danger.”

He leaned forward, his voice low.

“Watson, the house is High Gable. Its owner is a man called Henderson. A violent and secretive man. He lives with his children, a secretary, and a governess named Miss Burnet.”

“You believe she wrote the note?”

“It is the only logical conclusion.”

Holmes stood and placed his hand on my shoulder.

“If the law cannot act, we must. Tonight we may have to take matters into our own hands.”

I felt a chill that was not from the wind outside. The strange note, the savage cook, the dark house at High Gable, and the missing governess—all formed a shadow around us.

And yet, as always, Holmes seemed calm, as if the danger itself drew him forward.

The night ahead promised revelation.

Part 3

It was near five in the afternoon when our plans were changed in a sudden and dramatic way. The light outside had already begun to fade when the door burst open and a rough-looking countryman hurried into our room. His face was flushed with excitement, and his breath came quickly.

“They’ve gone, Mr. Holmes!” he cried. “They left by the last train. The lady broke away, and I have her in a cab outside.”

Holmes sprang to his feet. “Good, Warner! You have done well.”

The man explained that he had been watching the gates of High Gable, as Holmes had asked. When a carriage drove out with Miss Burnet inside, he followed it to the station. She appeared weak, as if she were walking in a dream. When they tried to place her in the train, she suddenly struggled. In the confusion, Warner helped her into a cab and brought her straight to us.

We went down at once. In the cab sat a woman who seemed near collapse. Her face was thin and pale. Her eyes were dull, and her head rested weakly against the side of the carriage. Holmes and I lifted her carefully and brought her upstairs. She could barely stand.

Holmes ordered strong coffee, and after some minutes her mind began to clear. She looked around the room with growing awareness. Inspector Baynes had been sent for and soon arrived.

“You have given me what I needed, Mr. Holmes,” said Baynes warmly. “This changes everything.”

“Tell me first,” Holmes replied, “who is Henderson?”

Baynes answered in a low voice. “Henderson is not his real name. He is Don Murillo, once called the Tiger of San Pedro.”

I felt a shock as the name struck my memory. The Tiger of San Pedro had been a cruel ruler in Central America. He had governed with violence and fear. Many men had died under his orders. When a rebellion rose against him, he escaped with his wealth. Since then he had vanished.

“Yes,” said Baynes, “that is the man. He has been living quietly here in England under a false name. But some of his enemies have found him.”

Miss Burnet, who had been listening closely, suddenly sat upright. Though still weak, her eyes burned with emotion.

“He is a monster,” she said in a trembling voice. “A monster who has destroyed many lives.”

Holmes spoke gently. “Madam, you must tell us everything.”

She drew a deep breath.

“My true name is Signora Victor Durando,” she began. “My husband was once a minister in San Pedro. He was an honest and noble man. Murillo feared him. On a false charge he recalled my husband and had him shot.”

She paused, struggling with the memory.

“After that I had nothing. When Murillo fled his country, many who had suffered under him joined together. They swore that he would not escape justice. I became part of that group.”

Holmes listened without interruption.

“When we learned that Murillo lived here as Henderson, I gained a place in his house as governess to his children. He did not know who I was. I watched him. I waited.”

“Garcia,” she continued, “was the son of a man who had also suffered under Murillo. He came with two loyal friends. It was arranged that I would send word when it was safe.”

“The note,” Holmes said quietly.

She nodded. “Yes. I wrote it. I described how to reach Murillo’s room. A green light would mean the way was open. A white light would mean danger.”

“But something went wrong?” Holmes asked.

“Yes,” she whispered. “The secretary, Lopez, saw me. He seized me and dragged me to Murillo. They forced me to give them Garcia’s address. They sent him a false message.”

Her voice broke.

“Murillo went out himself that night. He killed Garcia before he could reach

the house.”

The room was silent except for the sound of the wind outside.

“For days they kept me locked in my room,” she continued. “They beat me. They threatened to kill me. Today they drugged me and tried to send me away by train.”

“But you escaped,” said Holmes.

She looked at Warner gratefully. “Yes. Thanks to him.”

Inspector Baynes stood up. “This is enough,” he said firmly. “We can act now.”

Holmes smiled faintly. “You see, Inspector, our paths have met at last.”

Baynes gave a short laugh. “I arrested the cook only to make Murillo feel safe. I knew he would try to flee. I had men watching.”

Holmes nodded with approval. “You have done well.”

Within hours officers were on their way to High Gable. But the Tiger of San Pedro was cunning. He and his secretary escaped before they could be taken.

Some months later news reached us from Madrid. A nobleman and his secretary had been found murdered in a hotel. The descriptions matched Murillo and Lopez.

When Inspector Baynes brought the report to Baker Street, Holmes read it quietly.

“Justice moves slowly,” he said at last, “but it moves.”

That evening, as we sat by the fire, Holmes reflected upon the strange case.

“It was a tangled affair, Watson,” he said. “A fallen tyrant living under a false name, a secret society seeking revenge, and a well-meaning Englishman drawn into danger.”

“And the strange things in the kitchen?” I asked.

Holmes smiled slightly.

“The cook was a man from the forests of San Pedro. The small figure was a fetish object from his religion. The white bird and the blood were part of a ritual sacrifice. Primitive beliefs, but carried out with great seriousness.”

“So the grotesque became the horrible,” I said.

Holmes looked thoughtfully into the flames.

“Yes,” he replied softly. “There is often only one step between them.”

The wind howled outside as it had on the day the telegram arrived. Yet the storm had passed for us. Another strange mystery had been solved, though justice had come in a way that no court in England could command.

And once more I resolved to record the events faithfully, though I knew that no simple telling could fully express the dark and complex web in which we had moved.

The Adventure of the Bruce-Partington Plans

Part 1

In the third week of November in the year 1895 a thick yellow fog lay over London. It hung in the streets from morning to night. From the windows of our rooms in Baker Street we could not see the houses across the road. The world outside seemed lost in a dull brown cloud. For three days Holmes endured it with patience. On the first day he worked on his great book of notes. On the second and third he read about old music and played strange tunes upon his violin. But on the fourth morning even he could bear it no longer.

He paced up and down our sitting-room like a restless animal. He tapped the table. He bit his nails. He looked again and again through the window at the thick fog that moved slowly past.

“Anything of interest in the paper, Watson?” he asked.

I knew what he meant. By interest he meant crime. I looked once more at the pages before me.

“There is news of politics,” I said. “And talk of war in a distant country. But nothing that would please you.”

Holmes gave a low sound of annoyance.

“The London criminal has grown dull,” he said. “Such a day as this is made for bold action. A thief could move unseen. A murderer could vanish like smoke.”

“There have been some small thefts,” I offered.

He waved his hand.

“Nothing worth the stage that nature has set for them. It is fortunate for London that I am not a criminal.”

“I quite agree,” I answered.

He gave a short laugh. “Suppose I wished to remove a man who stood in my way. A false message. A meeting in this fog. No one would see. No one would hear. The tiger moves in such weather.”

At that moment the maid entered with a telegram. Holmes tore it open and read it quickly. His face changed from impatience to surprise.

“This is new,” he said. “My brother Mycroft is coming here.”

“Your brother?” I asked. “Why should that surprise you?”

“Because Mycroft does not move without strong cause,” Holmes replied. “He follows a fixed path in life. His rooms in Pall Mall, the Diogenes Club, and Whitehall. He once visited us, and that was years ago. If he comes now, something important has occurred.”

He handed me the telegram. It read: “Must see you over Cadogan West. Coming at once. Mycroft.”

“Cadogan West,” I said slowly. “I seem to know the name.”

“It means nothing to me,” Holmes replied. “But for Mycroft to speak of it in such a way, it must be serious.”

Within half an hour the door opened and a tall, heavy man entered. Mycroft Holmes was larger than his brother and slower in movement. His face was pale and thoughtful. His eyes were calm, yet very sharp.

“Good morning, Sherlock,” he said in a quiet voice. “Good morning, Dr. Watson.”

“You bring news,” said Holmes at once.

Mycroft removed his gloves and sat down with care.

“Very grave news,” he answered. “A young man named Arthur Cadogan West has been found dead near the tracks of the underground railway.”

Holmes stopped pacing.

“Explain,” he said.

“The body was discovered last night near Aldgate Station,” Mycroft continued.

“There were no signs of robbery. But in his pocket were certain papers of great importance to the government.”

Holmes’s eyes brightened.

“Proceed.”

“Cadogan West was a clerk at Woolwich Arsenal,” said Mycroft. “He had access to plans of a new submarine. The Bruce-Partington submarine. It is one of the most important inventions of our time.”

Holmes stood very still.

“And the plans were found on his body?”

“Some of them,” Mycroft replied. “Not all. Several pages are missing. Those pages contain the most vital details.”

I felt a chill despite the warm fire.

“Do you believe he stole them?” Holmes asked.

Mycroft folded his hands over his knee.

“That is the question. The young man was known as steady and loyal. He was engaged to be married. He had no known debts. Yet he left his office early, and that same night he was found dead on the tracks.”

“How did he die?” I asked.

“His body showed signs of having fallen from a train,” said Mycroft. “But there were no tickets on him. No witnesses saw him enter the railway.”

Holmes began to move again, though now his steps were quick and sharp.

“Let us consider the facts,” he said. “A trusted clerk leaves his office. He carries secret plans. He is found dead beside the railway. Some of the plans are missing.”

“Exactly,” said Mycroft.

“If he stole them,” Holmes continued, “why was he not paid? Why was he found with any of them still in his pocket?”

“The police suggest that he met someone,” Mycroft replied. “Perhaps to sell the plans. Perhaps there was a struggle. He fell.”

Holmes shook his head.

“Too simple,” he said. “The fog would hide much, but not all. The body was near Aldgate?”

“Yes.”

“And the missing pages?”

“Still missing.”

Holmes stopped in front of his brother.

“This concerns national safety,” he said quietly.

“It does,” Mycroft answered. “If the plans have fallen into foreign hands, the danger is great.”

Holmes turned to me.

“Watson, we have our case.”

Mycroft rose slowly.

“Sherlock, the government wishes for speed and silence. I come to you because this cannot be trusted to ordinary hands.”

