



PENGUIN
CANADA

the *Sherlockian*

?

GRAHAMMOORE



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The Sherlockian is a work of historical fiction. All of the contemporary characters in the novel are the product of the author's imagination.

*For my mother, who first taught me to love mysteries when I was eight years old. We lay in bed
~~passing a copy of Agatha Christie's A Murder in Three Acts back and forth, reading to each~~
other.*

She made all of this possible.

The Reichenbach Falls

*So please grip this fact with your cerebral tentacle
The doll and its maker are never identical*

—Sir Arthur Conan Doyle,
London Opinion, December 12, 1912

August 9, 1891

Arthur Conan Doyle curled his brow tightly and thought only of murder.

“I’m going to kill him,” Conan Doyle said as he folded his arms across his broad frame. High in the Swiss Alps, the air tickled Arthur’s inch-thick mustache and seemed to blow straight through his ears. Set far back on his head, Arthur’s ears always appeared to be perking up, listening to something else, something distant and behind him. For such a stocky man, he had a nose that was remarkably sharp. His hair had only recently begun to gray, a process that Arthur couldn’t help but wish along. Though he was but thirty-three years of age, he was already a celebrated author. An internationally acclaimed man of letters with light ocher hair would not do so well as a wizened one, now, would he?

Arthur’s two traveling companions ascended to the ledge on which he stood, the highest climbable point of the Reichenbach Falls. Silas Hocking was a cleric and novelist well known as far away as Arthur’s London. His recent offering of religious literature, *Her Benny*, was a work Arthur held in high regard. Edward Benson was an acquaintance of Hocking’s and was much quieter than his gregarious friend. Though Arthur had met the two men only this morning, over breakfast at the Rif Alp Hotel in Zermatt, he felt that he could confide in them safely. He could tell them of his mind, and of his dark plans.

“The fact is, he has gotten to be a kind of ‘old man of the sea’ about my neck,” continued Arthur, “and I intend to make an end of him.” Hocking huffed as he stood beside Arthur, gazing at the vast expanse of the Alps before them. Tufts of snow melted yards beneath their feet into a mighty stream of water that had, millennia ago, driven a path through the mountain as it poured loudly into the frothing pool below. Benson silently pressed a mittenful of snow into a tight ball and dropped it whimsically into the chasm. The force of the wind tore bits off the snowball as it fell, until it disappeared in the air as a series of white puffs.

“If I don’t,” said Arthur, “he’ll make a death of me.”

“Don’t you think you’re being rather rough on an old friend?” asked Hocking. “He’s given you fame. Fortune. You two have made a handsome couple.”

“And in plastering his name across every penny dreadful in London, I’ve given him a reputation which far exceeds my own. You know I get letters. ‘My beloved cat has vanished into South Hampstead. Her name is Sherry-Ann. Can you find her?’ Or, ‘My mum had her purse snatched exiting a hansom in Piccadilly. Can you deduce the culprit?’ But the thing of it is, the letters aren’t addressed to me—they’re addressed to *him*. They think he’s real.”

“Yes, your poor, admiring readers,” pleaded Hocking. “Have you thought of them? People seem so terribly fond of the fellow.”

“More fond of him than of me! Do you know I received a letter from my own Mam? She asked—knowing I would of course do anything she ever required—she asked that I sign the name Sherlock

Holmes to a book for her neighbor Beattie. Can you imagine? Sign his name rather than my own. My Mam speaks as if she's *Holmes's* mother, not mine. Gah!" Arthur tried to contain his sudden burst of anger.

"My greater work is ignored," he continued. "*Micah Clarke? The White Company?* That charming little play I concocted with Mr. Barrie? Overlooked for a few morbid yarns. Worse still, he has become a waste of my time. If I have to concoct another of those tortuous plots—the bedroom door always locked from the inside, the dead man's indecipherable final message, the whole thing told wrong end first so that no one can guess the obvious solution—it is a drain." Arthur looked to his boots, showing his weariness in his bowed head. "To put it frankly, I hate him. And for my own sanity I will soon see him dead."

"How will you do it, then?" teased Hocking. "How does one go about killing the great Sherlock Holmes? Stab him in the heart? Slit his throat? Hang him by the neck?"

"A hanging! My, are those words a balm upon my mind. But no, no, it should be something grand—he is a hero, after all. I'll give him one final case. And a villain. He'll be in need of a proper villain this time around. A gentlemanly fight to the death; he sacrifices himself for the greater good, and both men perish. Something along those lines." Benson pounded another snowball into being and lobbed it gently into the air. Arthur and Hocking watched its open-ended arc as it vanished into the sky.

"If you want to save on funeral expenses," Hocking said with a chuckle, "you could always toss him off a cliff." He looked to Arthur for a reaction but found no smile on his face. Instead Arthur curled his brow in the tight-faced frown he wore when he was in the midst of his deepest thinking.

He gazed at the jaws of the chasm below. He could hear the roar of the falling water and the violent crush it made at the mouth of the rock-speckled river. Arthur felt himself suddenly terrified. He imagined his own death on those stones. Being a medical man, Arthur was more than familiar with the frailty of the human body. A fall of this height . . . His corpse banging, slapping against the rocks all the way down . . . The dreadful cry caught in his mouth . . . Torn limb from limb on the crust of the earth, the wisps of grass stained with his blood . . . And now, in his thoughts, his own body vanished, replaced by someone leaner. Taller. A thin, underfed ribbon of a man, in a deerstalker cap and long coat. His hard face obliterated, once and for all, on a spike of gunmetal stone.

Murder.

The Baker Street Irregulars

*“My name is Sherlock Holmes. It is my business
to know what other people don’t know.”*

—Sir Arthur Conan Doyle,
“The Adventure of the Blue Carbuncle”

January 5, 2013

The five-penny piece tumbled into Harold’s palm. The coin felt heavy as it landed, heads up, and Harold closed his fingers around the worn silver. He squeezed for a few seconds before he realized that his hands were shaking. The room exploded in applause.

“Hurray!”

“Welcome aboard!”

“Congratulations, Harold!”

