

The Triumphant
Return of
Sherlock Holmes

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Prologue

For several years, I have, with his permission, presented in The Strand Magazine accounts of the several cases of Sherlock Holmes. These accounts of his many adventures have gained an ardent readership from all around Kyoto; it is no exaggeration to say that the name "Sherlock Holmes" is celebrated across the land.

Yes, to observe Sherlock Holmes is to observe genius at work. Yet it was not the efforts of Mr. Holmes alone which have won his current renown.

Who was it, who tinged his arid, colourless notes with thrill and romance? Who was it, who played the thankless role of the bumbling assistant to inveigle sympathy from the reader? Who was it, who spent the countless hours in the wee hours of the night bound to his desk in order to satisfy the laborious demands of an exacting magazine editor?

The answer, of course, is I: John H. Watson, M.D.

"Without Watson, there would be no Holmes."

I bid you, good readers, repeat it once more.

"Without Watson, there would be no Holmes."

I should be much obliged if you, dear readers, would etch this undeniable truth unto your breasts, and bestow at last upon this humble yet indispensable author the respect he so meekly desires and so richly deserves.



Following the serialization of Holmes's first adventure in its pages, the Strand Magazine began to sell like hot cakes. As its readers increased and Holmes's reputation grew, a veritable mob of would-be clients from all around the capital came flocking to the door of 221B, Teramachi Street. The line stretched from the doorstep all the way to the corner of Teramachi Nijō, and soon enough a flock of rapacious costermongers sprang up alongside it, hawking sweets and drinks to the impatient crowd. It was like the Gion Festival come early, and for us it was a giddy time.

Holmes was a busy man indeed—no sooner had one case been unravelled than another appeared to take its place. As for me, I had wed the former Miss Mary Morstan and was in the process of setting up the private practice which I had so long dreamed of near

Shimogamo Shrine. Everything was going so swimmingly that we all forgot one simple thing: that the entirety of our prosperity was built upon the genius of Sherlock Holmes. A most curious bedrock upon which to build a house, and, as it turned out, one made entirely of sand.

"Strange. Where can have my God-given talent have gone?"

That murmured lamentation by Holmes was the first sign that our period of joy had come to an end.

It is difficult to pinpoint precisely when Holmes's slump began. He had been wading deeper and deeper into a bog, and by the time he had realized that there was no bottom it was too late to extricate his feet from the mire. The colossal failure of the case of the Red-headed League was the death knell in the downfall of Sherlock Holmes.

Following the case, Holmes shut himself up in his room at 221B Teramachi Street.

It is little surprise that Holmes's downward spiral brought all of us who had been buoyed by the high tide of his success along with it. The serialization of his adventures in *The Strand* were forced into an indefinite hiatus, and sales of the magazine declined considerably. My practice, whose finances were leveraged upon the fees I had anticipated for my writing, became strained. The rosy future which had seemed so close at hand now suddenly seemed a much less certain thing.



Even the most seasoned will meet failure, frustration and misfortune at some point in their career. He may withdraw from the public eye and pout, despair, squeak and sob. And the renowned detective Sherlock Holmes was no different.

For a time, Holmes wandered the confines of an inescapable labyrinth. This dossier presents those heretofore unknown facts for the first time to the public. Behind the gilded curtain, we found ourselves in **terra incognita**, thrust into a scenario quite unlike the usual detective novel adventures the reader may be accustomed to. At the nadir of his slump, Holmes may as well have been dead to the world, and so too was John H. Watson.

For the silence of Sherlock Holmes was also my own.

Chapter 1

The Wanderings of James Moriarty

It was on an invigorating evening in the latter part of October that the maid brought in the mail. I was having tea with my wife Mary in our residence, which also served as my practice, on Shimogamo Boulevard. Between a bill and the latest medical association proceedings my eye fell upon a charming little envelope. It was from an admirer of the adventures of Sherlock Holmes.

To: Dr. John H. Watson

Dear Sir,

I hope these late autumn days find you well. Mother tells me, "I'm sure the good doctor is too busy to be answering letters from his readers!" But I won't be so easily put off. For you see, the more letters I write, the more likely you are to see one of them.

I am a fourteen year-old girl. My father runs an importing firm, which my mother and brother assist him with. One day my brother brought home a copy of The Strand Magazine, and that was my fateful first encounter with the adventures of Mr. Sherlock Holmes. The story was so thrilling that in my excitement I developed a fever and they had to call for a doctor. (Not to worry, my fever is much better now.) My entire family has since become admirers of Mr. Holmes. Even father, who rarely reads novels, said as he was perusing a recent copy, "There's much to edify the mind here. Mayhap it may come of use in the trade."

You may imagine then that we were all quite distraught to hear that the serial was being suspended. It is evident that both you and Mr. Holmes must have made the decision with some good reason in mind, but I must confess that the adventures of Mr. Holmes have become a source of great solace for us.

Please, Dr. Watson, nothing would make us happier than were you to resume the adventures of Mr. Sherlock Holmes.

Most sincerely and respectfully,

An admirer of Sherlock Holmes

I put my elbows on the table, rested my chin upon my palms, and sank into thought.

"A letter from a reader?" Mary asked.

I nodded. Already a year had passed since the cessation of the serial. Yet letters continued to pour in nearly every day from admirers.

"I suppose you're thinking of him again."

"No, not him."

"Nonsense. I know that face—it means that you are thinking of that man again."

To Mary Sherlock Holmes was always "that man". For the last six months I had not heard her mention him under any other name.

"There's been another telegraph from that man."

"Is that man still lying about?"

"Are you going to visit that man again?"

There was always an inscrutable expression on her face when she said those words. It is a fact well-settled that there are few women in all of Sakyō Ward and Kamigyō Ward combined who can match my Mary's beauty, but nevertheless whenever the conversation turned to "that man" a faint shadow would come over her lovely features. This only drew out my wife's beauty even more, and I gazed at her fondly over the table as she frowned.

But it would not do to let her catch on to my perverse amusement. I feigned an immoderately exasperated look.

"He has me at my wits' end, that Holmes."

The most crucial thing was to make myself agreeable to Mary's present mood. In her estimation Sherlock Holmes was an element of danger, and the one most likely to dash our designs for the future to smithereens: a dark cloud upon the horizon; a smouldering spark of household discord; an omen of ill portent. I must admit that I also believed Mary's unwavering caution towards that threat to be not ill-founded.

"That man has not stirred from that pitiable state for a year already," said she, a furrow in her elegant brow. "Lately I have wondered whether he has any inclination to rise out of his slump at all! No, I suspect he enjoys his torpor."

"My dear, I cannot imagine that to be the case."

"This is why he is content to be such a slugabed: because you indulge him so. You must be firm with that man!"