Holmes’s eyes shone.

“You are right,” he said. “Tell me everything about Cadogan West.”

Mycroft gave a clear and careful account. Cadogan West was young, well liked, and serious. He had worked for years at Woolwich. The plans of the submarine had been locked in a safe. Only a few men had access. On the day of his death he had been seen looking troubled. He left the office earlier than usual.

That night he did not return home. His body was found hours later.

“Was there any sign of violence?” Holmes asked.

“None beyond the fall,” Mycroft replied. “But the matter of the missing pages troubles me.”

Holmes nodded.

“It troubles me as well.”

For a moment the room was silent except for the soft crackle of the fire.

“You understand,” said Mycroft at last, “that if this is treason, it must be dealt with at once. And if it is not treason, we must clear the name of an innocent man.”

Holmes stopped pacing and faced his brother.

“I will begin at once,” he said. “The fog has given us a stage. Now we must discover the actors.”

Mycroft gave a small smile. “I knew you would not refuse.”

When he had left, Holmes stood at the window and stared into the thick yellow air.

“What do you think, Watson?” he asked.

“It seems clear that someone else is involved,” I said. “The missing pages suggest a larger plan.”

Holmes nodded slowly.

“Yes. A dead clerk may hide a living traitor.”

He turned back to the fire, his face calm but alive with thought.

“We must go first to Aldgate,” he said. “And then to Woolwich. In this fog, truth may be hard to see. But it is there, Watson. It is always there.”

Thus began the strange and serious matter of the Bruce-Partington Plans.

Part 2

The fog still lay thick over London when Holmes and I left Baker Street that afternoon. It pressed close around us as we stepped into the cab. The lamps in the street shone as dull circles of light. The air smelled of smoke and damp stone. Holmes sat silent beside me, his long fingers pressed together, his eyes half closed in thought.

“We begin with the body,” he said at last. “The dead man cannot lie.”

We drove first to the place near Aldgate where Arthur Cadogan West had been found. A police inspector met us there and showed us the spot. It was close to the railway line, where the tracks curve before entering the station.

“The body was discovered early this morning,” the inspector explained. “It lay beside the line. No one saw him fall.”

Holmes examined the ground with care. He bent low, his face near the stones and metal rails.

“There are no marks of a struggle here,” he said quietly. “No sign that he climbed down from a train. And no blood upon the line.”

“It may have washed away,” the inspector suggested.

Holmes shook his head. “There is little rain today. No, the body was not struck

here.”

He stood and looked along the railway.

“The train must have stopped nearby,” he murmured. “Or the body was placed here.”

“Placed?” I asked.

Holmes turned to me.

“Consider it, Watson. If Cadogan West fell from a moving train, his body would show greater injury. And yet the marks are not severe. The fall was short.”

“You think he was dead before he reached the tracks?” I said slowly.

Holmes did not answer at once.

“It is possible,” he said at last. “Let us continue.”

We went next to the station. Holmes asked many questions. At what hour did trains pass? Did any stop unexpectedly? Were there reports of doors opening between stations?

The stationmaster was polite but firm.

“No train stopped on the line that night,” he said. “And no driver reported anything unusual.”

Holmes thanked him and left without further comment.

In the cab again, he leaned back and closed his eyes.

“He was not thrown from a moving train,” he said quietly. “He was placed where he was found.”

“But why?” I asked.

“To suggest an accident,” Holmes replied. “Or perhaps to hide the true place of death.”

We next traveled to Woolwich Arsenal. The fog seemed even thicker near the river. Armed guards stood at the gate. Mycroft had already arranged our entry.

Inside we were led to a plain office. A senior officer greeted Holmes with seriousness.

“This is a grave matter,” the man said. “The Bruce-Partington submarine is of the highest importance. Only a few men have seen the full plans.”

“And Cadogan West was one of them?” Holmes asked.

“Yes. He was trusted.”

Holmes asked to see the safe from which the plans had been taken. It was a heavy metal box set into the wall.

“There are two keys?” Holmes asked.

“Yes. One held by the chief designer. The other by a senior official.”

“Was the safe forced?”

“No. It was opened in the usual way.”

Holmes’s eyes sharpened.

“Then someone with authority opened it,” he said softly.

The officer looked troubled.

“We cannot believe that,” he said.

Holmes did not press him. Instead, he asked about Cadogan West’s behavior in recent days.

“He seemed quiet,” the officer replied. “But nothing unusual. He was engaged to be married. He had no debts.”

“Did he leave early on the day in question?” Holmes asked.

“Yes. He said he felt unwell.”

Holmes stood very still for a moment.

“Unwell,” he repeated.

When we left the Arsenal, Holmes walked in silence beside me.

“Watson,” he said at last, “what motive can you see for this young man to betray his country?”

“Money?” I suggested. “Or fear?”

Holmes shook his head.

“He kept some of the plans on him. A thief would carry all. And he did not hide them well.”

“Then he did not steal them?” I said.

“I begin to think he did not,” Holmes replied.

That evening we returned to Baker Street. Holmes refused dinner and sat at his table, making notes and drawing small diagrams.

“If he did not steal them,” I said carefully, “then he may have discovered

something.”

Holmes looked up at once.

“Yes,” he said quietly. “That is the line I follow.”

“He leaves the office early. He carries the plans. He is found dead. The most important pages are missing. Suppose he suspected someone else. Suppose he took the plans to prove it.”

I felt a slow excitement.

“Then he was silenced,” I said.

Holmes nodded.

“And the body placed by the railway to suggest an accident.”

He rose and began to pace.

“But who?” he murmured. “Who had both access and motive?”

I watched him move through the fog-dim light of our room.

“Mycroft said only a few men had access to the safe,” I said.

“Yes,” Holmes answered. “And one of them must be false.”

He stopped and faced me.

“Watson, this is not a simple case of theft. It is something deeper. Someone within the very heart of government may be involved.”

The words hung heavy in the air.

Holmes walked again to the window. Outside the fog pressed against the glass like a living thing.

“The fog hides the streets,” he said softly. “But it cannot hide truth forever.”

He turned back to his desk.

“Tomorrow we visit Cadogan West’s home,” he said. “We must learn more of his last hours.”

I could see that the case had taken full hold of him now. The dull days of inaction were gone. In their place stood a mystery that touched the safety of the nation.

And Holmes, as always, was ready to pursue it wherever it led.

Part 3

The next morning the fog still covered London, though it seemed thinner than before. Holmes had risen early and was already dressed when I entered our sitting-room. He stood by the fire, silent and thoughtful.

“We go to Cadogan West’s home first,” he said. “The private life often explains the public act.”

We traveled to a quiet street in the suburbs. The house was small but neat. A middle-aged woman opened the door. Her face showed deep grief.

“You are friends of Arthur?” she asked in a trembling voice.

“We wish to clear his name,” Holmes replied gently.

She led us into a simple sitting-room. On the table lay a photograph of a young woman. Holmes’s eyes rested on it.

“His fiancée?” he asked.

“Yes,” the woman said. “Miss Violet Westbury.”

Holmes asked about Arthur’s last day.

“He seemed troubled,” the woman said. “He left the house early and returned in the afternoon. He was pale. He said little.”

“Did he speak of his work?” Holmes asked.

“No. He never did. He was proud of his position.”

“Did he receive any letters?” Holmes asked quietly.

She hesitated.

“There was one,” she said at last. “He read it and burned it.”

Holmes’s eyes flashed.

“From whom?”

“I do not know. It had no name.”

Holmes nodded slowly.

“And that evening?”

“He said he must go out again. He looked distressed. I asked what was wrong. He would not say. That was the last I saw of him.”

Holmes thanked her and rose.

“He did not act like a man who had sold secrets,” he said to me as we left. “He

acted like a man under great strain.”

“Perhaps he learned something,” I said.

“Yes,” Holmes answered. “And perhaps he went to confront someone.”

Our next visit was to Miss Violet Westbury. She received us in a small parlor. Her eyes were red from weeping.

“Arthur was honest,” she said firmly. “He would never betray his country.”

“We believe that,” Holmes replied.

“He told me he was worried,” she continued. “He said there were dark things around him at work. But he would not explain.”

Holmes leaned forward.

“Did he mention any name?”

She shook her head.

“Only that he felt watched.”

Holmes rose at once.

“Watson,” he said quietly when we were outside, “this confirms it. He discovered something.”

“And someone feared he would speak,” I said.

Holmes nodded.

We returned to Woolwich Arsenal. Holmes asked for a list of all who had access to the safe. There were few names. Among them was Sir James Walter, a senior official, and Colonel Valentine.

“Sir James is a man of long service,” the officer told us. “He is trusted.”

Holmes asked to see him.

Sir James received us in a large office. He was pale and weary.

“This is a dreadful affair,” he said. “I cannot believe that young West was guilty.”

“Nor can I,” Holmes replied. “But I ask you plainly—who else could have opened the safe?”

Sir James hesitated.

“Only those with keys,” he said at last.

“And you hold one?” Holmes asked.

“Yes.”

Holmes watched him closely.

“Where was your key on the day in question?”

“In my possession.”

Holmes’s eyes narrowed slightly.

“You are certain?”

Sir James flushed.

“Of course.”

Holmes rose.

“Forgive my directness. The matter concerns national safety.”

When we left, Holmes walked in silence.

“You suspect him?” I asked.

“I suspect no one,” Holmes replied. “But I observe that he is under strain.”

“Could he be protecting someone?” I suggested.

Holmes stopped.

“That is possible.”

That evening Mycroft arrived again at Baker Street.

“You have made progress?” he asked.

Holmes explained his conclusions.

“Cadogan West did not steal the plans,” he said. “He learned of their theft. He took some pages to prove it. He meant to confront the guilty party.”

Mycroft listened with grave attention.

“And was killed for it?” he asked.

“Yes. His body was placed by the railway to suggest an accident. The missing pages were taken.”

Mycroft folded his arms.

“This is serious,” he said. “Very serious.”

Holmes stepped closer to his brother.

“One more point,” he said. “The fog. It provided cover. The murderer needed privacy and speed.”

“You believe the crime took place near Aldgate?” Mycroft asked.