Harold heard laughter, and more clapping. A hand slapped him on the back, and another rubbed his shoulder warmly. But all Harold could think about was the coin in his own right hand. In his left hand, Harold gripped his new certificate. The coin had been glued, poorly, to the lower left corner and had become unattached when Harold overexcitedly grasped the paper. The coin had fallen off, and Harold had caught it midflight. He looked down at the tiny silver piece. It was a Victorian-era shilling, worth only five pennies in its day. It would be worth a lot more than that now, and to Harold it was worth a fortune. He blinked away the moisture that had formed in the corners of his eyes. The coin meant that he had arrived. That he had achieved something. That he belonged.

“Welcome, Harold,” said a voice behind him. Someone tousled the deerstalker cap on his head. “Welcome to the Baker Street Irregulars.”

These words, which Harold had hoped to hear for so long, sounded foreign and strange now as he finally heard them. All these people—two hundred bodies, laughing and joking and patting backs—they were all clapping for Harold. This Harold. Harold White, twenty-nine years old, with the slight belly, with the thick eyebrows, with the astigmatism, with the sweaty, shivering hands.

Harold couldn’t believe that he really deserved all this. But he did. He belonged here.

The Baker Street Irregulars were the world’s preeminent organization devoted to the study of Sherlock Holmes, and Harold was its newest member. Harold had published his first article in the *Baker Street Journal*, the Irregulars’ quarterly publication, two years earlier. “On the Dating of Bloodstains: Sherlock Holmes and the Founding of Modern Forensics,” Harold had titled the piece. He had explored the historical connections between Holmes’s first experiments in *A Study in Scarlet* with the work of Dr. Eduard Piotrowski. (“Dr. Piotrowski, practicing in Kraków in the 1890s, beat in the heads of baby rabbits and recorded the patterns made by the blood bursting from their skulls. Holmes’s experiments were similarly gory, though he at least had the decency to use his own blood, as well as the labors of his own skull,” Harold had written. He thought this was his most amusing line in the piece.) Harold had published two other articles after, in smaller Sherlockian magazines. Tonight was his first time at the Irregulars’ invitation-only annual dinner. Just to be included among the guests at the Irregulars’ dinner was an immense honor—but to be offered membership, at such a young age, with such a small history of scholarship to his name? Harold couldn’t think of another Irregular who

been offered membership this quickly, after only one dinner.

Harold White, in the cheap black suit that hung loosely on the shoulders, in the chicken-stained tie, was in the middle of the proudest moment of his life. He adjusted the plaid deerstalker hat that rested magnificently on his head. The hat was by far his favorite possession. He'd owned it since he was fourteen years old, since he had first become obsessed with Sherlock Holmes and dressed as the famous detective for Halloween. As his love of Holmes grew from childish infatuation to mature study, what had once been a costume prop eventually became day-to-day clothing. He'd worn the hat proudly at his graduation from Princeton, even temporarily sewing a tassel on top for the occasion. As Harold moved from his nervous teens to his tedious twenties, the hat served him well through the cocktail parties, the autumn picnics, the friends' weddings that cropped up more and more often. He had worn it when he accepted his first career-oriented job as a New York publisher's assistant. He had worn it when he separated from his longest-lasting girlfriend, Amanda, about whom Harold never spoke.

The Irregulars' dinner, held this year at the Algonquin Hotel on Forty-fourth Street, fell amid the grand week of Sherlockiana. For four days around January 6, Holmes's birthday, all the world's societies devoted to the celebration of Sherlock Holmes gathered in New York. Lectures, tours, book signings, sales of Victorian antiques and first-edition printings—for a Sherlock Holmes devotee, it was heaven.

Of the hundreds of Sherlockian societies in attendance, however, the Baker Street Irregulars were by far the oldest, the most senior, and the most exclusive. Truman and FDR had claimed membership, as had Isaac Asimov. Only the Irregulars, and their few guests, could attend the annual dinner, and their rare invitations were the object of heated cravings from Sherlockians the world over. The Irregulars were even responsible, as everyone knew, for deducing January 6 as the day of Holmes's birth. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle had never actually written the date January 6 in the "Canon"—that is, the four novels and fifty-six short stories that make up all the original adventures of Sherlock Holmes. But an extensive, Talmudically deep reading of these tales allowed Christopher Morley, one of the founding Irregulars, to propose January 6 as the most likely candidate for Holmes's birthday. All the other organizations were considered "scion" groups of the Irregulars and needed an official sanction from the Irregulars in order to form. Applications for membership in the Irregulars did not exist—you distinguished yourself in the field of Sherlockian studies, they would find you. And if the leader of the Irregulars deemed you qualified, you would be presented with a shilling piece as a sign of your membership—like the coin, the faded and ancient silver, that Harold squeezed between his whitening knuckles.

The applause dissipated into chatter. Chairs were pushed back from the dining tables, white linen napkins draped across the plates of half-eaten chickens and boiled vegetables. Tumblers of scotch were downed in long gulps. Hands were shaken. Good-byes were offered.

Harold felt suddenly foolish, clutching his shilling. He had fantasized about this moment since he first learned of the Irregulars. And now it was over. He wondered what he would have to do next to have this feeling back. He wanted so much to hold on to his successes and not let them fade away in the dull clamor of normal life. Harold watched servers collect the silverware, sweeping the dirty forks and dull butter knives into plastic tubs.

Harold lived in Los Angeles and worked as a freelance literary researcher. His primary employers were movie studios, whose legal departments hired him to defend against charges of copyright violation. If an angry novelist sued the makers of the summer's biggest action blockbuster, claiming that they had stolen the idea from his little-read political thriller of twenty years back, it was Harold's job to write a brief saying that no, in fact *both* works took their basic plot elements from a lesser-known Ben Jonson play, or one of Dostoyevsky's difficult short stories, or another work that was similarly obscure and similarly in the public domain. Harold's name was well used and well lauded.

the legal departments of the studios, except in the rare cases when they would sue one another.

Harold's main qualification for this position was that he had read everything. He had simply read more books—more fiction—than anyone else whom either he or his employers had met. This had been accomplished, at his age, via an acute ability to speed-read. As a child, as he ploddingly read through the pages of every Sherlock Holmes mystery, his desire—his animal need—to know what happened next posed a problem: It took him longer to get through the stories than he could bear. So he taught himself to speed-read from a mail-order self-help book. His fellow students would tease him about this ability, as they found it unthinkable that anybody could read a four-hundredpage novel in two hours and still have any significant amount of information retention. But Harold could. And he would prove it to them, reading books alongside his peers and letting them quiz him about plot elements and descriptive passages. Sure enough, Harold retained more information, more quickly, than anyone he had met at his grade school in Chicago, in his college years at Princeton, or in his adult life since.