"But Mary, you know how much we owe to him."

I placed the letter back in its envelope, stood up, and went to the window. Outside, carriages rattled up and down the dusty length of Shimogamo Boulevard. Across the road the evening sun hung low over Shimogamo Shrine. It was an out-of-the-way place to open an office, yet having been a humble army doctor relying solely upon the meagre pension provided by the service I could hardly have imagined that I would one day have the fortune of possessing an independent practice of my own.

Mary had come as a client four years ago, when Holmes and I shared lodging in the rooms at 221B, Teramachi Street. The full details of that case I have detailed in "The Sign of Four". At the end of it I proposed marriage to Miss Morstan, so it is not untrue to say that we owe our current matrimony to Holmes. Then again, it was also Holmes who nearly unmade it.

In the past year, Holmes's slump had brought a great many things nearly to ruin: my practice, my mental state, Mary's plans for the future. It is only natural that where once to Mary he had been the estimable "Mr. Holmes", he had become merely "Holmes", before plummeting in her eyes to "that man".

Mary stood and came to my side. "John," she said. "You are more than Sherlock Holmes's biographer. You can't let his slump keep you down forever."

"You are right, my dear..."

"You must look ahead, take strides towards the future. Be brave, John."

And she planted a kiss upon my cheek.



I was due that night to meet my colleagues from the medical association.

"Will you be meeting Mr. Thurston?"

"Yes, we'll be playing billiards at the club," I said, pausing at the door. "Go on to bed without me, I suspect we shall be out rather late."

Outside I secured a carriage on Shimogamo Boulevard. As it crossed over Aoi Bridge I saw the evening sun gleaming upon the water. Upon the evening-shaded banks people strolled to and fro, lost in thought. To the right I could see Mt. Daimonji, stained crimson by the setting sun.

At present Holmes in the throes of his slump was like a Robinson Crusoe, tossed upon the tempestuous waves of Kyoto in the present Victorian epoch. There was no doubt at all in my mind that he had quite wasted the day locked away in his quarters at 221B, Teramachi Street, lounging on his settee and lamenting the loss of his God-given talent, or else mentally dividing the world into that which is beneficial to the stomach and that which is not, letting his life pass idly by.

Not far from Kōjin Bridge I stopped at the club and left a message for Thurston before stepping back into the carriage and bidding the driver proceed down Kawaramachi Street. My destination was 221B, Teramachi Street—the lodgings and office of one Sherlock Holmes. I felt a twinge of regret about abandoning Thurston, but I was too much concerned about Holmes.

I had not seen his face since our falling out two weeks prior.

The carriage turned at last off Marutamachi Street into Teramachi Street. On both sides of the cobblestone street were shops and tobacconists and venerable confectionaries. The

sight of the old street brought back memories of ten years prior, when I had lived with Sherlock Holmes. The carriage stopped before 221B, Teramachi Street. I rang the bell, and Mrs. Hudson, the landlady, ushered me into the hallway.

"How is he?" I inquired.

"Thank God you've come, Dr. Watson," said she, with an air of relief. "He's been shut up in his room for days. He won't open his curtains, and hardly touches his food. 'I'm of no use to anyone; retirement is all that is left for me,' says he."

"His usual fare."

"I'm afraid he means it this time."

"Nonsense! He doesn't mean a word of it." I sighed and ascended the seventeen steps that led up from the hall to his room, followed by Mrs. Hudson's anxious voice: "Do keep it civil, won't you?"

In the year since Holmes's precipitous downfall, my pen had lain idle, raising the ire of more than a few of the more quick-tempered admirers of these stories. Some had taken to spreading a rumour that it was I who was the cause of his slump. Their disappointment in the great Sherlock Holmes had been diverted into rage at his partner Watson, and I was thoroughly sick of being made a pin-cushion.



In the dim light I could make out that Sherlock Holmes's quarters were as disheveled as ever. Discarded newspapers and records of crime lay strewn upon the floor; there was nowhere to tread but upon them. Amid this sea of rubbish rose up a table and chairs like an archipelago. A scent of acetic acid drifted up from a table fitted with chemical equipment, and the wall was riddled with bullet-pocks. Upon the mantelpiece sat a *daruma* from Mrs. Hudson, one eye left blank in anticipation of Holmes's eventual rehabilitation, forlornly gathering dust.

"Are you still with us, Holmes?" I called.

A groan emerged from within the room. "Is that you, Watson?"

I picked my way through the dim room towards the settee in front of the fireplace.

Sherlock Holmes lay upon it in a gray dressing-gown. His whiskers were long and unshaven, and his eyes blearily observed the ceiling. On the side-table was a fish-bowl containing a corpulent goldfish looking out insolently from within. Its name was Watson; Holmes had acquired the sulky-faced freshwater fish from a stall at a festival in the autumn.

Two weeks earlier, after laying a thick stream of grievances upon me Holmes had cried out, "You are not on my side at all!" Whereupon he had bestowed the name upon the goldfish and promoted it to the position of his new partner. This had brought us to heated words, at the end of which Mrs. Hudson had flown in and doused us with the watery contents of a flower vase—certainly not conduct befitting two gentlemen in their thirties.

I lit a gas-lamp and settled myself down in an armchair.

"I see things have not gotten any better."

"I have had no such fortune, none at all."

"Surely you still have clients?"

"Clients! I hardly consider such shabby requests worthy of my attention."

"Surely you're not catching at straws in order to turn them away?"

Holmes fell into an irritable silence, which I took as proof that my words had been on the mark.

I continued: "In other words, you are afraid of failure. Indeed if you wish to avoid failure and the wounding of your detective's pride, there may be no better thing than to lay around doing nothing. But do you think that this prevarication can go on forever? You must take up a case, and prove your worth!"

"Do you mean to say I am being indolent?"

"Do you mean to say you are not?"

"Certainly. You see, but you do not observe." Holmes glanced up sulkily, his gaze clouded with vexation. "You miss the problem entirely. Why has Sherlock Holmes fallen into such a slump—*that* is the greatest mystery in the history of the world. You see, I am currently engaged with the case of myself. I hardly have time to address the mundane problems of the common folk. And certainly I can hardly count on you to offer assistance. An unworthy friend, indeed!"

"How dare you—me, unworthy?"

A year had passed since the great failure of the case of the Red-headed League. As his partner, as his friend, as his physician, I had explored countless paths by which I might rescue Sherlock Holmes from his desperate straits. I had tried everything from having him tread on cut bamboo to stimulate the nerves in his feet, to having him down herbal draughts. I prayed to Benzaiten daily, delved deep into the mountains and meditated beneath pounding waterfalls, even went to Arima Onsen for a restorative bath. Yet all of this had had no effect on Holmes's plight. The incessant toll had worn me down until one day I collapsed, prompting an incensed Mary to storm into Holmes's quarters and lodge a furious protest. Neither had I been exempt from her fury.