“Yes. The railway line runs close to certain government buildings.”

Mycroft's face grew still.

"You mean—"

"I mean that the plans may have been passed to a foreign agent nearby," Holmes said quietly.

Silence filled the room.

"Then the traitor is close to us," Mycroft said at last.

Holmes's eyes shone with quiet intensity.

"Yes," he replied. "Very close."

He turned to the window and looked out at the fog once more.

"The fog hides much," he said softly. "But it cannot hide guilt from me."

I felt that we stood at the edge of revelation. The death of Arthur Cadogan West was no simple tragedy. It was part of a greater design.

And Holmes was now certain that he was closing in upon the truth.

Part 4

The evening had grown dark, and the fog pressed close against the windows of Baker Street. Mycroft Holmes sat heavy and still in his chair, his large hands folded before him. Sherlock Holmes stood on the rug, thin and alert, like a hound that has caught a scent.

"There is one place we have not examined," said Holmes quietly.

"And that is?" Mycroft asked.

"The underground line itself. The train which passed Aldgate that night."

Mycroft lifted his head. "You believe the exchange took place inside a carriage?"

"I do," Holmes replied. "Consider the facts. The fog was thick. The line between certain stations runs above ground for a short distance. A man could open a door, drop a body, and close it again before anyone noticed."

"But why there?" I asked.

Holmes turned to me.

"Because near that stretch of track stands a building used by foreign agents. It is known that several embassies are located close by. The murderer could pass the

stolen pages to a waiting contact and then dispose of the body.”

Mycroft rose slowly.

“If that is true,” he said, “the matter touches international danger.”

Holmes nodded.

“Yes. But first we must prove it.”

The next morning we visited the railway company offices. Holmes asked to inspect the train that had passed Aldgate at the hour in question. After some difficulty and the help of Mycroft’s authority, we were granted access.

The carriage stood in a shed, cold and silent. Holmes moved slowly along its length. He examined the doors, the steps, and the metal frames.

“Here,” he said suddenly.

He pointed to the lower edge of one door. A faint dark stain marked the metal.

“Blood,” he said softly.

I bent close. The stain was small but clear.

“He was placed here,” Holmes continued. “The door was opened briefly. The body was pushed out.”

“Then he was already dead,” I said.

“Yes.”

Holmes then turned his attention to the inside of the carriage. He studied the floor, the seats, and the corners.

“There has been cleaning,” he murmured. “But not perfect cleaning.”

He bent low and touched a faint mark near the seat.

“A scuff from a heel. A struggle perhaps.”

Mycroft stood watching, his face serious.

“Then the crime took place inside this train,” he said.

“Yes,” Holmes answered. “Now we must ask who traveled upon it.”

We returned to Baker Street to consider the list of passengers. Holmes studied the names with care.

“Many are ordinary,” he said. “But one stands out.”

“Which?” I asked.

Holmes tapped the paper.

“Sir James Walter.”

Mycroft’s face grew pale.

“Impossible,” he said at once. “Sir James is beyond suspicion.”

“He was on that train,” Holmes replied calmly. “He left the Arsenal at nearly the same hour. And he holds one of the keys to the safe.”

Mycroft paced heavily across the room.

“Sherlock, you must be cautious. Sir James has served the government for years.”

“I accuse no one,” Holmes said evenly. “But facts are facts.”

“What motive could he have?” I asked.

Holmes looked at me steadily.

“Perhaps none for himself,” he said. “But suppose he had been careless. Suppose someone close to him had access to his key.”

Mycroft stopped pacing.

“You suggest—”

“That another may have used Sir James’s trust,” Holmes finished.

At that moment a knock sounded at the door. A messenger entered with urgent news.

“Sir James Walter has been found dead,” he said.

The room fell silent.

“Dead?” Mycroft repeated.

“Yes, sir. In his home. It appears to be suicide.”

Holmes stood very still. Then he spoke in a low voice.

“No,” he said. “Not suicide.”

We hurried at once to Sir James’s house. He lay in his study, lifeless. A revolver rested near his hand.

Holmes examined the scene with care.

“There is no powder mark on his hand,” he said quietly. “The shot was fired at a distance.”

“Then he was murdered?” I said.

Holmes nodded.

“And made to appear guilty.”

Mycroft’s face was grave.

“Then Sir James was innocent,” he said softly.

“Yes,” Holmes replied. “But someone close to him was not.”

Holmes turned his attention to the desk. Papers lay scattered. One drawer stood half open.

“His key,” Holmes said.

It was not there.

“Removed,” Holmes continued. “And likely used without his knowledge.”

“Who had access to this house?” Mycroft asked.

“His brother,” Holmes answered. “Colonel Valentine Walter.”

Mycroft frowned.

“Valentine is younger and less steady,” he said slowly.

Holmes’s eyes shone.

“Exactly.”

“You believe he stole the plans?” I asked.

“I believe he copied them or removed them,” Holmes replied. “Cadogan West discovered it. He confronted Valentine on the train. There was a struggle. West was killed. The pages were passed to a foreign agent near Aldgate. Then the body was thrown onto the track.”

Mycroft sank into a chair.

“And Sir James learned the truth,” he said.

“Yes,” Holmes answered. “And was silenced before he could speak.”

The chain now seemed clear. The fog that had hidden the city had also hidden treason within its heart.

Holmes stood upright, his face calm but stern.

“We must act quickly,” he said. “If Valentine Walter has not yet fled, he will soon.”

Outside the window the fog began at last to thin. A pale light broke through the brown cloud.

Holmes watched it for a moment.

“The air clears,” he said quietly. “And so does this case.”

I knew then that the end was near, and that the traitor who had betrayed his country would soon be brought to justice.

Part 5

There was no time to lose. Holmes asked Mycroft for every detail concerning Colonel Valentine Walter. We learned that he had recently been in financial trouble. He had expensive habits and little restraint. Though his brother Sir James had long supported him, there were rumors of debt.

“Debt is a strong motive,” Holmes said quietly. “Stronger than loyalty in some men.”

“But to betray the nation?” I asked.

Holmes turned to me.

“A man in need may not think of nations. He thinks of escape.”

Mycroft provided the address of Colonel Valentine Walter. Holmes insisted we go at once.

When we arrived, the house stood in uneasy silence. A servant admitted us. The Colonel was said to be resting.

Holmes asked to see him immediately.

We were shown into a sitting-room. After a short wait, Colonel Walter entered. He was a man of middle age, pale, and restless. His eyes shifted quickly when he saw Mycroft.

“This is unexpected,” he said.

Holmes did not waste time.

“Colonel Walter,” he said evenly, “Arthur Cadogan West is dead. Sir James Walter is dead. The Bruce-Partington plans have been stolen. We believe you know why.”

The Colonel’s face lost all color.

“This is madness,” he said. “I know nothing.”

Holmes stepped closer.

“You were on the underground train that night. You met West there. He confronted you. In the struggle he was killed.”

“No!” cried the Colonel.

“The missing pages were passed to a foreign agent near Aldgate. You returned home. Later Sir James discovered the truth. He was silenced.”

The Colonel trembled.

“You cannot prove this,” he whispered.

Holmes’s voice remained calm.

“We have proof enough. Blood in the carriage. Your presence on the train. Your debts. The missing key from Sir James’s desk.”

The Colonel sank into a chair.

“I never meant to kill him,” he said at last in a broken voice. “He threatened me. He said he would expose me. We struggled. He struck his head.”

“And Sir James?” Mycroft asked quietly.

The Colonel covered his face.

“He found the papers,” he said. “He knew. I feared disgrace.”

Silence filled the room.

Holmes spoke at last.

“You sold your country for money. And you killed to hide it.”

The Colonel made no answer.

Police officers were summoned. Colonel Valentine Walter was taken into custody. The missing pages were later recovered through diplomatic means, though the foreign agent escaped.

That evening, when we returned to Baker Street, the fog had lifted. The air was clear and cold.

Holmes stood by the window, looking out at the lights of the city.

“A sad case,” he said quietly. “A weak man and a strong temptation.”

“And a loyal young man who paid the price,” I said.

Holmes nodded.

“Cadogan West sought to defend his country. He died for it.”

Mycroft visited us once more before leaving for Whitehall.

“The matter will be handled quietly,” he said. “The public will hear little.”

Holmes inclined his head.

“That is best.”

After Mycroft had gone, Holmes sat in his chair and lit his pipe.

“The fog gave cover,” he said slowly. “But in the end, truth moves like light. It finds its way.”

I looked at him with admiration. Once more he had followed a thin thread through confusion and danger until the pattern stood clear.

“You seem almost disappointed,” I said.

Holmes smiled faintly.

“It is not the solving that interests me most, Watson. It is the chase.”

He leaned back, his face calm once more.

Outside, London moved under a clear sky. The danger had passed. The stolen plans were safe. The traitor was caught.

And yet I could not forget the pale face of Arthur Cadogan West, nor the heavy burden borne by Sir James Walter.

In that case, as in many others, crime had sprung not from great evil alone, but from weakness of spirit.

Holmes knocked the ash from his pipe.

“Well, Watson,” he said, “until the next fog.”

And so ended the matter of the Bruce-Partington Plans.

The Adventure of the Devil's Foot

Part 1

It was in the spring of 1897 that Holmes's health gave me serious concern. For months he had worked without rest. His mind had been under great strain, and though he did not complain, I could see that his strength was failing. His face grew thin, his eyes shone too brightly, and his hands trembled when he thought no one was watching. As a doctor and as his friend, I knew that he stood near a

breakdown.

I insisted that he must leave London. At first he refused. He said that crime did not rest and that he could not rest while it lived. But at last he gave way, more to please me than from belief in my advice. We traveled to the far west of Cornwall, to a small village near the sea. There we took rooms in a simple cottage that looked out upon the gray waters and the wild cliffs beyond.

The air was clear and sharp. The sea beat against the rocks with steady force. The land was rough and lonely, with few houses and long stretches of heath. Holmes walked with me along the paths that wound over the cliffs. He said little at first, but I saw that the fresh wind did him good.