"Harold!" came a deep and resonant voice from behind. A set of hands squeezed Harold's shoulders. He turned and looked up into the face of Jeffrey Engels. A snow-haired Californian with a nearly permanent grin etched into his cheeks, Jeffrey was easily the best-liked and most respected Sherlockian in the room. Harold suspected that it was Jeffrey, in fact, who had campaigned for Harold's investiture in the Irregulars. But he knew better than to ask, as Jeffrey would never tell him one way or the other.

"Thank you," said Harold.

Jeffrey ignored Harold's comment. His usual grin was gone, replaced with a dour stare.

"This affair has taken a grave turn," said Jeffrey quietly.

"To what?"

"To murder!" replied Jeffrey.

The Final Problem

“You know a conjuror gets no credit
when once he has explained his trick.”

—Sir Arthur Conan Doyle,
A Study in Scarlet

September 3, 1891

Arthur killed Sherlock Holmes by the light of a single lamp.

Encased behind the heavy wooden doors of his study, Arthur wrote quickly. The oil lamp atop his writing desk glowed pale yellow over the book-lined walls. Shakespeare, Catullus, even, as Arthur would admit freely, Poe. His favorites were all there, but Arthur rarely consulted them. He wrote confidently. He was not the sort of writer who spread his sources across his desk like bedsheets, clinging to them tightly, consulting, soiling, pinching. *Hamlet* lay on its shelf—third from the bottom, a quarter of the way around the room clockwise from the door—and if, when Arthur quoted it for another pithy aphorism from Holmes, he quoted inaccurately . . . well, such was fiction.

Murder tasted sweet on Arthur’s lips. He salivated. His pen, heavy between his stubby fingers, did not scratch the paper. It stroked the pages, filling each one top to bottom with black ink. The plot, the confounding little puzzle of tricks and then treats, had been worked out well in advance.

At this, the middle point of his career, Arthur was unquestionably England’s great composer of the mystery story. Indeed, as the States had failed to produce a mystery author of any caliber since Poe had invented the form, Arthur thought it not unreasonable to say that he was the most accomplished in the world. There was a trick to mystery stories, of course, and Arthur wasn’t embarrassed to admit that he knew it. It was the same trick practiced by a thousand amateur parlor magicians and face-painters and circus jugglers: misdirection.

Arthur laid the facts of the crime before his readers clearly, calmly, and efficiently. No important detail was left out, and—yes, here was the mark of the true craftsman—not too many unimportant details were left in. It’s an easy feat to confuse the reader with a mountain of unnecessary characters and events; the challenge, for Arthur, was in presenting a clean and simple tale, with only a few notable characters to keep straight, and yet still to obscure the solution from the reader. The key was in the prose, in the way the information was laid out. Arthur kept the reader’s mind on the exciting, exceptional, and yet fundamentally *unimportant* facts of the case, while the salient details were left for Holmes to work upon, as if by magic.

It was a game for Arthur, putting together these plots. It was he against his audience, the writer locked in endless combat with his readers, and only one would emerge victorious. Either the reader would guess the ending early or Arthur would confound him to the final page. It was a test of wits, and a war that Arthur did not often lose.

Why, of course, if the reader were smart enough, he could figure the whole thing through after just the first few pages! But in his heart Arthur knew that his readers didn’t really *want* to win. They wanted to test their wits against the author at full pitch, and they wanted to lose. To be dazzled. And so Arthur’s struggle was long, and moreover it was bloody exhausting. He had come to realize that putting together a decent mystery was an infernally tedious affair. And, his having labored at this mi-

for some years now, the tedium had engendered in him such a hatred for Holmes as he could no longer contain. Now his hatred extended beyond just the rat-faced detective: It carried over to the reader who adored him so. And now thankfully, at last, in his final Holmes story, Arthur would be done with them all for good.

Late as the hour was, Arthur heard the rambunctious banging of children upstairs. He could hear faintly, the maid Kathleen telling them to hush up before they woke their mother. Touie would be sound asleep by now, as she had been most of the day. Her consumption was not much worsening, but the clean Swiss *föhn* had done little to improve her health. She rarely left the house. Journeys into the city were simply out of the question. Against her frailty, though, Arthur had become determined. He would take care of poor, dear Touie, his bride since she was nineteen. And if they should have to keep separate bedrooms, for her health, and if nannies would be required to look after the children, and if she had now wilted into the winter of her own private quarters . . . well, so be it. Arthur would write. He had liked to keep regular, daytime hours for his work, but tonight was different. Some writing or editing had to do in the dark.

Arthur's pen did not hasten as he moved on to the final page. He made the same broad strokes he always had. The words came to him, first in his head—the orderly noun, the clarifying verb, the occasional but welcome adjective—one by one, and he dutifully recorded them onto the darkening sheet. He did not go back over his sentences once they were on the page. He did not scratch out words like his good friends Mr. Barrie and Mr. Oliver, endlessly replacing them with their freshest *mot juste*. Such was the mark, Arthur felt, of an indecisive hand. He did not consult his previous paragraphs for where to go next. He simply knew.

His fingers were steady as he came to the last bit of his story. A letter from beyond the grave, to be opened after its sender had passed on. “The best and the wisest man whom I have ever known,” Arthur wrote. A fitting tribute; a fine farewell. He placed a light period after “known” and turned the sheet onto its predecessors. He carefully pressed the stack into a tidy, perfect rectangle and flipped the pages over. “The Final Problem,” read the title at the top of page one. *Indeed*, thought Arthur. And then, queerly, he smiled. He even allowed himself a chortle, as he was alone. Without his wife, or his children, or even his mother knowing, Arthur was, for the first time in years, finally free.

He stood. He stumbled happily to the door. And then— Oh! He'd almost forgotten.

Arthur practically skipped back to his desk. What had come over him? You'd be excused for thinking he was a love-struck teenager, on his way to call on his *amore*.

Arthur unlocked the bottom-left drawer beneath his desk and removed one dark, leather-bound book from a stack of many. He opened the book and flipped through to the bottom of a page already quite filled with his ink. He plucked up his pen and recorded the date. And then, though most evenings Arthur would spend an hour recording all the day's events and all of his most private thoughts, tonight he committed only two words to his diary.