"I have my own life to attend to. You can't expect me to cater to your every whim!"

"Hmph! Too busy catering to your wife's, I'm sure."

"Surely it is not surprising that I cherish my wife."

"Yes, and who was it that arranged your meeting with your cherished wife? Perhaps you have forgotten that without the business of 'The Sign of Four' you would never have met Miss Morstan at all. Why, if not for me you would still be wasting away on the third floor, groaning about your lack of female companionship. It is I who lifted you from your bachelorhood. And now that you have found what you are looking for, you have no further use for me. Were our adventures together only ever a means to an end for you? By all rights you both ought to kiss my feet morning, noon, and night."

"You have had your say, and I think it is time I had mine."

"Go on then, speak your mind."

"Who is it to whom you owe your fame? If I hadn't published all those accounts in The Strand, you would still be toiling away in obscurity alone in this room. And you say your success was accomplished by your own hand? Don't give yourself airs!"

"The Strand!" Holmes sneered. "Your little collection of fairy tale amusements for the masses. Only a child would be fooled by those tawdry fantasies. I certainly never asked you to write them. In fact, as I recall it was you who begged to publish accounts of those cases—it was you who used me as a stepping stone for your own benefit. To this I raise no objection, but you are certainly in no position to demand gratitude from me. I would certainly have distinguished myself in due time, Watson or no!"

"Is that so?" I snorted. "Then how do you explain your current predicament?"

Even Holmes had no ready answer for that question.

"You must face reality, Holmes," I remonstrated. "Excuses will get you nowhere."

"Then tell me this, Watson," said he. "What do you define as reality? Is it there beneath the rump of your beloved wife? It must feel most comfortable under there. Are you content being a lowly stool beneath the heft of that hard-hearted woman? She was as docile as you please when I was solving cases, but a mere bump in the road and she shows her true colours!"

"I won't hear this slander!"

"How touching it is to see a man so dedicated to his marital servitude!"

I rose from my chair and was on the verge of seizing his collar. But all at once I was overtaken by a sense of resignation. "Enough of this," I said wearily, sitting down once more.

Mary would no doubt fly into a fury if she were to learn that I was secretly visiting Holmes. The Holmes Problem was like a keg of gunpowder that threatened to detonate beneath our marriage and rupture the tranquility of the Watson household. Yet even cognizant of that danger, here I sat, engaging in these futile debates, having made no progress over the course of the year in resolving the matter.

But here was the biggest problem of all: I could not abandon Holmes.



Holmes got up from the settee and picked up a violin which lay discarded upon the floor. It was the Stradivarius which he had scrounged up from the flea market at Tō-ji when he was still at college. Holmes was not a skilled player by any stretch of the imagination. Long after Mary and I had been wed and moved to Shimogamo, it seemed to me that the scraping of his bow across the strings continued to echo down the Kamo River after us, like the severed head of Shuten-dōji gnashing its teeth.

"Spare me the wailings of your violin," said I.

"No man may deny me the right of pursuing my artistic interests."

Holmes commenced one of his exasperating solos, while I sighed and stared glumly into the fireplace.

After some time, I heard a pounding noise issue from the ceiling.

"What's that?" I wondered, looking up. The room on the third floor had previously been my own, but to my knowledge it now lay empty. "Is there someone living up there now?"

But Holmes only continued to draw his bow back and forth, with a look of great irritation. With each impassioned arpeggio the stamping on the ceiling grew louder and louder. At last I heard an upstairs door slam shut, and furious steps descending the stairs. The door flew open, and an old man wielding a cane barged into the room.

"Cease this abominable racket at once!"

"I'm afraid I can't hear you!" shouted Holmes, his bow raking across the strings. "I'm in the middle of a performance!"

"Cease that racket, I say! Put that violin down, you fool!"

The old man was cloaked entirely in black, his bony frame stooped and wizened. His prominent forehead was pallid, his eyes sunken. His thin lips were pressed into a scowl, and he slowly shook his head as he glared at Holmes like a great serpent regarding its prey. It was evident that he was no mere pensioner.

Holmes tutted and stopped his bow.

"It seems you have some business with me. Very well—I can spare five minutes, no more."

"All that I have to say has already crossed your mind."

"Then possibly my answer has crossed yours."

"You stand fast?"

"Absolutely."

From his pocket the old man drew a small black notebook.

"On the night of October 15th, you disturbed my repose. Two nights later on the 17th of the month, you seriously inconvenienced me yet again. Furthermore on the 20th you woke me from my precious slumber, such that the following day I was entirely unable to apply myself to my work. Ever since I took up lodgings here my research has encountered uncountable setbacks due to your boundless interference. The situation is becoming an impossible one."

"Surely Mrs. Hudson explained it to you before you moved in?"

"Yes, she informed me of the violin. But the din was beyond anything which I could have imagined. How is it possible for a violin to produce such a hideous screeching! Your incompetence is unfathomable."

"If you cannot bear it, there is certainly nothing barring you from finding other accommodations."

"That is not possible, for I have already paid six months' rent in advance."

The old man placed the notebook back in his pocket and glared venomously at Holmes. "Mrs. Hudson tells me that you are a detective of some repute. A contemptible profession, I might add, chasing fruitlessly after criminals all the day long!"

"You might say something similar about physicists," observed Holmes. "Chasing fruitlessly after Mother Nature, or something like it."

The old man quivered all over with rage, and he drew his stick up into the air. At once Holmes raised the Stradivarius up to protect himself. The scene which presented itself reminded me of the famous duel on Ganryū-jima.

"The physicist," snarled the old man, his venomous snake's gaze fixed upon Holmes, "is he who plumbs the deepest mysteries of the universe. I availed myself of these lodgings in order to shut out the noise of the hoi polloi, and bring my grand theory to its final culmination. It is a theory which would unlock the very secrets of the cosmos, and bring humanity to a new phase. And yet I find myself stymied by scraping and screeching of that damned violin. It is not my progress alone whom you hinder: it is the progress of all humanity. Have you no shame?"

His raving at an end, the old man lowered his cane.

"I will be merciful today. But I warn you that if you raise my ire again, I will not be so again." And with that he turned on his heel and swept out of the room like a black wind.



"Moriarty?" I inquired in astonishment. "*The* Professor James Moriarty?"

Holmes and I were having supper at the round table by the window. After bringing the food in Mrs. Hudson lingered for some idle chatter. She was more than eager to tell me about the man who had moved into the third floor, who turned out to be a far more interesting person than I had anticipated.