Our nearest neighbor was a clergyman named Mr. Roundhay. He was a quiet and kind man. From him we learned of the few families who lived near the village. Among them was the family of the Tregennises. They were three brothers and one sister. They had once lived together, but now the brothers occupied a house called Tredannick Wartha, while the sister lived in a nearby cottage.

Holmes showed little interest in these details. He seemed content to rest and read. But this quiet did not last long.

One morning, after breakfast, Mr. Roundhay came to our cottage in great distress. His face was pale, and his voice shook as he spoke.

“A terrible thing has happened,” he said. “At Tredannick Wartha. The three Tregennis brothers have been found dead or mad.”

Holmes rose at once.

“Explain,” he said quietly.

“They were found this morning by the sister, Miss Brenda Tregennis,” said the clergyman. “Two of the brothers were dead in their chairs. The third was alive, but his mind is gone. He laughs and cries and does not know what he says.”

Holmes’s eyes sharpened.

“How did they die?” he asked.

“There were no marks of violence,” said Mr. Roundhay. “They were seated at the table as if they had been playing cards. Their faces were fixed in an expression of terror.”

Holmes turned to me.

“We must go,” he said.

Within minutes we were walking quickly across the heath toward Tredannick Wartha. The house stood alone, gray against the sky. A small crowd had gathered outside. The door stood open.

Inside, the air felt heavy and strange. We were led into the room where the tragedy had taken place. The scene was one I shall never forget.

The table stood in the center of the room. Cards lay scattered upon it. Two men sat in their chairs, their heads thrown back, their eyes wide open. Their faces were twisted in horror. They were clearly dead. A third man crouched near the fireplace. He laughed suddenly when we entered, then burst into tears. His hair was disordered, and his hands shook wildly.

Holmes moved slowly about the room. He touched nothing at first. He studied the windows and the door. He looked at the hearth and the lamp upon the table.

“When were they last seen alive?” he asked.

A servant answered. “Last night, sir. They dined together. Miss Brenda was with them until late.”

“Where is Miss Brenda now?” Holmes asked.

“At her cottage, sir. She left before midnight.”

Holmes nodded.

“And this brother?” he said, pointing to the man who laughed and cried.

“Mortimer Tregennis,” the servant replied. “He came early this morning and found them so.”

Holmes bent closer to the dead men. He examined their faces carefully.

“The expression is one of extreme fear,” he said softly.

I felt a chill.

“Poison?” I suggested.

Holmes shook his head.

“Perhaps. But what kind? There is no sign of struggle. The windows are closed. The door was locked from within.”

He walked to the window and opened it slightly. The sea wind entered the room.

“Was the window open when they were found?” he asked.

“No, sir.”

Holmes turned back to the table. He picked up the lamp and smelled it.

“Oil,” he said. “Nothing unusual.”

He then looked at the fireplace. The fire had burned low. There was ash upon the grate.

“What time did Miss Brenda leave?” he asked again.

“About ten, sir.”

Holmes straightened.

“Then whatever happened occurred after she left.”

He walked once more around the room, silent and thoughtful.

“There is something in the air,” he murmured.

I too felt it—a faint sense of oppression.

Holmes then examined the body of one of the dead men more closely.

“No wound. No mark. The heart perhaps stopped by shock.”

He stood upright and looked at me.

“Watson, have you ever seen death from fear alone?”

“Rarely,” I answered. “It is uncommon.”

“And madness?” he asked, glancing at Mortimer Tregennis.

“Possible,” I said. “Under extreme terror.”

Holmes nodded slowly.

“Then terror is the key,” he said.

We left the room and went outside into the fresh air. Holmes drew a deep breath.

“This case is not natural,” he said quietly. “There is something more here than we see.”

At that moment a man approached us. He was tall and dark, with sharp features and deep-set eyes. He introduced himself as Dr. Leon Sterndale, an explorer and friend of the Tregennis family.

“I have just returned from Africa,” he said. “I came at once when I heard the news.”

Holmes studied him carefully.

“You were a friend of Miss Brenda?” he asked.

“Yes,” said the doctor shortly.

There was something in his voice that caught my attention. A tension, perhaps, or deep feeling held in check.

Holmes asked him a few more questions, but the doctor gave little away. At last he turned and walked toward the cottage where Miss Brenda lived.

Holmes watched him go.

“A man of strong emotion,” he said quietly.

“Do you suspect him?” I asked.

Holmes did not answer at once.

“I suspect the unknown,” he said at last.

The wind rose over the heath. The sea crashed below the cliffs. And in that lonely place, with two men dead and one driven mad, I felt that we had stepped into a mystery darker than the gray sky above us.

Part 2

After leaving the house at Tredannick Wartha, Holmes and I walked slowly back across the heath. The wind blew strongly from the sea, and the sharp air seemed to clear the heaviness from my head. Holmes walked in silence for some time, his hands behind his back, his eyes fixed upon the ground before him.

“Watson,” he said at last, “there are few cases in which terror alone produces death. Yet in that room we saw two men whose faces bore the mark of extreme fear.”

“And a third who has lost his reason,” I replied.

Holmes nodded.

“Yes. And there was no sign of violence. No wound. No poison in the ordinary sense. The windows were closed. The door was locked.”

“Then whatever caused it was in the room,” I said.

“Exactly,” Holmes answered.

We returned to our cottage, but Holmes did not rest. He asked Mr. Roundhay

to arrange a meeting with Miss Brenda Tregennis. Before we could see her, however, news reached us that changed everything.

A messenger arrived breathless at our door.

“Miss Brenda is dead,” he cried.

Holmes stood at once.

“Dead?” he repeated sharply.

“Yes, sir. Found in her cottage. Alone.”

We hurried across the heath again, this time toward the small cottage where Miss Brenda lived. A small crowd stood outside. Inside, the scene was dreadful.

Miss Brenda lay in her chair near the window. Her face bore the same expression of horror that we had seen upon her brothers. Her eyes were wide. Her lips were drawn back in terror. She was clearly dead.

Holmes bent over her body with deep attention. I examined her as well. There was no mark upon her. No sign of injury.

“When was she last seen?” Holmes asked.

“This morning,” said a neighbor. “Dr. Sterndale visited her. He was with her for some time.”

Holmes’s eyes grew sharp.

“And then?”

“He left. Shortly after, she was found like this.”

Holmes stood and looked slowly around the room. It was small and simple. A lamp stood upon the table. The window was slightly open.

“Was the window open when she was found?” he asked.

“Yes,” the neighbor replied.

Holmes went to the table and examined the lamp closely. He removed the chimney and smelled it.

“Watson,” he said quietly, “observe this.”

I bent near and inhaled. There was a faint, strange odor, sharp and bitter.

“Do you recognize it?” Holmes asked.

“No,” I replied.

“Nor do I,” he said. “But it is not ordinary oil.”

Holmes then turned to the fireplace. There was little ash there, but he examined it carefully.

“We must test something,” he said suddenly.

He closed the window and relit the lamp. Then he placed it near the center of the room and asked me to sit beside him.

“Holmes,” I protested, “is this wise?”

“Trust me,” he replied.

For several moments nothing happened. Then I felt a strange sensation. The air seemed heavy. A slight dizziness came over me. My heart beat faster.

Holmes leaned back in his chair, his face pale.

“Open the window,” he said quickly.

I sprang to my feet and threw it wide. The fresh sea air rushed in. The strange feeling passed almost at once.

Holmes stood slowly, though I could see he was shaken.

“It is a vapor,” he said quietly. “A deadly vapor released by heat.”

“You mean the lamp—” I began.

“Yes. Something was placed within it. When the lamp burned, the substance gave off fumes. In a closed room, the result would be madness or death.”

I felt a chill.

“That explains the brothers,” I said. “They sat in a closed room with the lamp burning.”

“And Miss Brenda,” Holmes added. “But in her case, the window was open. That is why she died alone.”

“But who placed the substance in the lamp?” I asked.

Holmes did not hesitate.

“Dr. Leon Sterndale.”

“Because he was seen with her?” I asked.

Holmes nodded.

“And because he alone knew of certain African poisons.”

I remembered that Dr. Sterndale was an explorer who had spent years in remote regions.

“But why would he kill Miss Brenda?” I asked.

Holmes’s face grew grave.

“That is what we must learn.”

We sought Dr. Sterndale at once. He was staying in a small house not far from the coast. When we arrived, he stood by the window, looking out at the sea. His face was stern.

“You have come about Miss Brenda,” he said before Holmes could speak.

“Yes,” Holmes replied.

The doctor’s eyes were dark and intense.

“You believe I killed her,” he said quietly.

Holmes met his gaze without fear.

“I believe you placed a substance in her lamp. The same substance that killed her brothers.”

For a moment there was silence.

Then the doctor spoke in a low voice.

“You are right.”

I felt shock at his calm admission.

“Why?” Holmes asked.

Dr. Sterndale’s face twisted with emotion.

“Because her brothers killed her first,” he said.

Holmes waited.

“The brothers had learned of her affection for me,” the doctor continued. “They opposed it. There was a quarrel. That night they placed the same poison in their own lamp, intending to frighten her into submission. They did not understand its power. They died by their own act.”

“And Mortimer?” Holmes asked.

“He survived but lost his mind.”

“And you?” Holmes said quietly.

The doctor’s hands clenched.

“I loved her,” he said. “When I learned the truth, I swore that those responsible would not escape. Mortimer had lost his reason. The others were dead. But I

believed Brenda had known and said nothing. In my rage, I placed the poison in her lamp.”

His voice broke.

“When I saw her die, I knew what I had done.”

Holmes stood silent for a long moment.

“What is this poison?” he asked.

“It is called the Devil’s Foot,” said the doctor. “A root from Africa. When burned, it releases a vapor that drives the mind to terror.”

Holmes nodded slowly.

“You have committed a crime,” he said. “But I see also your suffering.”

Dr. Sterndale stood rigid.

“Do what you must,” he said.

Holmes turned to me.

“Watson,” he said quietly, “there are cases where justice is not simple.”

I understood his meaning.

After a long pause, Holmes spoke again to the doctor.

“Leave England,” he said firmly. “Return to Africa. If you remain, the law will find you.”

The doctor bowed his head.

“I will go,” he said.