“Killed Holmes,” he wrote.

Arthur felt light. His shoulder muscles loosened. He closed his eyes and inhaled the dark air. He was so happy.

He was careful to lock his precious diary back in the desk before stepping out into the hallway in search of brandy.

The Lost Diary

“Watson here will tell you that I can
never resist a touch of the dramatic.”

—Sir Arthur Conan Doyle,
“The Naval Treaty”

January 5, 2010, con

“To murder!” repeated Jeffrey Engels for emphasis, back in the Algonquin Hotel.

Harold paused. Something was very wrong here.

“The affair has taken a grave turn? To murder?” Jeffrey said again, with a touch of hesitation.

Harold laughed. “The quote is from ‘The Adventure of the Six Napoleons,’” he said. “You owe me a drink.”

“Well done!” Jeffrey beamed. “So I do.”

“But I think you owe me two drinks. The quote isn’t quite right. It should be ‘the affair has taken *very much* graver turn,’ not ‘a *grave* turn.’ ”

Jeffrey thought for a moment.

“My, you’ve been invested in the Irregulars all of two minutes and look at you! Picking nits at an old man already. Well, very well. I’ll keep you in scotch until dawn at this rate.”

Harold had initially encountered this Sherlockian quotation game at the very first meeting he had attended. Four years ago, before he had written anything for the *Baker Street Journal* or met any of the Irregulars, he found himself at the meeting of the local Los Angeles “scion” society, the Curious Collectors of Baker Street. They were a small group, considerably less prestigious than the Irregular Meetings were open to the public. In an oak-lined bar, over glasses of peat-smelling scotch—a drink the Sherlockians seemed to think that ice cubes were made from poison and were therefore to be distrusted, as far as Harold could tell—they called out quotes from Sherlock Holmes stories. One member would holler a quote—“ ‘ I never guess. It is a shocking habit, destructive to the logic of the faculty,’” for instance. Then the man or woman to his right would have to provide the name of the story from which it came—in this case *The Sign of the Four*. If he answered correctly, it would then be his turn to yell out a quote, and then the turn of the Sherlockian to his right to supply the answer. Whoever erred first would find the next round on his or her tab. Given most Sherlockians’ fondness for high-quality scotch, and for voluminous quantities of same, new and inexperienced members would find their American Express cards pressed to their limits.

“It’s my first night as an Irregular,” said Harold. “And my guess is, you’re more than a little responsible for that. I think I’m the one who owes you a drink.”

Jeffrey’s grin returned. “I haven’t the faintest idea what you’re talking about, kid. Now let’s make use of the bar.”

A few minutes later, Harold sat on the stool beside Jeffrey, sipping bourbon. A group of revelers had staged a nonviolent coup over the bar’s piano and were sing-chanting an old Sherlockian ditty. The bartender regarded them with equal parts disapproval and bemusement.

“To all our friends canonical / On both sides of the crime / We’ll take the cup and lift it up / To Holmes and Watson’s time,” sang the drunken group, to the tune of “Auld Lang Syne.” It was bot

off-key and arrhythmic, though Harold had to admit that he wasn't sure he'd ever heard a Sherlockian song sung with much regard for proper pitch.

Harold and Jeffrey were soon talking about the diary, which Harold suspected was all anyone was talking about that night. The singing and drinking were a distraction, but there was really only one thought haunting the minds of the hundreds of Sherlockians in the Algonquin Hotel: the lost diary of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. The lost diary that had finally been found.

After Conan Doyle died, one volume of his diaries had gone missing. The author had kept a detailed daily diary of his activities for his entire life, and yet when his wife and children surveyed his papers after his death, one book was strangely not present. No worn, ink-drenched leather journal for the period from October 11 through December 23, 1900, could be found. And in the century that had passed since that day, not one of the hundreds of scholars and family members who had tried to find it had been able to do so. The lost diary was the holy grail of Sherlockian studies. It would be worth a fortune—perhaps as much as \$10 million, if it ever went up for sale at Sotheby's. But more importantly, it would provide a window into the mind of the world's greatest mystery writer, at the height of his powers. For a hundred years, scholars had theorized about what was in the diary. A manuscript for a lost story? Some secret confession from Conan Doyle? And how on earth had it vanished so completely?

Three months before the dinner at the Algonquin, each member of the Irregulars had received a tantalizingly brief e-mail from Alex Cale, a fellow Irregular. "The great mystery is solved," it had read. "I have found the diary. Please make all necessary arrangements that I might present it, and the secrets contained within, at this year's conference."

It was a delicious mystery, even for Alex, who had a particular fondness for this sort of drama. Quickly, a flurry of e-mails skittered across the globe: "Is he serious?" . . . "He can't mean THE diary, can he?" . . . "He's been looking for that damned thing for twenty-five years; he only just found it NOW?" The Baker Street Irregulars reacted with incredulity only to buffer themselves from the forthcoming shock; the next three months would see them through stages of exhilaration, anxiety, twitchy anticipation, and, from some darker corners, jealousy.

Alex Cale was already the most accomplished of the Sherlockians. It was difficult to argue that he was not the world's greatest expert on Sherlock Holmes, though the Irregulars boasted more than a few experts who might be inclined to disagree. But of course, his rivals had said, of course it would be Alex Cale who found the missing diary of Arthur Conan Doyle. With his money. With his free time. With dear dead Daddy's seemingly never-ending trust fund behind him.

And yet the question currently foremost in the minds of Harold, Jeffrey, and the hundreds of other Sherlockians drinking, laughing, sleeping, or, less commonly, making love in the Algonquin Hotel was this: Where *had* Alex found the diary? And how had he found it?

After his initial message, Alex stopped responding to his e-mails. He returned no phone calls. He answered no letters, even though the craft of old-fashioned letter writing had always been one in which he'd taken some pride. Finally, after a number of attempts at communication from Jeffrey and Engels, Alex wrote back a message. If one could even call it that.

"Am being followed," Alex wrote to Jeffrey. "Will update soon." It had the clipped syntax of a telegram, and as a result Jeffrey couldn't tell whether Alex was joking or whether he was losing his mind. He forwarded Alex's message around, and the consensus was that Alex was having a little too much fun with all of this, taking the fantastical mystery a bit too far. Certainly the diary would be valuable, but who—what shadowy figure—would trail Alex around his London home? Cale must be teasing, they thought. Though Harold, prone to fantasy as he was, harbored fears. Was it possible that someone really was trying to hurt Alex Cale?