Professor James Moriarty was an esteemed researcher of applied physics whose name was often heard in connection with grand projects such as the Great Exhibition and the Moonrocket Project. Several years earlier he had published the bestselling self-help book "The Binomial Theorem of the Soul".

"He's among the most outstanding men of the age! What is he doing here?"

"He told me he wanted some peace and quiet to focus on his research, so he did. Even quit his college lab, if you can believe it. He's as queer as our own Holmes, or queerer. He hardly leaves his room during the day, only setting out at nightfall and not coming back 'til the first blush of dawn. What can he possibly be doing all night? Hardly anyone comes to visit him; I've only ever had one person ask after him, a young chap by the name of Cartwright."

"You certainly attract the most eccentric lodgers, Mrs. Hudson."

"And aren't I blessed for it!" said she, giving Holmes a dirty look out of the corner of her eye. "I distinctly recall asking you to tone down your violin performances, Mr. Holmes."

"I think a little neighbourly forbearance is in order," said Holmes, polishing off his curried fowl and pie. "If he doesn't like it, he can leave. You have his advance payment in hand, Mrs. Hudson? Then in any event you suffer no loss."

"That may be so, but haven't you any sympathy for the poor man?"

"Pooh, pooh. Save your pity for someone who deserves it!"

It was no accident that Holmes was tormenting the professor so. Early in the summer, Holmes had declared that he was enlisting the aid of the mystical methods of "The Binomial Theorem of the Soul" in order to finally turn around his long slump. The words had hardly left his mouth than dark clouds rolled in overhead and thunder rumbled through the sky. It was a sign, he said, that he must synchronize himself with the heavens to recall his long-lost talent, and at once he rushed up to the roof of 221B Teramachi Street, threw off his clothes, and contorted his body in a wild dance stark-naked in the midst of the pouring rain.

However it was not his long-lost talent which that obscene cavorting summoned, but the local constables.

It was only through the intervention of Inspector Lestrade of Shinchō Yard that Holmes avoided being carted off to a cell, but the incident cost Holmes his last remaining thread of

dignity. It will not come as a surprise that Holmes angrily hurled his copy of "The Binomial Theorem of the Soul" into the fireplace.

"You should never have let that room to another tenant," said he.

"Then you would be willing to repay me the lost income?"

"Naturally."

"And when exactly would you have the money for me?"

"Someday...after this accursed slump is over and done with..."

"A likely tale! And I suppose you think I can pay the grocer with fairy dust!" Mrs. Hudson rolled her eyes in disgust. "I've said it before and I'll say it again: you ought consult Madame Richborough. I've no doubt you'd profit from her advice."

"Who is Madame Richborough?"

"Why, you mean to say you haven't heard of her?"

"She's a charlatan who styles herself a spirit medium", said Holmes derisively. "A mere swindler who's taken the current fad of spiritualism to new heights. She's roused up enough money from her faithful to build herself a pretty new mansion near Nanzenji. Suffice it to say, dear Mrs. Hudson, I do not believe a word of this spiritualist claptrap. I'll be quite frank with you, if it has come to relying on nonsense like crystal balls and spiritual transmissions and ectoplasm, I should be quite content to sit here and starve instead!"

It was precisely then that the doorbell rang. Mrs. Hudson scowled and got up. "Very well, Mr. Holmes. If you are so loath to consult Madame Richborough, then consult the good doctor to find a way out of your stagnation. But I warn you, if you fall into arrears I shall have you take that Stradivarius to the pawnbroker's on the spot!"

As Mrs. Hudson fumed her way down the stairs, Holmes sat in stony silence, working upon a mouthful of pie.



The visitor at the door turned out to be a caller for Professor Moriarty.

We heard footsteps thumping up to the third floor, and then Mrs. Hudson came sweeping gleefully into the room. "It's Mr. Cartwright," she whispered. "The one I've seen visit the professor before."

"What sort of person is he?" I inquired.

"He's a young scholar, a protégé of the professor," replied Mrs. Hudson. She placed her ear to the door, straining to hear any noise issuing from the upper floor. I joined her at the door, while Holmes yawned, crossed the room, and sat eased himself into his favourite armchair by the fireplace.

"People have a right to privacy," he remarked as he lit his pipe.

"I am only being a responsible landlady," replied Mrs. Hudson.

I stepped beside her and placed my ear to the door. It was impossible to make out what was being said upstairs, but it was evident that Professor Moriarty had not invited the young man inside. After a spirited exchange, we heard the door shut with a thump, and the visitor's footsteps coming back down the stairs.

Mrs. Hudson swung the door open. "Mr. Cartwright, would you be so good as to join us for a moment?"

Mr. Cartwright was a young man of not much more than twenty, thin and dressed in a grey overcoat. His hair was a pale chestnut, and he had gold-rimmed spectacles. His unsuccessful interview must have shaken him, for his face wore a somber expression.

"How pale your face is! There must be something weighing upon your mind. Talking about it will certainly set your mind at ease." With repeated persuasions Mrs. Hudson cajoled the young man in. He certainly did seem to be troubled, for he entered the room irresolutely and set himself down upon the settee with a dazed look.

"Let me introduce Mr. Sherlock Holmes, and Dr. Watson."

The young man jumped up with a look of astonishment. "You are Sherlock Holmes? The well-known detective?"

"Yes, the very same," said Holmes in a self-deprecating voice. But he showed no inclination of continuing the conversation, so it fell to me to engage our visitor.

"You are an acquaintance of Professor Moriarty, then?"

"Just so. My name is Walter Cartwright, and I am a researcher at a university laboratory in the field of applied physics. Professor Moriarty was my advisor in my school days."

"Why has such an esteemed researcher shut himself up in a boarding house such as this? He seems to be suffering from some affliction of the mind, and his habits are quite incomprehensible. As his neighbour Holmes is of course considerably concerned. Could we trouble you to shed any light upon the matter?"

"Well, I..." Cartwright hesitated. "I'm afraid it would not be my place to speak of matters which the professor prefers to remain private..."

"It is for the professor's sake that I ask. I assure you that Holmes is perfectly accustomed to matters of client privacy, and will keep anything you divulge strictly confidential."

"That's right," chimed in Mrs. Hudson. "You may find their aid to be useful."

After some tergiversation, Mr. Cartwright sighed. "I'm afraid I hardly know any more than you do," he admitted. "I have always known Professor Moriarty to be a most outstanding researcher and mentor. He taught me a great deal as a student, and in the spring of last year I was honoured to become a fully-fledged researcher in the applied physics laboratory and gain experience under his tutelage. But in the fall he stopped coming to the laboratory. Not long afterward he suddenly resigned his place."

"What was his reason?"