And so he did. Within days he had left the country.

Holmes and I walked back across the cliffs once more. The sea wind blew strong and cold.

“A terrible case,” I said.

“Yes,” Holmes replied softly. “The Devil’s Foot indeed.”

He looked out over the dark waters.

“Watson, sometimes the greatest danger is not from greed or hatred, but from uncontrolled passion.”

I could not disagree.

Thus ended one of the strangest and most dreadful cases in which I ever assisted my friend Sherlock Holmes.

The Adventure of the Red Circle

Part 1

It was in the autumn of the year 1895 that Mrs. Warren first came to consult Sherlock Holmes. The air in London was damp and gray, and the light that entered our rooms in Baker Street was thin and weak. Holmes sat in his chair near the fire, reading a newspaper, while I wrote letters at the table. The maid announced a visitor, and a woman entered, nervous and troubled.

She was middle-aged, with a thin face and anxious eyes. Her clothes were plain but neat. She twisted her hands together as she spoke.

“Mr. Holmes,” she said, “I am in great distress. I do not know what to do.”

Holmes put down his paper at once.

“Pray sit down, madam,” he said kindly. “Tell me your trouble.”

“My name is Mrs. Warren,” she began. “My husband and I keep lodgings. A week ago a gentleman came to us and took the top room.”

“Yes?” Holmes said.

“He paid a week in advance and asked that his meals be left outside his door. He said he wished to be undisturbed. We thought nothing of it at first. But he has not left the room since.”

Holmes leaned forward slightly.

“Not at all?”

“Not once, sir. We never see him. He does not speak. He writes his requests on small slips of paper and pushes them under the door.”

“Requests for what?” Holmes asked.

“For food. And sometimes for newspapers.”

“Have you heard any sound from the room?” Holmes asked.

“Very little,” she replied. “Sometimes I think I hear someone walking softly. But that is all.”

Holmes’s eyes grew sharp.

“And what troubles you most?” he asked.

Mrs. Warren’s voice trembled.

“The writing,” she said. “It is not the same as when he first came.”

Holmes glanced at me quickly.

“Explain,” he said.

“When he first rented the room, he wrote his name and signed the book. The writing was clear and strong. But the notes he sends now are different. They are in another hand.”

Holmes rose at once.

“You have brought these notes?” he asked.

Mrs. Warren drew several small slips of paper from her bag. Holmes examined them closely.

“Short messages,” he said. “‘More bread.’ ‘Send soap.’ ‘Daily Gazette.’ All written in block letters.”

“Yes,” she said. “And I fear that something has happened.”

“Why?” Holmes asked.

“Because yesterday my husband saw a face at the window.”

Holmes’s eyes flashed.

“At the top window?”

“Yes. It was not the face of the man who came to us.”

“You are sure?” Holmes asked quietly.

“Quite sure. My husband saw him when he arrived. This face was different. It was pale and frightened.”

Holmes stood very still.

“Has anyone else visited the room?” he asked.

“No, sir.”

Holmes turned to me.

“Watson, we must visit this house.”

Within half an hour we were in a small street in South London. Mrs. Warren led us inside. The house was narrow and plain. The stairs creaked as we climbed to the top floor.

The door to the room was closed. A tray stood outside, untouched.

Holmes bent and examined the tray. Then he tapped lightly upon the door.

“Sir,” he called calmly, “we wish to speak with you.”

There was no answer.

Holmes knocked again, louder.

Still silence.

He turned the handle, but the door was locked from within.

Holmes crouched and examined the keyhole.

“A key is in the lock,” he said softly.

He rose and looked at the window at the end of the corridor. It gave a clear view of the street below.

“Has your lodger received any letters?” he asked.

“Yes,” Mrs. Warren replied. “But he does not open the door. He tells us to leave them outside.”

Holmes nodded slowly.

“There is more here than fear,” he said quietly. “There is danger.”

He then turned to Mrs. Warren.

“Madam, has your lodger ever spoken aloud?”

“Only once,” she said. “The first day. Since then, never.”

Holmes looked thoughtful.

“The man who rented the room is not the one inside now,” he said calmly.

Mrs. Warren gasped.

“Then where is he?”

Holmes’s face grew serious.

“That is what we must learn.”

He stepped to the door once more and called out in a clear voice.

“We mean you no harm. If you are in danger, give us some sign.”

For several seconds there was no response.

Then, faintly, we heard a soft movement inside the room.

Holmes’s eyes lit with interest.

“Watson,” he said quietly, “this is no simple matter of a strange lodger. We

stand at the edge of something deeper.”

And as I looked at the closed door and the silent corridor, I felt that the house held a secret that would not remain hidden long.

Part 2

Holmes stood before the locked door for several moments, listening with deep attention. The house was quiet. From below we could hear the faint sound of carts in the street and the distant call of a vendor. Inside the room there was no voice, only the sense that someone waited in silence.

“We must not force the door,” Holmes said softly. “If there is danger, it may drive it into action.”

He turned to Mrs. Warren.

“Has your lodger asked for anything unusual? Any special item?”

“Only food and newspapers,” she replied. “But yesterday he asked for matches.”

Holmes’s eyes sharpened.

“Matches,” he repeated. “That is of interest.”

He walked to the window at the end of the passage and looked down into the street. It was narrow and not busy. A few people passed below. He studied the houses opposite with care.

“Watson,” he said quietly, “we must watch.”

We descended to the street and stood on the opposite side. Holmes looked up at the top window of the Warrens’ house. The curtains were partly drawn.

“If someone inside is in fear,” he said, “they may attempt communication.”

We waited for nearly an hour. At last Holmes touched my arm.

“There,” he whispered.

At the top window, behind the curtain, a hand appeared. It held a small card. Upon it was written a single word in large letters: “HELP.”

My heart quickened.

“Did you see?” I said.

“Yes,” Holmes replied. “The letters are formed in the same block style as the

notes.”

The hand vanished. A moment later it returned with another card. This one bore only a single letter: “S.”

“Strange,” I said.

Another card followed: “T.”

Holmes’s face grew intent.

“They are spelling something,” he murmured.

The cards appeared one by one: “A.” Then “Y.” Then a pause.

“STAY,” I said.

Holmes nodded.

The next cards followed: “A.” “W.” “A.” “Y.”

“STAY AWAY,” Holmes said quietly.

We watched in silence. The hand disappeared, and the curtain moved back into place.

“So,” Holmes said at last, “the person inside warns us.”

“But why?” I asked.

“Because they fear for us,” Holmes replied. “Or because they fear the one who watches them.”

He glanced down the street.

“There must be someone observing the house.”

Holmes walked slowly along the pavement, studying every doorway and window. His eyes missed nothing. At last he stopped near a small building opposite the Warrens’ house.

“Observe,” he said softly.

On the upper floor of the opposite house, behind half-closed curtains, a faint movement could be seen. Someone was watching.

“The Red Circle,” Holmes murmured.

“What do you mean?” I asked.

“It is a name I have heard before,” he replied. “A secret group. Foreign. Dangerous.”

We returned to Baker Street that evening. Holmes sat long into the night,

thinking.

“Watson,” he said at last, “our lodger is not a man, but a woman.”

“A woman?” I said in surprise.

“Yes. The small hand. The shape of the letters. And the fear.”

“Then who rented the room?” I asked.

“Likely her husband,” Holmes replied. “He secured the room, then left. She hides within.”

“From whom?” I said.

“From the Red Circle,” Holmes answered.

The next morning we returned to the street. Holmes had arranged for plain-clothed officers to watch the house opposite. We waited nearby.

In the late afternoon a man approached the Warrens’ house. He was dark and strong, with sharp eyes. He moved cautiously and looked about him before entering.

Holmes’s hand tightened on my arm.

“That is the watcher,” he said.

The man entered the house. Moments later a cry rang out from above. We rushed inside. The stairs were dark and narrow. At the top, the door to the room stood open.

Inside, a woman stood pale and shaking. Before her lay the body of the dark man. He had been shot.

A revolver lay near her hand.

Holmes stepped forward.

“You are safe now,” he said calmly.

Tears filled her eyes.

“He would have killed me,” she said. “He belongs to the Red Circle.”

“Tell us your story,” Holmes said gently.

She drew a deep breath.

“My name is Emilia Lucca,” she began. “My husband and I fled from Italy. He had refused to join a secret group called the Red Circle. They demand loyalty. If you refuse, they kill.”

“And your husband?” Holmes asked.

“He arranged this room for me. He meant to return, but they found him. I do not know if he lives.”

Holmes nodded.

“The man you shot?” he asked.

“One of them,” she replied. “He has watched me for days.”

Police officers entered and secured the body. Holmes turned to the woman once more.

“You acted in self-defense,” he said. “The law will see that.”

She covered her face and wept quietly.

Later we learned that her husband had indeed been murdered by the Red Circle. The group had sought to silence her as well.

As Holmes and I walked back to Baker Street, he spoke softly.

“The world holds many dangers beyond our shores, Watson. Some follow men across oceans.”

“And yet,” I said, “she found courage.”

Holmes inclined his head.

“Yes. Courage in fear. That is rare.”

The autumn air was cool and clear. The strange lodger of Mrs. Warren’s house was strange no longer. The secret had been revealed.

And once again, Holmes had drawn truth from silence and shadow.

Part 3

After the shooting, the small street filled quickly with noise and movement. Police officers entered the house and took charge of the body. Mrs. Warren stood trembling near the door, and her husband tried to comfort her. Holmes spoke calmly to the officers and gave a clear account of what had taken place.

Emilia Lucca sat in a chair, her face pale but steady. Though shaken, she no longer showed the deep fear that had marked her before. The danger that had pressed upon her for days had ended in a single moment.

“You will not be harmed,” Holmes told her quietly. “The man forced his way into the room. You defended yourself.”

She nodded, though tears filled her eyes.

“I have been alone,” she said softly. “Alone and waiting.”

Holmes asked her to explain everything in full detail.

“My husband, Gennaro Lucca,” she began, “was once part of a secret group in Italy. They call themselves the Red Circle. They claim to fight injustice, but they rule by fear. If a man refuses them, they threaten his life.”