"My best guess?" said Jeffrey. "It's a story. A lost manuscript. Conan Doyle must have decided

was garbage and hidden it away. He wouldn't have wanted anyone to find and publish his subpar work."

"Maybe," said Harold. "But Conan Doyle published a lot of material in his life. And look, not to be blasphemous or anything, but they're not all gems. 'The Lion's Mane'? 'The Mazarin Stone'? I mean, really."

Jeffrey laughed.

"I always took the view that Conan Doyle didn't even write those awful late stories himself. They don't quite sound like him. But the diary is from the fall of 1900. He was preparing to write *The Hound of the Baskervilles*. Probably his best work, if you ask me."

"Yeah," said Harold. "I'm not sure . . . I just don't think it's a story, for some reason. I think it's . . ." Harold drifted off. He felt silly saying this out loud.

"It's . . . ?" prompted Jeffrey.

"I mean, that it's . . . That the diary has a secret in it. Something he didn't want anyone to know. Something he wrote down for himself. And only himself. He was a writer. He was a devout diarist. He liked to put things on paper. It's therapeutic. But then he didn't want the world knowing whatever is . . . that thing."

Jeffrey's phone went off. The sound was somewhere between a squeak and a beep. He looked at the screen and, motioning an apology to Harold, answered his phone.

"Yes?" was all Jeffrey said, and then, after a moment, "Thank you." Harold looked at him quizzically.

"So you think there's a secret in that diary?" said Jeffrey. "Well then, kid, why don't we find out?"

Harold was still just as confused.

"That was the concierge," continued Jeffrey. "I told him to contact me as soon as Alex Cale checked in." He smiled again, pleased with himself. "Cale is in the lobby. Want to go solve a mystery?"

Harold narrowly avoided knocking his drink over as he jumped up from his stool.

He bounded out of the wide double doors like Holmes on the trail of Professor Moriarty. Jeffrey still smiling, followed into the radiant lobby.

Alex—Jeffrey was right, that was actually Alex Cale signing his name for the desk clerk—wore a thick trench coat, buttoned to the top, and held a heavy-looking briefcase in his right hand. He transferred the case to his left hand while he finished with the hotel forms. Effete but friendly, Alex was the kind of man who hosted as many parties as he attended and who had a knack for making sure that everyone was satisfied with a drink at even the parties for which he wasn't responsible. Harold had met Alex at previous Sherlockian events, and of course he'd known Alex's name almost as long as he'd known the name Sherlock Holmes, but he did not know him well.

"Alex, my old friend, you're here!" bellowed Jeffrey. Alex turned but didn't seem entirely happy to see the two men heading toward him.

"Gentlemen," said Alex quietly. His accent—English—was rare among the Irregulars, most of whom were American. Alex neither set down the case nor moved to embrace his two colleagues in any way. He stood there like a wet paper towel, damp and used. A storm must have kicked up outside. Harold hadn't noticed. Alex's pupils were wide, as if from lack of sleep. He seemed to gaze right past them.

"Where have you been all week, you old dog? We've missed you. Yesterday we had the most marvelous talk from Laurie King about the Woman—her role in the Great Hiatus, all that. Fascinating."

"Sorry I missed it," said Alex with obvious insincerity. He must know, thought Harold, that they did not want to talk to him about any of this. They wanted to talk to Alex about what everyone wanted to talk to Alex about: The diary. Tomorrow's lecture. The solution to a hundred-year puzzle.

“Who are you?” asked Alex. He didn’t even bother to look Harold in the eye as he said it.

“Harold. I’m Harold White. I was just invested in the Irregulars tonight.” Harold reached out for a handshake, but Alex made no move to take his hand. “We actually met once before. In California. You were at UCLA, giving a talk?”

“Right, yes,” said Alex. “I remember. Pleasure to see you again.” Alex clearly did not remember, nor did he seem particularly pleased.

“They get younger every year, don’t they?” said Jeffrey warmly.

Harold tried not to take offense.

“I’m not really that young,” countered Harold. “I’ve already—”

“Do not turn around,” said Alex abruptly.

Harold was confused. “I’m sorry?”

“Do not turn around,” repeated Alex. Both Harold and Jeffrey were facing away from the hotel’s front doors, though both instinctively started to cheat their heads to the side. “There’s someone outside. Through the window. *Do not turn*, what’s-your-name—Harry?—what did I just say to you? Now, I’m going to shift slightly to my right. Yes. Now you two do the same. Yes. Again. Can you see anyone? There at the window?”

Harold tried to move his eyes without moving his head, which gave him a slight headache. He saw thick waves of rain batter the tall windows. He saw dull streaks of white light on the glass from the streetlights across Forty-fourth Street. He did not see anything like a face in the window, peering sinisterly into the lobby.

Harold was confused, and he was becoming concerned as well— though for Alex’s sanity rather than for his safety. Jeffrey did not appear to see anything untoward outside the hotel either, and he seemed equally uncertain about how to respond.

“C’mon now,” said Jeffrey. “Quit putting us on. Come and let’s have a drink. You can tell us about your adventures.”

Alex either ignored or didn’t hear him, searching the rest of the lobby in quick, sharp glances.

“Tell us what’s in the diary,” Jeffrey continued. “Please. Give us a sneak peek, before tomorrow.”

Alex stared at Jeffrey for a silent moment. He appeared genuinely confused.

“You really want to know what’s in this diary?” said Alex.

The question was so simple, and the answer so obvious, that it took them a few moments to respond.

“Yes,” said the two men, in approximate unison. For the first time, Alex made eye contact with Harold. The effect was unnerving.

“I wonder if you do,” said Alex. “When you’re presented with a problem, it’s only natural to want to know the answer. But if you think you can manage to sleep tonight, then sleep on this: Is the mystery sometimes more pleasurable than the solution? Are you sure that finding out what’s in the diary will be as satisfying as forever wondering about what’s in this diary?” He stepped back, away from them, switching his briefcase from one hand to the other. He pulled it to his chest, tapping it lightly with his free hand. “I suppose you’ll see tomorrow, then.”