"I haven't the slightest idea. The only explanation he left was that it was for personal reasons."

Thereafter Mr. Cartwright knew nothing of Professor Moriarty's whereabouts, and it was through sheer chance that he was reunited with the professor only the previous week.

That night he had gone to Pontochō with some fellow researchers from the laboratory. Later in the evening they were on their way home when Cartwright spotted a shadowy figure sitting at the end of Sanjō Bridge. The figure was intently scribbling in a small, black leather-bound notebook, heedless of the fact that it was blocking foot traffic. It looked up briefly, and Cartwright could not help but let out a shout.

"Professor! What are you doing here!?"

But upon hearing his voice Professor Moriarty immediately snapped shut the notebook and fled the scene. Cartwright left his fellows behind and pursued him, tracking him all the way to 221B Teramachi Street. But the professor refused to let him into the room.

"I am pursuing the most important research of all," he said through the crack in the doorway. "I have no desire to be interrupted by fools. Leave me alone!"

"Perhaps I could help you!" Cartwright pleaded.

"And what help could you possibly offer me?" sneered the professor.

Cartwright was stunned. The professor had always been willing to lend an ear to his protégés. Unable to let things lie, he had visited the professor again today, only to be rebuffed in much the same manner.

"I don't understand what's happened to him," he lamented. "It's as if something has possessed him!"



"You have explained the situation very admirably. Allow us to look into the matter," I said.

"I pray that you will," said Cartwright, before exiting the room with dispirited footsteps.

Mrs. Hudson cleared the dishes away, but before she left the room she shot me a meaningful glance, as if to say, "You must put Holmes to work!" No doubt that had been

her aim in eagerly ushering the dispirited Cartwright inside. The good landlady was clearly not one to be underestimated. Seeing me nod discreetly, she swept from the room with an air of satisfaction.

Sherlock Holmes was hugging his knees to his chest upon the armchair. "I'll thank you not to accept requests on my behalf."

"Oh, put away your complaints and humour me, Holmes," I chided him, sitting down upon the settee and leaning towards him. "What do you make of it?"

"I make nothing of it at all. The good professor said it himself. He wishes to shut himself off from the noise of the rabble and focus on his research: that is all there is to it. He wishes for no interference, so let us leave him to his work. What more need be said?"

"But clearly there is something abnormal in his behaviour."

"Is there?"

"Without cause he quits his prestigious seat and shuts himself up here, of all places, refusing even to admit his most treasured pupil into his room. What kind of research would drive him to this? And Mrs. Hudson tells me that he leaves his room every night at dusk and does not return until dawn. What is an old man doing prowling about town all night?"

"Surely you don't mean to suggest he's scouring the alleyways to cut the throat of some unsuspecting damsel."

The prospect did not seem an impossible one, and I glanced up furtively at the ceiling. Not a sound could be heard from the third floor. The image that sprang to my mind was of a desolate room, the professor seated at a room, hunched over a desk working on his sordid research. Flames flickered in the hearth, their light reflected in the mad gleam in his eyes, playing over the mad grin on his lips.

"I suggest we follow the professor tonight, and ascertain what it is he is up to."

"Utter foolishness!" Holmes scoffed. "You have taken the matter up yourself, you may pursue it yourself."

"Very well, sir. I suppose I shall." I stood and glowered down at Holmes. "You disgrace yourself! Was it not you, Holmes, who once professed that the even most insipid facade may conceal the most heinous crime? Once you would have plunged head-on into the case. What you lack is the desire to find cases which are of interest to you. Work, man! Whatever case it may be, you must work!"

During my impassioned tirade Holmes was silent. He pressed himself back into his armchair, his mouth pressed into a frown, sulking like a child.

"Alright, Watson," he sighed at last. "I'll come. I trust that will satisfy you?"



Professor Moriarty departed at about half past 9.

After a brief interval we set off after him. The gas lamps and shop windows glittered along the length of Teramachi Street. The professor was dressed in black from head to toe: black cloak, black bowler hat, black gloves, leaning upon a black cane as he made his way slowly past the shops.

"Come on, Holmes," I urged my reluctant companion.

At Nijō Teramachi Professor Moriarty turned right. Dim, squeezed Nijō Street was a stark contrast to the twinkling lights of Teramachi Street. Peeling mortar walls loomed in close on both sides, and gas lamps dotted the road like stepping stones, casting veils of light through which the professor's dark silhouette slipped before melting back into the shadows. There was something of the phantasmagorical to the sight, and I began to wonder whether the professor might not be of this world. Holmes and I stuck to the shadows, trying not to make too much noise with our footsteps, and continued our pursuit.

At Yanaginobanba Street the professor at last did something unusual.

A little flower seller wearing a wool hat was standing beneath a gas lamp at the intersection. I doubted whether she would find many customers here, and indeed the basket which he carried in her arms was still full of blooms yet unsold. Professor Moriarty paused and eyed the girl.

"Holmes!" I whispered, hastening forward. There was a terrible gleam in the professor's eyes, and the girl was rooted to the spot as if petrified by terror.

The professor drew a banknote from his pocket and said, "I would like all the flowers you have left."

The flower seller blinked, then tentatively held out the basket. Professor Moriarty clumsily scooped out the remaining flowers. "You may keep the change," he brusquely muttered with a slight wave of his hand, and then he strode off. The girl watched him go with a look of bewilderment.

Holmes and I wore much the same expression on our faces. "Why on earth would he buy flowers?"

Thereafter Professor Moriarty continued resolutely southward, until he reached Shijō Street.

Within the gas-lit valley that lay between the magnificent facades which lined the boulevard, lights glowed mysteriously in the fog. Though it was growing late, the grandest street in all Kyoto was still bustling. In that crowd could be seen every species of life known to man: homeward bound tradesmen; retired military men; vagabonds; patrolling constables; troops of guardsmen; street merchants hawking every good imaginable; and sandwich-men standing slack-jawed in the road. An uncountable multitude of carts clattered along the cobbles; broughams raced on bearing their aristocratic occupants towards Gion, while wagons laden with goods plodded along the street. Through the thick mist which lay draped over this mad diorama, Professor Moriarty walked unflappably onward, his arms full with the flowers.

"I wonder if he means to propose," Holmes remarked drily.



Two hours later, Holmes and I found ourselves in a pub.

I sat forward with my elbows placed upon the table, gazing at the Takase River which rushed onward before me. I was reminiscing about the period after I had returned from Afghanistan, before I had met Holmes. At the time I could afford nothing better than a

doss-house near Bukkō-ji, having nothing to lean on but what little pension the empire allotted to her former soldiers. The meager contents of my pocketbook were hardly enough to avail me much in the way of entertainment, yet unable to bear another night of solitude in my dreary quarters I would find a cheap bar and while away the hours watching the reflections of the gas-lamps shimmer on the surface of the Takase.