“And your husband refused?” Holmes asked.

“Yes,” she said. “He wished to live peacefully. We left our country and came to England. But the Red Circle does not forget.”

“He arranged the lodging for you,” Holmes said.

“Yes. He rented the room under his own name. He told me to remain hidden while he tried to settle matters.”

“But he did not return,” I said gently.

She shook her head.

“No. I received a message that he had been taken.”

Holmes’s face grew grave.

“And so you stayed hidden,” he said. “You wrote the notes in block letters to conceal your hand.”

“Yes,” she replied. “I feared that someone might watch.”

Holmes nodded.

“They did watch,” he said. “From the house opposite.”

Emilia shuddered.

“I saw him once at the window. He smiled at me.”

The thought sent a chill through me.

“When he entered today,” Holmes continued, “what did he say?”

“He said that the Red Circle never fails,” she answered. “He said I must come with him.”

“And you refused.”

She lifted her head slightly.

“Yes. I had my husband’s revolver. I warned him. He laughed.”

“And then?” Holmes asked.

“He stepped toward me. I fired.”

There was silence in the room for a moment.

Holmes turned to the officers.

“The case is clear,” he said calmly. “She acted to protect her life.”

The officers agreed that the evidence supported her claim.

Later that evening, Holmes and I sat again in our rooms in Baker Street. The fire burned brightly. Outside, the city moved as usual, unaware of the drama that had taken place in the quiet street.

“A sad affair,” I said.

Holmes leaned back in his chair.

“Yes. The Red Circle is one of many such groups,” he replied. “They claim high purpose but act with violence.”

“And her husband?” I asked.

Holmes’s face grew thoughtful.

“It is likely he was killed soon after he was taken,” he said quietly. “Such groups rarely forgive.”

I felt deep sympathy for the brave woman who had faced such danger alone.

“She showed great courage,” I said.

“Indeed,” Holmes answered. “Fear did not break her.”

He rose and walked slowly across the room.

“There is a pattern in such cases,” he said. “Secrecy, threat, isolation. The victim feels cut off from help.”

“But she reached out,” I said. “With the cards in the window.”

Holmes smiled faintly.

“Yes. A simple signal. Yet enough.”

He paused by the window and looked out into the night.

“Watson, there are many forms of evil in this world. Some are loud and open. Others move in silence.”

I nodded.

“And sometimes,” I said, “it takes only a small act to bring light.”

Holmes returned to his chair.

“Mrs. Warren will have a quieter house now,” he said.

“I hope so,” I replied.

Holmes reached for his violin and began to play a slow and thoughtful tune. The music filled the room softly. It seemed to carry both sorrow and calm.

As I listened, I reflected upon the strange lodger who had hidden in fear behind a locked door, writing simple words upon small slips of paper. Those small words had told a story of danger and courage.

“STAY AWAY,” she had written.

Yet by staying, we had uncovered the truth.

The Red Circle had lost one of its agents. Its shadow had been driven back, at least in that small corner of London.

And once again, I resolved to set down the events faithfully, so that the quiet bravery of Emilia Lucca would not be forgotten.

Thus ended the matter of the strange lodger and the Red Circle.

The Disappearance of Lady Frances Carfax

Part 1

It was in the late summer of 1894 that Sherlock Holmes was engaged upon a case in the north of England. I remained in London, attending to my medical duties. One morning I received a telegram from Holmes.

“Come at once,” it read. “Lady Frances Carfax missing. Need assistance.”

I left by the next train and joined him at a quiet country inn. Holmes greeted me with unusual seriousness.

“This is not an ordinary case, Watson,” he said. “It concerns a lady of birth and means who has vanished.”

He handed me a letter.

“Lady Frances Carfax,” he continued, “is the last of an old and noble family.

She travels much, usually with a maid. For some weeks her friends have had no word from her.”

“Is she young?” I asked.

“No. She is past middle age,” Holmes replied. “But she is known for kindness and charity. She carries with her a collection of valuable jewels.”

“Jewels,” I repeated.

Holmes nodded.

“That fact alone increases the danger.”

He explained that Lady Frances had been staying at various hotels in Europe. Her last known address was at a hotel in Lausanne, in Switzerland. From there she had written a final letter to her old governess in England. After that, silence.

“Her maid returned alone,” Holmes said. “The maid claims that Lady Frances left her suddenly and without warning.”

“That seems strange,” I said.

“Very strange,” Holmes replied.

We traveled at once to Lausanne. The journey was long, but Holmes spent it in thought. Upon arrival, we visited the hotel where Lady Frances had stayed.

The manager remembered her well.

“She was quiet and gentle,” he said. “She left without complaint.”

“Did she receive visitors?” Holmes asked.

“Yes. A tall man, dark, with a beard. He claimed to be a clergyman.”

Holmes’s eyes sharpened.

“A clergyman?” he repeated.

“Yes. He spoke of religion and charity.”

Holmes nodded slowly.

“And the maid?” he asked.

“The maid remained for a short time after Lady Frances departed. She seemed troubled.”

Holmes asked to see the room where Lady Frances had stayed. He examined it with care, though weeks had passed.

“She left voluntarily?” I asked.

Holmes shook his head.

“I doubt it.”

We next sought the maid, who had returned to England. Before leaving Switzerland, however, Holmes made inquiries about the bearded clergyman.

“His name was Dr. Schlessinger,” the hotel manager said. “He claimed to be collecting funds for a church.”

Holmes gave me a quick glance.

“Fraud,” he murmured.

Upon our return to England, we located the maid, Marie Devine. She appeared nervous and defensive.

“Lady Frances dismissed me,” she said. “She wished to travel alone.”

“Did she say where she would go?” Holmes asked.

“No,” Marie replied. “She seemed under the influence of that clergyman.”

Holmes studied her closely.

“Under his influence in what way?” he asked.

“He spoke of duty and faith,” Marie said. “He urged her to give her jewels for charity.”

Holmes leaned back in his chair.

“And did she?” he asked.

Marie hesitated.

“I do not know.”

Holmes’s eyes did not leave her face.

“You quarreled with her before she left,” he said quietly.

Marie flushed.

“We had words,” she admitted. “But I did not harm her.”

Holmes rose after questioning her further.

“Watson,” he said as we left, “the maid knows more than she tells.”

“Do you suspect her?” I asked.

“I suspect the clergyman more,” Holmes replied. “A false priest who seeks jewels.”

Holmes soon discovered that Dr. Schlessinger had been seen in London. He

was said to travel with a wife who appeared frail and ill.

“A common trick,” Holmes said. “A man who uses a false show of religion and sympathy.”

We traced Schlessinger to a lodging-house in London. Holmes observed the house from across the street.

“We must act carefully,” he said. “If Lady Frances is alive, she may be in danger.”

That evening Holmes approached the house alone, while I waited nearby. He returned with grave expression.

“They are there,” he said quietly. “The false clergyman and his so-called wife. But no sign of Lady Frances.”

“Then where is she?” I asked.

Holmes’s face was set.

“If she gave them her jewels,” he said, “she may no longer be of use to them.”

The thought chilled me.

“You believe—” I began.

Holmes raised his hand.

“We must not assume the worst,” he said. “But time is against us.”

He looked toward the darkened windows of the lodging-house.

“Watson, we stand on the edge of something grave.”

I felt the weight of his words. A noble lady missing. A false clergyman. Jewels that might tempt greed.

The night air was cool and still.

And as we watched the shadowed house, I knew that the case of Lady Frances Carfax would test both our patience and our resolve.

Part 2

The next morning Holmes began his work before sunrise. He had already made inquiries about Dr. Schlessinger and the woman who called herself his wife. The couple had rented rooms in a quiet part of London. They kept to themselves and

were said to be deeply religious. The woman appeared weak and often remained indoors.

“Appearances,” Holmes said softly, “are often tools.”

He had also learned that Schlessinger had been seen visiting a dealer in precious stones. The visit had been brief.

“If Lady Frances gave him her jewels,” Holmes said, “he would not keep them long. He would sell them quickly.”

We went at once to the dealer. Holmes described certain pieces known to belong to Lady Frances. The dealer hesitated at first, but under Holmes’s steady gaze he admitted that a man fitting Schlessinger’s description had indeed brought several jewels for sale.

“They were fine stones,” the dealer said. “Very fine. I paid well.”

Holmes asked when the sale had occurred.

“Three days ago,” the dealer replied.

Holmes thanked him and left without further comment.

“The jewels are gone,” I said as we stepped into the street.

“Yes,” Holmes replied. “But the lady may not yet be.”

That afternoon Holmes received unexpected news. Dr. Schlessinger’s wife had died suddenly. The death had been reported as natural.

“Convenient,” Holmes said quietly.

We hurried to the lodging-house. A small crowd had gathered outside. The body of the supposed wife had been removed. Holmes spoke to the landlord.

“The poor lady was ill for some time,” the landlord said. “She grew weaker each day.”

“Was a doctor called?” Holmes asked.

“No. Her husband said she needed only prayer.”

Holmes’s face hardened.

“Where is Dr. Schlessinger now?” he asked.

“He has gone out,” the landlord replied.

Holmes turned to me.

“Watson, this woman was not his wife.”

“You are certain?” I asked.

“Yes. The maid in Lausanne described Lady Frances as gentle and well-dressed. The woman here was thin, worn, and clearly not of noble birth.”

“Then where is Lady Frances?” I said, my heart tightening.

Holmes looked grave.

“If she is dead,” he said slowly, “her body may lie where we do not expect.”

He then made inquiries at undertakers in the area. At one establishment he found that the body of a woman had been prepared for burial. The name given was that of Schlessinger’s wife.

“May we view the body?” Holmes asked calmly.

The undertaker hesitated but agreed.

We were led into a cold room. A coffin stood open. Holmes lifted the lid carefully.

The face inside was not that of Lady Frances Carfax.

Holmes replaced the lid.

“Watson,” he said quietly, “this is not the lady we seek.”

“Then she lives?” I asked.

“Or her body lies elsewhere,” he replied.

Holmes examined the coffin with close attention. It was solid and heavy.

“Too heavy,” he murmured.

“Too heavy for what?” I asked.