As Alex walked quickly away across the hardwood floor, Harold noticed the line of wet footprints he left in his path. The shoe-shaped puddles quickly streaked and pooled, their original shape lost in a thin watery sheen.

From around the lobby, Harold could hear murmuring. Sherlockian heads were turning. Wait, was that just Alex Cale, standing there? The man with the briefcase? But before anyone else could approach him, Alex disappeared into an elevator.

“Jesus,” said Harold. “What do you think he meant by that?”

“That by this time tomorrow,” answered Jeffrey, “we’ll have solved the last great mystery of Arthur Conan Doyle.”

Mourning

Petty thefts, wanton assaults, purposeless outrage—to the man who held the clue all could be worked into one connected whole. To the scientific student of the higher criminal world, no capital in Europe offered the advantages which London then possessed.

—Sir Arthur Conan Doyle,
“The Adventure of the Norwood Builder”

December 18, 1891

Arthur emerged from the orange glow of the Charing Cross Station into the dry Christmastime cold. Despite being well into winter, London had experienced little snowfall. Thus everyone expected a huge storm any day now. The cold bashed against Arthur’s long coat, wheedling its way into the sleeves, slipping between the laces of his leather shoes, poking at his earlobes, and, after a few moments, painting the tops of his ears blush red.

In the second week of this snowless December, Arthur’s murder—and he thought of it as such in more uncertain terms—of Sherlock Holmes had become public. “FAMED DETECTIVE PERISHES,” blared the headline in the *Times*. Arthur was embarrassed by this supreme foolishness. The dolts even printed an obituary for the man. *An obituary for a fictional character*. In a newspaper, no less. It was significant enough, thought Arthur, that things had indeed gotten out of hand with the fellow. Ending it was clearly the right thing to do. He was a nuisance, and the good people of London would be better served by some higher fiction. At least, at last, the madness would die down. Some new adventurer would pop up from the pages of the *Strand* and onto the national stage; perhaps it would be that Raffles character the one Willie Hornung had been writing about. Sherlock Holmes would be forgotten in a year’s time. Arthur was sure of it.

Two and a half years earlier, Arthur had moved from his cramped quarters in Montague Place to a lovely suburban four-story, eight miles away in South Norwood. He certainly didn’t miss the noise, or the streetwide bustle you had to mash against each time you left the house. But he did miss walking past the British Museum each day, idling along the great stone wall that enclosed the museum in a squared-off letter U. He had occasionally taken the long way about, peering into the gaping expanse of gray stone as the wall opened to reveal a forest of Ionic columns beneath a simple architrave. The cornice above was so wide and thin that when Arthur glanced at it, he always thought it was as if the clouds above formed the right hand of God, pushing down on the museum, pressing it deeper into the soil of Britain.

South Norwood was nonetheless an improvement. One didn’t have to choke through the city smog every day—“London saves a man a fortune on tobacco,” he would joke to Barrie, who would laugh kindly—and it was only a few minutes into Charing Cross by train. He bought a tandem tricycle for himself and Touie, who managed the exercise very well. They could cycle fifteen miles before dinner if they got started right after tea. The house even had room for Arthur’s sister Connie, after Arthur and the Mam put an end to her gallivanting in Portugal. She made an excellent governess for Roger and Kingsley, Arthur’s children, the latter of whom was still, at one year of age, no bigger than a throw pillow.

Arthur left the mall in the center of the street, heading south, away from the Charing Cross Hotel. He passed a one-legged news vendor, who shook the day's papers at him. They did not make eye contact.

A line of cabs creaked and rattled along the Strand. The horses made grumbling noises in the colic like old men, tired and cantankerous. Boys flitted about delivering notes in all directions at once. The smooth lines of the three- and four-story buildings that bordered the avenue were abutted by bright red "TO LET" signs, offering rooms above the telegraph office, above the shops, above the solicitor's long row. Arthur turned his back to Trafalgar Square and strolled.

The suburbs were a treat, of course, but Arthur missed the city. He loved coming into town for his errands, which he would perform leisurely. He would soak up the city's energy, its squealing and squawking, and then return with a full belly to Norwood. To Touie. To his tricycle.

He was content in this moment. He even swung his stick as he made his way a few paces along the Strand. He would have been in the mood for whistling had he been the sort of man who whistled. It was a fine morning.

"YOU BRUTE!" an old lady shouted as she struck Arthur's head full force with her handbag, bruising his nose and knocking off his hat. Arthur stumbled, unhurt but considerably shocked. She could not have been under sixty years old if she was a day. Her body was hunched, shoulders rigid above the tips of her toes. She looked more frail than anything else. It wasn't quite clear from where she summoned up the strength to hit Arthur. She wore a thin black armband over her dark coat as if she were in mourning. He stammered.

"I . . . madam, I . . . I'm sorry, have I . . . I've offended you in some way?"

"YOU MONSTER!" she barked before taking aim again with her bag. Heavy, it made a long, slow arc against the sky, the blue of the bag standing out against the thick cloud cover. Aware at least of her presence this time, Arthur stepped back, avoiding the blow. He raised his stick for a moment, assuming a defensive position, and then felt mortified enough to set it back on the pavement. He was not an athletic man. He couldn't very well raise his walking stick against a confused, elderly woman.

"Ma'am, I don't know who you think I am, but I assure you I've never met you before in my life."

A page boy stopped his hurried running to take in the scene. He was joined by a tall gentlewoman in a fashionable hat, who carried her sun umbrella outstretched despite the cloudy, wintry day. Other turned heads led to another. A crowd began to grow.

"I know full well who you are, Dr. Doyle, and don't think I don't know what you've done." Arthur was less confused by her double negative than by her use of his family name. Arthur was not used to being recognized, even though there had been photographs of him in the papers last year. David Thomson had taken a very nice one of Arthur writing at his desk for the *Daily Chronicle*.

Arthur could hear a mumbling emerge from the gathering crowd. "Doyle . . . Doyle . . . Doyle . . ."

"I'm sure I don't know what you're on about," he pleaded. He looked toward the crowd for support, for confirmation of his own sanity against the madness of the crone. Below their twittering jaws, Arthur saw that many in the crowd wore identical black armbands. A whole city in mourning. He could swear on the Holy Book that he'd seen today's papers . . . Was there some sad news that he'd missed? The passing of some great statesman? Cecil was old, to be sure, but not so old that . . . Well, the Queen Mother? No, no. Surely he would have heard!