I glanced at the counter and saw Professor Moriarty scowling at his glass, as motionless as a hulking gargoyle. The flowers which he had bought from the girl were piled up beside him. His was certainly an odd sight, an otherworldly spot of gloom amid the otherwise bright lights of the bar, and neither the bartender nor the cheerful wastrels whom he tended made any attempt to engage him in conversation.

Holmes was meanwhile pondering over a map which he had spread out over the table.

"I can discern no pattern to his movements."

"None at all?"

"To my eye he is walking completely at random," replied Holmes, sliding the shilling map over to me to examine.

The route which Professor Moriarty had taken was marked upon it. The line followed close along Shijō Street, winding westward through a tangled maze of innumerable alleyways. I scrutinized it for some time, but just as Holmes had said it appeared that he was walking entirely at random.

I had never participated in a stranger chase than I did that night. We had not detected the slightest hint of any sort of criminal activity, yet there seemed to be more to what we had witnessed than a long stroll on an autumn night. Professor Moriarty exuded a sense of purpose as he strode on, and yet I had detected something close to desperation, as though the professor was trapped in a labyrinth and was searching for the way out. At times he had suddenly halted during his wandering, sometimes in front of a shuttered shop, or before an empty plot of land; and yet we could never perceive anything out of the ordinary about any of those places. Each time he stopped he would silently bow his head as if offering a silent prayer before resuming his walk. And each time he would leave a flower on the ground, like a tribute before a gravestone.

"Whatever is he up to?"

"Buying flowers is not a crime," observed Holmes. "And neither is taking a nighttime stroll." He lapsed into silence, puffing disinterestedly on a handrolled cigarette.

I glanced around the bustling Admiral Benbow inn. The middle-aged innkeeper, Windigate by name, had once plied the trade routes on a merchantman, and true to his seafaring past, anchors and compasses adorned the walls. Professor Moriarty sat at the counter leaning on his elbows, hunched over as though he were in some pain. Then again perhaps he was only nodding off.

A man came in through the front door, which led out to Kiyamachi Street. At first I paid little attention to him. He was of short stature, and his disheveled hair and shabby attire pointed to him being a clerk, and likely drunk. There was no shortage of that sort of man around this part of town. The man made his way past our table, his feet dragging listlessly upon the ground, and set himself down on the seat beside Professor Moriarty. He spoke to Windigate and ordered a beer. He glanced around in our direction, and the idea struck me that I had seen his ferret-like face somewhere before.

I turned to Holmes and whispered, "Do you know that man? I am convinced that I have seen him before."

Holmes turned, then snorted. "Of course I do. It's Lestrade."

"Lestrade!? Can it be? He looks nothing alike!"

"I suppose he's on watch in some disguise. Leave the fool alone."

As we whispered back and forth, Lestrade realized who we were. He stood up and stumbled near to our table, with an expression I could not decipher on his unshaven face, and suddenly burst into tears.

"Mr. Holmes!" he cried, falling to his knees upon the dust- and crumb-encrusted floor.

"Forgive me, Holmes!"

The bar went deathly silent.

"I am fit only to crawl on my belly like a worm," he choked out. "Only crumbs and sawdust will pass my lips."

Certainly the floor of the Admiral Benbow did seem to be host to all manner of nutritious detritus, but it was astonishing to hear this querulous voice issuing from the lofty Inspector Lestrade of Shinchō Yard.

Even Holmes was taken aback. "What's come over you, Lestrade?"

"I have fallen into a slump myself," moaned the inspector, grinding his chin into the ground. "I understand now all too well the pain which you have felt."

One year ago Holmes had become the laughingstock of society for his great failure in the case of the Red-headed League, and rather than shielding the detective, Lestrade had saved his own skin and roundly castigated him for interfering with the official investigation. Since then Holmes and Lestrade had had no communication.

"I have wronged you greatly, and for that I can offer only my apologies," the inspector cried, sounding on the verge of tears.



"It is almost comical, how inept I have become."

Lestrade was seated on the filthy floor, his knees hugged to his chest. Ever since he and Holmes had parted company following the case of the Red-headed League, each and every one of his investigations had run into a dead end, and his once keen intuition now failed to produce even the most rudimentary of insights.

"How odd. Perhaps it is merely a slump," he reflected, but all the while his rivals on the force—Inspectors Jones, Bradstreet, Hopkins—were steadily cracking case after case. Eventually he lost all confidence in himself and was unable to apply himself to his work.

No sympathy was forthcoming from his colleagues, who must have been silently smouldering with envy while he had basked in the limelight. Where once he had been the darling of the top brass at Shinchō Yard, hardly a month went by now where he was not summoned to the superintendent-general's office for a thunderous dressing-down. At this

rate there was no question that it would only be a matter of time before he was dismissed from the investigative force.

To add insult to injury, the Daily Chronicle, which had so gleefully followed Holmes's deviation and downfall, had run an article headlined *Inspector Lestrade in Shambles*. And so the inspector had spent the last several days stumbling around Kiyamachi, in his despair drowning himself in the bottle.

"So it is not only I who has suffered," said Holmes profoundly.

But to me the cause of Lestrade's slump was evident, for in the first place he owed his meteoric rise to the top of Shinchō Yard to the meticulous advice of one Sherlock Holmes. In short, he was, like me, only a member of the crew aboard the jolly old S.S. Holmes who was destined to go down with the ship.

It was astonishing that Lestrade himself was insensible to this fact, but even more astonishing that Holmes sincerely sympathized with him. Then again perhaps it should not have been surprising that a man who had been in the dumps for over a year should sympathize with another who knew the same pain as he.

Holmes patted Lestrade kindly on the back. "Come, the time for groveling is past."

"You would forgive a sniveling worm such as I, Holmes?"

"If you are a worm, then I suppose so am I. Come, let us let bygones be bygones."

Taking Lestrade's arm Holmes stood him up, brushed off the nutritious dust from his chin, wiped the tears and snot which dribbled down his face, then sat him down at our table.

"It's like I've wandered into some pitch-black labyrinth," Lestrade remarked, as he nursed a beer. "I've lost faith in myself so utterly...I can hardly believe that only a year ago things were going so well. My colleagues on the force scoff at me; the papers ridicule me; even my own wife and daughter have given up hope in me. If I'd known things would fall so far, I would gladly have accepted a demotion to chase around sheep rustlers in the fields of Ohara-no-sato all day. I wish I could hide myself away in a place with no one around, or bloom like one of the violets in a field."