Holmes did not answer at once. He asked the undertaker about the burial arrangements.

“The coffin is to be sealed today,” the man replied. “The burial will take place tomorrow.”

Holmes turned sharply.

“We must delay it,” he said.

After some difficulty, Holmes secured permission to inspect the coffin once more before burial. When the undertaker left the room, Holmes closed the door and turned to me.

“Watson,” he said quietly, “help me lift the coffin.”

We strained together. It was indeed heavier than it should have been.

Holmes removed the nails and opened the lower lining beneath the first body.

There, hidden beneath the false bottom, lay another form.

I felt my breath catch.

It was the body of Lady Frances Carfax.

Her face was pale and still. There were marks upon her wrists.

“She was buried alive,” I whispered in horror.

Holmes examined her quickly.

“No,” he said softly. “She was drugged. She likely died of suffocation.”

My anger rose.

“The villain!” I cried.

Holmes closed the coffin with care.

“We must act at once,” he said.

The police were summoned. Dr. Schlessinger was arrested before he could flee. Under questioning, it was revealed that his true name was not Schlessinger at all. He was a criminal who preyed upon lonely and wealthy women.

He had gained Lady Frances’s trust through false religion. He persuaded her to part with her jewels. When she began to suspect him, he drugged her. Believing her dead, he hid her body beneath the coffin of his accomplice, who had died of illness.

“A cruel and calculated act,” Holmes said quietly.

As we returned to Baker Street, I felt both relief and sorrow.

“We were nearly too late,” I said.

Holmes nodded.

“Yes. Another day, and she would have been buried beyond reach.”

He stood at the window and looked out upon the busy street below.

“Greed,” he said softly. “It drives men to dark deeds.”

I thought of Lady Frances, traveling alone with trust in her heart. Her kindness had been turned against her.

“It is fortunate that her old governess wrote to you,” I said.

Holmes inclined his head.

“A small thread,” he replied. “Yet enough.”

Thus ended the sad affair of Lady Frances Carfax, whose disappearance had led us from quiet inns to hidden coffins and false priests.

And once again, I was reminded that beneath the calm face of society there may lie cruelty, waiting only for opportunity.

But so long as Sherlock Holmes stood ready, such cruelty would not go unchallenged.

Part 3

The arrest of the man who had called himself Dr. Schlessinger brought the case to its end, yet the full truth only came slowly to light. Holmes and I were present when he was questioned. His calm and pious manner had vanished. In its place was a hard and bitter expression.

“You cannot prove murder,” he said coldly.

Holmes regarded him without emotion.

“We can prove deception,” he replied. “You traveled under a false name. You gained the trust of Lady Frances Carfax. You sold her jewels. You drugged her.”

The man’s eyes flickered.

“She was weak,” he said. “She fainted.”

Holmes’s voice grew firm.

“You placed her body beneath the coffin of your companion, hoping to bury her without discovery. Had we not intervened, she would have been lowered into the earth unnoticed.”

The man gave no reply.

Later, when we were alone, I spoke of the horror of it.

“Holmes,” I said, “had we arrived a day later—”

He lifted his hand gently.

“Yes, Watson. But we did not.”

I reflected upon the steps that had led to our discovery. It had begun with a letter from an old governess, troubled by silence. From that small doubt Holmes had

traced the path of a wandering lady across Europe, from hotel to hotel, until it ended in a quiet London lodging-house.

“It was the coffin,” I said thoughtfully. “You sensed something amiss.”

Holmes nodded.

“Weight tells a story,” he said quietly. “A coffin prepared for a thin and sickly woman should not have been so heavy.”

“And the marks upon Lady Frances’s wrists?” I asked.

“She struggled when she awoke,” Holmes replied gravely. “The drug wore off before death came. It was a cruel end.”

I felt a deep sadness.

“She trusted him,” I said.

“Yes,” Holmes answered. “He used religion as a mask. There are few disguises more dangerous.”

In the days that followed, the case was widely discussed. Many were shocked that a woman of rank could fall victim to such deceit. Yet Holmes showed little surprise.

“Rank offers no shield against cunning,” he said. “Loneliness is the true weakness.”

I thought of Lady Frances traveling from place to place, with only her maid for company. When that maid quarreled with her and left, she had been alone in a foreign land. The false clergyman had offered sympathy and faith. She had accepted both.

“The maid knew something,” I said.

Holmes inclined his head.

“Yes. She quarreled over the jewels. She feared that her mistress was being misled. But she lacked courage to act.”

“Yet in the end,” I said, “justice was done.”

Holmes did not smile.

“Justice,” he repeated softly. “It restores order. It does not restore life.”

His words lingered in my mind.

Some weeks later, the jewels that had been sold were traced and returned to

Lady Frances's estate. Her friends arranged for a proper burial, attended with dignity and respect.

On the evening after the trial, Holmes and I sat once more in Baker Street. The fire burned warmly, and the familiar sounds of London drifted through the window.

"Watson," Holmes said after a time, "what do you think was the turning point?"

I considered.

"The sale of the jewels," I said. "It revealed his greed."

Holmes shook his head gently.

"No. The turning point was earlier. It was when the governess noticed silence. When she wrote for help."

I nodded.

"A small act," I said.

"Yes," Holmes replied. "A small act that saved truth from burial."

He rose and moved to the window. The street below was bright with lamps and moving figures.

"It is often so," he continued. "Crime hides in quiet places. It depends upon the belief that no one will look closely."

I thought of the narrow coffin, the false bottom, the hidden form beneath.

"You look closely," I said.

Holmes gave a faint smile.

"It is my profession."

He returned to his chair and reached for his violin. The music that followed was low and thoughtful, filled with a sense of sorrow but also resolution.

As I listened, I felt once more the strange mixture of darkness and light that marked so many of our cases. Evil had acted with cunning and cruelty. Yet through patience and reason, it had been brought to account.

The disappearance of Lady Frances Carfax had ended not in mystery but in revelation.

And though her life could not be restored, her name had been cleared of suspicion, and the man who betrayed her trust would face the law.

In this, at least, there was some measure of peace.

Part 4

Although the main facts of the case were clear, there remained certain details which Holmes later explained to me with his usual precision. It was his habit, after the excitement of action had passed, to review the chain of events and mark each link in its proper place.

“You see, Watson,” he said one evening as we sat quietly in Baker Street, “the danger began not with the sale of the jewels, nor even with the drugging of Lady Frances. It began with isolation.”

He leaned back in his chair, his long fingers pressed together.

“Lady Frances traveled from hotel to hotel. She had wealth, but she lacked close friends. When she quarreled with her maid, she dismissed the one person who might have protected her.”

“The maid was frightened,” I said.

“Yes,” Holmes replied. “But fear without action is useless.”

He then described how Schlessinger, whose true name was Dr. Shlessinger no more than it was holy, had studied his victim carefully. He presented himself as a man of faith. He spoke softly and with great feeling. He praised her charity and urged her to give more.

“Such men know their prey,” Holmes said. “They see kindness and mistake it for weakness.”

I asked how he had discovered the false bottom of the coffin so quickly.

Holmes smiled faintly.

“Because criminals often repeat patterns,” he said. “The so-called wife had died at a convenient moment. The coffin was too heavy. The haste of the burial was suspicious.”

“And the drug?” I asked.

“Likely a powerful sleeping draft,” Holmes answered. “Strong enough to render her helpless. He believed her dead when he placed her in the coffin.”

I shuddered.

“To awaken in darkness—” I began.

Holmes raised his hand.

“We must not dwell upon it.”

His voice softened slightly.

“It is enough that she did not vanish without record. Her name will not be tied to scandal or suspicion.”

In the days after the arrest, the newspapers reported the story widely. Many readers were shocked that a man could use religion as a mask for theft and murder. Yet Holmes showed little surprise.

“The mask is chosen to match the victim,” he said. “If he had sought a merchant, he might have posed as a banker. If he had sought a soldier, he might have worn a uniform.”

“Then it is not faith that is false,” I said, “but the man.”

“Exactly,” Holmes replied.

I thought often of Lady Frances in those days. Though I had never met her in life, her character had become clear through the letters and accounts of those who knew her. She had been generous and trusting, perhaps too much so.

“Would you say she was foolish?” I asked Holmes one afternoon.

He shook his head.

“No. To trust is not foolish. But trust should be balanced with caution.”

His tone was calm, yet there was feeling behind it.

“The world,” he added quietly, “contains both goodness and deceit. One must recognize both.”

Some weeks later we received a letter from the old governess whose concern had begun the inquiry. She expressed gratitude that the truth had been uncovered and that Lady Frances would rest in dignity.

Holmes read the letter carefully and then placed it upon the table.

“There,” he said softly. “The small thread that saved her name.”

It was typical of Holmes that he valued such details. He often said that cases did not begin with great drama but with slight irregularities—a silence, a misplaced word, a weight that did not match expectation.

“Observation,” he once told me, “is the beginning of justice.”

As autumn turned toward winter, life in Baker Street resumed its usual rhythm. Patients came and went from my surgery. Clients visited Holmes with strange stories and troubled faces. The city moved forward, unaware of how near it had come to burying a lady alive.

On a quiet evening, as Holmes tuned his violin, I spoke once more of the case.

“It was nearly too late,” I said.

Holmes looked at me thoughtfully.

“Yes,” he replied. “But nearly is not the same as too late.”

He began to play a gentle air. The notes were steady and calm.

I reflected then upon the many times I had stood beside him at the edge of darkness. In each case there had been risk—sometimes great risk. Yet Holmes never sought danger for its own sake. He sought clarity.

“You never doubted that something was wrong,” I said.

“Silence is sometimes louder than noise,” he answered.

The disappearance of Lady Frances Carfax had shown once again that crime often hides beneath respectability and that evil may wear a kindly face.

But it had also shown that vigilance and reason can uncover even the most carefully hidden wrong.

As the music filled the room, I felt once more that strange mixture of sadness and reassurance that marked so many of our adventures.

Lady Frances had not been forgotten.

And in that, at least, there was comfort.

The Adventure of the Dying Detective

Part 1

It was in the early autumn of the year 1894 that I was called urgently to Baker Street by Mrs. Hudson. Her voice, when she reached me, trembled with fear.