"You killed him, you killed him just as I'm standing here," hissed the old woman.

"Why'd you do it?" barked someone—it could have been anyone—from the crowd.

"I killed . . . ?" sputtered Arthur as the horrible, unthinkable thought appeared behind his eyes. "You don't mean to say that you're angry because I—"

"You killed Sherlock Holmes."

At first Arthur was purely dumbfounded. He didn't speak, didn't move as the old woman whapped

him again across the midsection. A few members of the crowd, to their credit, suggested that she stand down, though others were more concerned with Arthur. They wanted an answer. There was none to give.

Arthur's cheeks swelled with rage.

Two months earlier, in October, his father had died in a mental hospital in Crichton, about eight miles south of Arthur's childhood home in Edinburgh. Charles Doyle's lunacy, combined with his drink, had kept him from ever being close to his elder son. For years Charles had sent Arthur mail from the asylum. Arthur would tense up when he saw the scribbled envelopes on his doorstep, with their telling postmark: Dumfries. His father never sent proper letters, only drawings. Macabre portraits of himself, of Arthur, of animals. Fairies mingling with enormous insects. Grotesquely large centipedes riding cruel, dark blue jays. News of his father's passing initially brought a certain relief. But as Arthur rarely went to visit, he didn't learn until after Charles's death of the detailed log his father had kept of Arthur's achievements. Charles had clipped reviews of each and every one of Arthur's novels and kept them in a scrapbook on which he'd sketched scenes of his family around the table, in the kitchen of their old Edinburgh two-story. The Mam, who despite the alcoholic fits and mad ravings had remained loyal to her husband, found the book among Charles's things and sent it to Arthur without comment. It was only then that Arthur realized what he'd lost. Did Papa even know before he died, that Arthur was married? That Arthur had two children? That the second child was born premature and spent two months swaddled in the hospital before Arthur took him home?

A week after Charles's death, dear Touie spent a long afternoon with the family doctor. At the end of their meeting, the doctor slowly descended the steps from Touie's second-floor bedroom to tell Arthur that the cough in her lungs was incurable. Tuberculosis. She would be gone within months, most likely. The man was courteous and effortlessly professional, which only compounded Arthur's shame. A medical man himself by training, and yet his own wife had lain stricken with tuberculosis for years and Arthur had thought it nothing but a natural weakness after the birth of their son. His shame threatened, on some days, to overpower his grief. There would be more rides into the country on their tricycle. Arthur would pedal harder. Every trip mattered.

Charles Doyle was real. Touie was real. Their deaths were tragedies. Sherlock Holmes was a bit of imagination. His death was a petty amusement. The old chattering woman and the growing crowd behind her did not know about Arthur's father—they didn't even know his name. The death of Charles Doyle did not merit a single sentence in the *Times*, the *Daily Telegraph*, or even the *Manchester Guardian*. Touie's illness would remain a secret for years. No, these people—these wretched, detestable people—knew nothing of Arthur. They knew only Holmes.

Arthur remained mute to the abuse until a nearby constable meandered over.

"Go along, now, go along," he instructed the crowd, with more understanding than belligerence in his voice. They complied, though the old woman cursed Arthur's name with every breath as she walked away. The constable—short, slim, professional—retrieved Arthur's hat for him.

"Thank you, sir," said Arthur, his consciousness returning to his surroundings.

"Don't you worry about all that, Dr. Doyle," said the constable. "I think you gave old Mr. Holmes a right fine farewell. Just a pity to see him go." And with a tip of his cap, the constable walked away.

. . . *Until Now*

*The world is full of murderers and their victims;
and how hungrily do they seek each other out!*

—Commonly attributed to Ambrose Bierce,
perhaps apocryphally

January 6, 2013

Harold entered a second-floor reception room of the Algonquin Hotel to the sound of ducks in heaven. The assembled Sherlockians were quacking at one another in anticipation. They were all “assembled” only in the sense that they were in fact all within the same four walls. They guffawed, hollered, and called to their friends like a rabble. They did not possess even a semblance of assembly.

Hundreds of Sherlockian luminaries were in chairs, though none really sat: To Harold they seemed to vibrate about an inch above their seats. They hovered, inquiring of their neighbors for rumor with sharp torques from side to side. Harold caught the scattered nouns from a half dozen different chatterings: “late,” “Alex,” “missing.”

On his way to an open chair, Harold poked the shoulder of an older English attendee whose name he couldn’t remember. The woman turned, her tight gray hair spinning round to reveal glasses thicker than one would think a woman could get away with wearing. Somehow she did.

“Is something up?” asked Harold, trying to seem both nonchalant and not hopelessly uninformed.

“Alex is late,” she said quickly. “There was an attempt to ring his room, but the phone is off the hook. He’s gone missing.”

“Jesus,” said Harold.

He thought of Alex’s nervousness the night before. Of Alex’s belief that he was being followed. He couldn’t be . . .

A small, youngish woman whom Harold didn’t recognize sat down to his left. As she turned, a wave of her curly brown hair swept to the side and Harold saw her eyes, opened wide as if taking in the world were a constant act of discovery. Her light blue dress made her appear to be a bit younger than she probably was. She wore a pink and yellow banded scarf around her neck, making her look, for a second, like an unwrapped bonbon.

“Gosh, what a commotion!” she said. Was she speaking to Harold? Her head faced forward as she continued scanning the room.

“Yeah,” said Harold, too quietly.

She turned to face him, and the sharp eye contact startled him a bit.

“Excuse me,” she said with a friendly tone in her voice. “Did you say something?”

“I . . . umm, yes. Yeah.”

“Sorry, I didn’t hear you with all the noise in here. What did you say?”

“Yeah.”

She paused. “Yeah?”

“Yeah, I said . . . Yeah. As in, yes, there’s quite a commotion. In here.”

She looked at him for a long moment, sizing him up.

“Right,” she said. She turned away again.

Harold blushed. Then he started saying things, as was his compulsion. He had a terrible habit, which he became nervous and didn't know what to say, of saying a few unrelated things in rapid succession as if hoping that at least one of them might take hold.

"Did you come here for the lecture? I'm Harold. Is it still raining out? Harold White."