"I understand perfectly how you feel, Lestrade," Holmes said encouragingly. "Our fortunes have sunk to rock bottom. Meaningful work continues to elude us; the world has turned her back on us. But it is precisely at this juncture, when all others have abandoned us, that we must lean upon one another. Whenever you are in travail, come to 221B Teramachi Street. Let us persevere, hand in hand, to overcome our present predicament. A slump! What of it? For a year I have grappled with the matter. Alas, I have yet to see the light at the end of the tunnel. But I shall not lose hope. I shall see this case to its very end, and unravel it!"

Lestrade grasped Holmes's hand, overcome by emotion.

"I am in your debt, Holmes. There is no one I can rely on but you!"

As the duo exchanged a firm handshake, a man at the adjacent table stood up.

"Excuse me, sirs," said he. He wore a moustache and a hunting cap. "You must be Sherlock Holmes, and you, Inspector Lestrade."

One look at his face, and Holmes's expression darkened. "Scoundrel!" he cried, standing up and thrusting a finger into the man's chest.

"What's this?" the man said, considerably startled. Holmes was so agitated that, fearing he might throw a punch, Lestrade and I rushed up to restrain him.

"You write for the Daily Chronicle!" Holmes shouted.

"All I want is to inquire about your recent affairs."

"Yes, and write some sordid article about it, no doubt! For God's sake, leave me alone!"

"Sure I will, and write my article too. If I'm to take a knock on the head I'll get my money's worth from it," sneered the man as he fled the bar. "I've already written the headline: a confederacy of nitwits!"

Holmes's fury remained unabated even after the reporter was gone. I suspected that the look of worry on Lestrade's face was not only out of concern for Holmes, but also out of trepidation at what tomorrow's papers might hold.

Holmes drained the rest of his mug. "I am confronted with the greatest case of my life," he growled. "And I won't let fools like that get in my way!"

I glanced at the counter then, and gasped, "Holmes!"

Professor Moriarty had vanished.



I hastily bade farewell to Lestrade and dashed out onto Kiyamachi Street, its cobblestones gleaming with the cheerful light cast by the many seedy taverns which jostled along its length. Red-faced wastrels tottered back and forth, before being swallowed up by one of the alleyways which led to Pontocho. I gave a kick to a top hat which came tumbling down the road; it rolled into the Takase River, gleaming in the light of the gas-lamps as it was swept away. Moriarty was nowhere to be found.

"I think we'd better call off the chase, Watson," said Holmes, coming up behind me. "I don't know what you expect to gain from running around after a doddering old man."

We walked to the west end of the Shijō Bridge. Big Ben towered above the majestic National Diet Building, which stretched southward along the Kamo River. The fog had rolled in thick over the river, and the Shijō Bridge looked as though it was suspended in a sea of clouds. Across the great span, the red lanterns of Gion glowed faintly in the mist. The grand theater of Minami-za loomed over the river, but it had long since closed for the evening, and the silhouette of its magnificent roof was as dark and forbidding as the ramparts of a medieval castle. The bell in the clock tower began to toll, echoing solemnly in the night over the streets of Kyoto. It was precisely midnight.

I grasped the handrail of the bridge and squinted upstream. "There!" I exclaimed, leaning forward and pointing. Professor Moriarty was trudging northward along the river.

I rushed down to the riverbank and picked up the old man's trail once more. Holmes muttered complaints behind me but followed along all the same. At first both banks of the river teemed with dazzling lights, but past the Sanjō Bridge the lights of downtown gradually receded into the distance, and the oppressive air became ever thicker.

The fog was an admixture of the noxious fumes of industry and the natural mist of the Kamo River. I had taken a particular dislike of it following my return from Afghanistan. Still bearing the scars of the battlefield, having neither kith nor kin in England, and having nothing with which to occupy my time but sit in my cheap lodgings, the fog which pressed in all around me seemed nothing less than the dismal future made physical.

"At this moment I should like nothing better than to go home and get a good night's rest," said Holmes as he walked along the river. "As you no doubt heard me tell Lestrade, this slump is the greatest case of my life; this is not the time for me to be frittering the night away on useless pursuits."

"Oh, do be quiet and keep up!"

"What's gotten into you, Watson?"

"I am only trying to restore your old confidence."

"Is that really all? There's something queer about you tonight."

As we crossed the Kōjin Bridge we saw ahead of us a bright glow in the fog. Approaching it we discovered that a band of vagabonds had lighted up a bonfire. As Professor Moriarty passed through the light the tramps recoiled; I could only assume that the professor's countenance must have been dreadful indeed.

After we had passed the fire I glanced backward; the sight of the flickering flames warmed my heart. I felt as though I were a traveler leaving the last friendly outpost and entering a vast wilderness, for from here on out the river moved into truly desolate environs. The moonbeams hardly pierced the smothering mist, and I was hard-pressed even to make out the path wending its way through the grass. It felt as though I was trudging a road that led to the edge of the world.

We came across a flower lying in the road, fallen from the professor's bouquet.

"Another one." I stooped down to pick it up, then squinted into the mist before me. The professor was still stumbling on, his cloak fluttering in the wind.

Why did Professor Moriarty occupy my mind so?

Enveloped in that black cloak, his silhouette radiated the intense melancholy of one who has no place in this world. Merely looking at it sent a shudder through me. It continued through the night, tired, dampened by the freezing mist, slowly fading from view. It reminded me of myself ten years earlier, before I had met Holmes, and it also seemed a portent of what Holmes's end might be should he despair of rising out of his slump. It did not occur to me then, but it seems to me that that vision may have been why I would not give up on my pursuit of the professor that night.

"Come on, Holmes!" I said in a low voice, walking on. Holmes followed, still muttering with resentment.



———Sherlock Holmes has fallen into a terrible slump!

It was the case of the Red-headed League which made that fact plain to all of Kyoto.

Late the previous fall, a man with a head of fiery red hair by the name of Jabez Wilson had shown up on the doorstep of 221B Teramachi Street with a most unusual account. He was the proprietor of a small pawnbroker at the corner of Shijō and Yanaginobanba Street, he said, and had by a curious turn of events recently become a member of an organization called the Red-headed League, which had been founded upon the bequest of a millionaire in order to provide easy berths for red-headed men—said berth being the nominal task of copying the entirety of the Heibonsha World Encyclopedia, for which they were paid a princely sum. Mr. Wilson could hardly believe his luck at being inducted into the league, and settled into his odd but well-compensated work with no complaint.

But on that morning of that fateful day, Mr. Wilson had arrived at the office of the Red-headed League as usual, only to find a notice nailed to the door:

**THE RED-HEADED LEAGUE
IS
DISSOLVED.**

It was as if a tanuki had played a great trick on him. And so Mr. Wilson came to Holmes's door requesting him to get to the bottom of the matter.