“Dr. Watson,” she said, “you must come at once. Mr. Holmes is very ill.”

I hurried there without delay. When I entered the familiar sitting-room, I was struck at once by the change in my friend. He lay upon the sofa, thin and pale. His eyes burned with unnatural brightness, and his cheeks were hollow. His lips were dry and cracked.

“Holmes!” I cried, rushing to his side.

He raised one trembling hand.

“Do not touch me, Watson,” he whispered.

His voice was weak but sharp.

“What is this?” I demanded. “How long have you been ill?”

“Three days,” he said faintly. “An Eastern disease. Very deadly.”

As a doctor, I was deeply alarmed. His skin was hot and dry. His breathing was quick and shallow. Yet there was something strange in his manner.

“Let me examine you,” I insisted.

He shook his head weakly.

“No. It is highly infectious. You must keep your distance.”

I felt anger rise in me.

“Holmes,” I said firmly, “you are not only my friend but my patient. I will not stand aside.”

He turned his face away.

“You can do nothing,” he murmured. “Only one man in London understands this disease.”

“Who?” I asked.

“Mr. Culverton Smith,” he whispered. “He studies rare diseases. He alone can help.”

I had heard the name. Culverton Smith was known for his interest in strange illnesses from the East. He was not a medical doctor but a private researcher.

“Then I shall fetch him at once,” I said.

Holmes’s eyes opened wide.

“Yes,” he said. “But do not tell him that I sent you. He must come freely.”

“Holmes,” I said, “this is foolish. Your life may depend upon it.”

He gave a faint, dry laugh that ended in a cough.

“Go,” he said. “Bring him.”

I hesitated. His condition appeared grave. Yet he refused my aid and would not allow me near.

“I will return quickly,” I said.

As I left the room, Mrs. Hudson met me in the hallway, wringing her hands.

“Is he dying, sir?” she whispered.

“He is very ill,” I replied.

I hurried through the streets to the house of Culverton Smith. The man received me in a small study filled with bottles and papers. He was tall and thin, with sharp features and cold eyes.

“Mr. Smith,” I said, “Sherlock Holmes is dangerously ill. He asks that you come.”

At the mention of Holmes’s name, a strange expression passed over Smith’s face.

“Ill?” he said slowly. “What illness?”

“A rare Eastern disease,” I replied. “He believes you can save him.”

Smith gave a short laugh.

“Indeed? And why should I care for Sherlock Holmes?”

I stared at him in surprise.

“Because he is dying,” I said firmly.

Smith’s eyes gleamed.

“Dying, you say?”

There was a tone in his voice that disturbed me.

“Yes,” I said. “He has asked for you.”

Smith rose slowly.

“Very well,” he said. “I will come.”

He paused and looked at me closely.

“But you must not return with me. I prefer to see him alone.”

I hesitated.

“I am his doctor,” I said.

“Then you have failed,” Smith replied coldly. “If you wish to save him, do as I

say.”

Though I disliked the man deeply, I feared for Holmes’s life. I agreed and returned first to Baker Street to inform Holmes that Smith was coming.

When I entered the room, Holmes lay as before, weak and trembling.

“He comes,” I said.

Holmes’s eyes flickered.

“Good,” he whispered. “Now listen, Watson. When he arrives, you must hide behind the bed.”

“Hide?” I repeated.

“Yes,” he said faintly. “You must hear what he says.”

I was startled.

“Holmes, this is madness. You are dying.”

A faint smile touched his lips.

“Trust me,” he said.

Though confused and deeply troubled, I did as he asked. I concealed myself behind the bed curtain just before Culverton Smith entered the room.

Smith approached the sofa slowly. He stood looking down at Holmes with a cold expression.

“So,” he said softly, “you sent for me.”

Holmes’s voice was weak.

“Yes,” he murmured. “I am very ill.”

Smith bent closer.

“You recognize the disease?” he asked quietly.

“Yes,” Holmes replied. “It is the same that killed your nephew.”

At these words, Smith stiffened.

“You know that?” he said.

Holmes gave a faint nod.

“You sent him the infected box,” he whispered.

Smith’s face changed.

“You were too clever,” he said slowly. “You discovered the truth. So I sent you the same gift.”

My heart beat wildly behind the curtain.

“Then you admit it?” Holmes said faintly.

“Of course,” Smith replied coldly. “The small ivory box. You opened it. You scratched your finger. And now you die.”

Holmes’s breathing grew weaker.

“Can you save me?” he whispered.

Smith laughed softly.

“Save you? Why should I?”

In that moment, Holmes’s voice changed.

It was no longer weak. It was strong and clear.

“Because I am not dying,” he said calmly.

I stepped from behind the curtain at once.

Culverton Smith turned, his face white with shock.

Holmes sat upright on the sofa. The illness had vanished from his expression.

“You have confessed,” he said quietly.

Police officers entered the room, summoned earlier by Holmes.

Smith stared in disbelief.

“It was a trap,” he whispered.

Holmes inclined his head.

“A necessary one,” he said.

Smith was taken away, still pale and shaking.

When the room was quiet again, I turned to Holmes in amazement.

“You were never ill?” I demanded.

Holmes smiled faintly.

“Not with the disease,” he said. “But I was hungry and tired.”

I felt anger and relief at once.

“You deceived me,” I said.

“Forgive me, Watson,” he replied gently. “But I needed Smith to speak freely.”

I could not remain angry long. The danger had been real, though not as I had feared.

“The ivory box?” I asked.

Holmes pointed to a small object upon the table.

“Never opened,” he said. “I suspected poison.”

I looked at him with renewed admiration.

“You risked much,” I said.

Holmes’s expression grew thoughtful.

“Sometimes,” he said quietly, “a dying man is more convincing than a healthy one.”

And thus ended the strange affair of the dying detective, in which my friend had once again used his mind as his greatest weapon.

His Last Bow: The War Service of Sherlock Holmes

Part 1

It was on a quiet evening in August of the year 1914 that I found myself once more in the company of Sherlock Holmes. Many years had passed since our earlier adventures. Holmes had retired from active work and lived in the country, where he kept bees and studied nature. I too had grown older, and my medical practice occupied most of my time.

Yet the shadow of war had fallen over Europe. News of conflict filled the newspapers. Nations moved toward battle, and there was tension in every city and village.

On that evening I traveled to a small village on the Sussex coast. The land was peaceful, with green fields and low hills that sloped gently toward the sea. Holmes’s cottage stood alone, simple and quiet. Smoke rose from the chimney.

When I entered, Holmes greeted me warmly. His hair was gray, and his face bore the marks of age. Yet his eyes were as sharp as ever.

“Watson,” he said, grasping my hand, “it is good to see you again.”

“And you,” I replied. “I hear that you are now a farmer and a keeper of bees.”

He smiled faintly.

“So it appears.”

We spoke for some time of old days. Yet I sensed that beneath his calm manner there was purpose.

“You did not invite me here only for friendship,” I said at last.

Holmes looked at me steadily.

“No,” he replied quietly. “There is work to be done.”

He explained that in a nearby house, known as a small farm, a man was staying who claimed to be an American. The man’s name was Von Bork. He was said to be connected with foreign affairs.

“He is not American,” Holmes said. “He is German.”

At that time, though war had not yet been declared, it was clear that Germany stood in opposition to England.

“You suspect him of spying?” I asked.

Holmes nodded.

“He gathers information,” he said. “Plans, defenses, secrets.”

“And you?” I asked.

“I have offered him help,” Holmes replied calmly.

I stared at him.

“Help?” I repeated.

“Yes,” he said. “I have played the part of a disgruntled Englishman. I have offered to sell him valuable information.”

“Holmes!” I cried.

He raised his hand.

“It is necessary,” he said. “He believes I have betrayed my country.”

“And you have not?” I asked firmly.

Holmes’s eyes flashed.

“Never.”

He then revealed his plan. That night he was to meet Von Bork and deliver certain documents. The German believed they were secret papers of great importance.

“In truth,” Holmes said, “they are of little value.”

“And the real information?” I asked.

Holmes smiled slightly.

“Safe.”

As evening fell, we walked together toward the farmhouse where Von Bork stayed. The sky was darkening, and a faint wind moved across the fields.

Holmes wore plain clothes and carried a small package under his arm.

“You must remain hidden,” he told me. “Observe, but do not interfere.”

I concealed myself near a hedge from which I could see the door of the farmhouse.

After a short time, the door opened. A tall man stepped out. He was strong, with sharp features and confident manner. This was Von Bork.

Holmes approached him calmly.

“Good evening,” Holmes said.

“You are punctual,” Von Bork replied.

His English was clear but carried a foreign tone.

“I have brought the papers,” Holmes said.

Von Bork gestured toward the house.

“Come inside,” he said.

They entered. I moved closer to the window and listened.

“You have done well,” Von Bork said from within. “Your information has been valuable.”

“And will continue to be,” Holmes replied evenly.

“You have risked much,” Von Bork said.

“As have you,” Holmes answered.

There was a pause. I imagined the package being opened.

“Excellent,” Von Bork said at last. “These papers will be of great use.”

Holmes’s voice remained calm.

“I am glad to hear it.”

Suddenly there was a loud knock at the door.

Von Bork’s voice grew tense.

“What is this?” he demanded.

The door burst open. Officers entered the room.

“In the name of the law,” a voice declared, “you are under arrest.”

I rushed inside.

Von Bork stood pale with shock. Holmes stood beside him, calm and steady.

“You have been betrayed,” Von Bork said bitterly.

Holmes inclined his head slightly.

“By a loyal Englishman,” he replied.

The officers secured Von Bork and took him away.

When we were alone, I turned to Holmes.

“So it was all a game,” I said.

Holmes shook his head.

“Not a game, Watson. A service.”

He looked out into the night toward the sea.

“War has begun,” he said quietly. “Every man must serve in his way.”

I felt pride and admiration.

“Even in retirement,” I said.

Holmes smiled faintly.

“Especially in retirement,” he answered.

And thus I witnessed what would prove to be the last great service of Sherlock Holmes to his country, performed not with noise or glory, but with quiet skill and unwavering loyalty.