The woman raised her eyebrows in thought; she was probably trying to figure out which of Harold's prompts to respond to.

"Harold," she said. "Do you know Alex Cale?" Apparently she'd chosen none-of-the-above.

"We're friends," he replied, excited to have somehow begun the conversation with what for him was a solid subject. "Well, we're friendly. I saw him last night. In the hotel."

"He was here last night?"

"Yes. He got caught in the rain." Harold chided himself silently for continuing to focus on the rain. He was sure there was something more interesting he could say to this woman. "He seemed nervous, actually. Said someone was following him. But you know— He's got a flair for the dramatic."

The woman looked up at Harold's deerstalker hat. She gestured to it with her right eyebrow.

"It looks to me like you both do. Do you think someone was following him?"

This was a difficult question. It was probably the most difficult question she could have asked.

"No. Maybe. I mean, wouldn't that be fantastic? Well, not fantastic, not if something bad happened but . . . noteworthy. You know what I mean." Something about her just made Harold want to talk—and keep talking. It was an appealing trait. A handy one for a...*journalist*?

After Alex Cale had announced his discovery, those months before, the Baker Street Irregulars had received a deluge of requests from reporters looking to attend this January's convention. Well, "deluge" by Sherlockian standards. Professional Sherlock Holmes obsessives tended not to garner much attention from the media. But they still had firm rules about this sort of thing—no one who was not a member of an accredited Sherlockian organization was allowed to attend the weekend's lectures. All requests were denied.

"Excuse me," said Harold, interrupting himself. "Who are you?"

"Sarah Lindsay," said the woman buoyantly. "Nice to meet you!" She extended her hand for a shake.

"Which organization are you a member of?"

"Oh, none," she said. "I'm a reporter. I'm doing a story on Alex Cale and the missing diary."

"How did you get in here?"

In response Sarah shrugged. "Jeffrey Engels," she said. "We e-mailed back and forth for a while and he let me in."

Harold thought this was a little strange—if Jeffrey had decided to make an exception for Sarah, wouldn't he have mentioned something about it?

"He's such a sweet guy, Jeffrey," she continued. "Are you an Irregular, too?"

"Yes." Harold realized that he had already spilled every secret he might know about Alex—his odd behavior last night, his paranoia. Sarah would make Alex, and the Irregulars, look like fools. She would mock their bits of period costuming, their occasionally self-serious lapses into indecipherable scholarship, their "flair for the dramatic," as Harold had just said. He made a nervous face.

"Are you worried about my being here? You don't need to be, I promise."

"No, I . . . I don't know what you're talking about. It's just, we have rules about reporters. Strange of any kind, actually. I didn't—"

"Harold, it's okay. What were you worried about? That I'd tease you about your hat? Or those little pipes that half of the men here are carrying in their coat pockets?"

Harold smiled. She was funny.

"Look," he replied, "we're at a Sherlock Holmes convention. If I *wasn't* wearing a deerstalker cap

don't you think that would be a little weird?"

"Very. If you're going to be an expert on nineteenth-century detective fiction, I say you should dress the part. But aren't you a little . . . *young* to be an Irregular?"

"I might be the youngest Irregular, but I know this stuff as well as anyone."

"I believe you," she said. "And I might just ask you to prove it."

They were interrupted then by a sound from the front of the room. At the podium, Jeffrey was testing the microphone.

Yes. Testing. One-two, or some such. Yes? You can hear me? Good." Jeffrey took a deep breath and spread some notes out in front of him. "Ladies and gentlemen, while we wait for the belated appearance of this morning's honored guest, Alexander Cale, let me say a few introductory words. I planned to go through this once he'd arrived, but I'm sure Mr. Cale doesn't need to hear yet another recitation of his exploits, or to bide his time while I make still more saucy jokes about a particular evening of drink we shared in Sussex many summers ago."

There were a few giggles throughout the room, and more knowing chortles.

"It's a funny story," Harold explained to Sarah. "There was a poorly planned late-night visit to the stables."

"When Sir Arthur Conan Doyle passed from this consciousness to the next, as he would have put it on July seventh, 1930, he left behind twenty-eight novels, well over a hundred short stories, several books of essays on spiritualism, four memoirs, and, of course, a voluminous collection of letters and diaries, which immediately fell into the care of an eager network of scholars. From his letters and diaries, we've gotten to know a Conan Doyle quite different from his public persona: We've seen him as the eternal schoolboy, ever imagining himself to be a knight-errant jumping to the defense of helpless, hapless maidens. We've seen him as the conflicted romantic, embroiled in a passionate mental affair with a younger woman—which from all evidence never became physical—while his invalid wife slowly passed. And we've seen him as jealous creator, raging against his brightly shining creation in page after page of broad, precise script. With this wealth of material, scholars have been able to piece together a fine variety of excellent biographies." Jeffrey leaned forward. "That more than a few of these scholars happened to be members of this august institution is a small matter in which we personally take some great pride. Andrew Lycett, John Dickson Carr, Martin Booth, and, perhaps most definitively, Daniel Stashower have all crafted masterful portraits of John Watson's friend and literary agent."

Sarah made a curious face. "Friend and literary agent?"

"Yes, welcome to Jeffrey being politic," whispered Harold. "Most Sherlockians sort of...*pretend*...that Holmes was real and that Conan Doyle had his adventures published as fiction to preserve his privacy. The rival Doyleans, as they call themselves, think the Sherlockians are stupid. Jeffrey acknowledged Doyle as the *author* of the stories, half the room would bleat blasphemy. Better to side with the Sherlockians. The Doyleans are less prone to rebellion."

"It's a good thing I didn't come to make fun of you," said Sarah.

". . . was a testament to Stashower's work in putting together the most detailed account of Doyle's life and times that we've seen," continued Jeffrey. "But a truly complete biography of the man has always remained out of reach. His diary from October through December of 1900 was not among his papers, all the rest of which were found neatly arranged in his study at Undershaw after his death. Rumors circulated, of course, that various of his children might have hidden it away somewhere, or sold privately. But no substantiation for such claims ever materialized. Indeed, beyond a few quick unmasked forgeries, there has been no trace of the diary over the past eighty years." Jeffrey paused and took a deep breath, and smiled. "Until now."

The room erupted in applause. Jeffrey said it again triumphantly, for effect: "Until now! M

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