Holmes and I set out to investigate the scene at once, and soon discovered that the back of Mr. Wilson's shop on Yanaginobanba Street just so happened to abut the vault of a large bank on Shijō Street, separated only by a wall. And it also so happened that this bank had only just received a considerable sum of golden French napoleons.

Perhaps this Red-headed League was merely a ruse, to extract the reclusive Mr. Wilson for a certain period every day and allow some unknown party to carry out its dark designs in his unattended office. Having ascertained that his pawnbroker's shop was adjacent to the vault of the neighbouring bank, it became clear that the plot must involve the digging of a tunnel in order to plunder the gold napoleons. And the dissolution of the League of Red-headed Men must signify that there was no longer any purpose in drawing Mr. Wilson out from his office, meaning that the tunnel had been completed—such was Holmes's thesis.

"There is no doubt about it. They will make their attempt on the bank tonight."

I did not question his theory for a moment. The chain of reasoning seemed entirely sound from start to finish.

We took our story to Inspector Lestrade at Shinchō Yard, obtained the assent of the director of the bank, and marched down into the cellar of the bank. There we spent the night in steadfast vigil, intending to apprehend the perpetrators as soon as they emerged from their tunnel. We waited for a very long time, there in that freezing subterranean vault. But the criminals never appeared.

We later established that the note claiming that the Red-headed League was dissolved had been nothing more than a simple prank by a disgruntled applicant to the vacancy which Mr. Wilson had instead filled. Improbable as it seemed, the Red-headed League did in fact exist. The tunnel—and the plot to steal the gold—did not.

"I may have been overhasty," Mr. Wilson sheepishly admitted the following week, having shown up to the office on Teramachi Street to deposit the paltry fee for which we had gone to so much trouble. I suppose he may still be found at the office of the Red-headed League, copying down entries about Tanuki and Tatami and *Tengu*.

Mr. Wilson got off rather light, but the incident took a far greater toll on poor Holmes. The extraordinary Red-headed League, the little pawnbroker's shop neighbouring the grand bank, the coincidental arrival of the gold napoleons: each of these disparate elements fit together perfectly when viewed through the framework of a heist. Perhaps too perfectly, for Holmes was by his own flawless conclusion led astray. He exerted a significant effort, persuading the bank director and arranging for a number of constables to lie in wait, and yet at the end of it all he failed to catch so much as a mouse in the trap he had so carefully laid.

Pride cometh before the fall, and when it hit the ground Holmes's pride shattered into a thousand fragments.

The following week, the impeccably informed Daily Chronicle published an exposé of the affair with the bombshell headline *SHERLOCK HOLMES IN SHAMBLES*. The piece thoroughly savaged Holmes's aptitude as a detective, and ended with a scathing quotation from none other than Lestrade: "Mr. Holmes's amateur pretensions have severely hindered the official police investigation."

Holmes had proceeded directly to the offices of the Daily Chronicle in Karasuma Oike to protest their publication of such an irresponsible article, but this only provoked the editors further. Shortly afterward the paper carried a considerably embellished account of his visit; *SHERLOCK HOLMES GOES BERSERK* was the headline. Holmes's face went white as a sheet when he read the article, and he promptly thrust a revolver loaded with Eley's No. 2 into his pocket and attempted to pay the newspaper another visit. It was all Mrs. Hudson and I could do to stop him.

Meanwhile, the article reverberated throughout Kyoto, and Holmes's reputation began to take a turn for the worse.



It was morning when Holmes and I returned to Teramachi Street. In the early morning light the street as if it had been bleached white. Wagons laden with vegetables overtook our weary feet, rumbling easily over the cobbles toward Nishiki Market.

Both he and I were utterly exhausted.

"This is the last one," I said, stooping and plucking the fallen flower from the ground before the door of 221B Teramachi Street.

Professor Moriarty had already gone inside. After gazing up at his third-floor window for a moment, we opened the front door and dragged ourselves up the staircase to Holmes's quarters on the second floor.

While Holmes stirred the embers in the fireplace, I threw open the curtains to let the light inside. I needed to be back at my medical practice before Mary stirred, but I could hardly bring myself to take another step. My body was entirely frozen over; I had rarely felt so miserable.

Our pursuit of Professor Moriarty had gone on for the whole night. He had traced the river up to Demachiyana-ji, crossed the Kamo Bridge, and continued east along Imadegawa Street. In the dead silence of night, the buildings of Kyoto University were as forbidding as a stone labyrinth. Yet it appeared that the professor had no business there tonight.

Once he reached the path to Ginkaku-ji, the professor turned north and proceeded for a long way along Shirakawa Street, after which he struck west down Kita-ōji Street. Upon crossing the Kamo once more his route became truly haphazard. He wandered around Imamiya Shrine and Daitoku-ji, passed by Kinkaku-ji, swung around Kitano-tenmangū, and meandered by the jostling textile factories of Nishijin before then heading south down Senbon Street, and by the time he reached Nijō Castle light was creeping over the eastern horizon.

"A fine chase you led us on!" Holmes groaned from his armchair. "An entire night's pursuit, and the professor as docile as a lamb, unless you consider being in impeccable health proof of some crime!"

I threw myself down upon the settee, too exhausted to emit even a groan.

What's the matter with you, Watson?

Only a year ago I had undertaken one grand adventure after another alongside Holmes. It was as though we had merely to step out of 221B Teramachi Street to stumble upon one thrilling intrigue or another. But now? We had spent the whole night stumbling around after a reclusive old man.

The morning sun shone bright upon the cream-coloured blinds, heralding the dawn of another day was dawning, yet this only drove me deeper into my melancholy. Downstairs there was a ring at the bell.

Holmes glanced at the clock on the mantelpiece and scowled. "Is it too much to expect people to call at a more reasonable hour?"

The bell continued to clang insistently, and at last aroused from her slumber Mrs. Watson clattered down the hall to answer it. We heard her exchanging words with the visitor at the door.

"A telegram, perhaps," Holmes mused.

It was not. Shortly we heard footfalls coming up the stairs, fury reverberating in each thump.

I bounded up like a spring, my fatigue instantly forgotten. It was Mary!



My wife Mary always called Sherlock Holmes "that man".

An indication that she intended to keep him at arm's length, yes, but if she had only disapproved of him that might have admitted the possibility that they were still on speaking terms. No, in Mary's eyes Holmes was beneath words now.

At first he had been "Mr. Holmes", before becoming "Holmes", and subsequently merely "that man". Each of these changes in his appellation had coincided with his undergoing some sort of transformation in Mary's eyes. Now Holmes was no longer her husband's colleague, or even his friend. My excoriation by the readers of *The Strand Magazine*, the dire straits of my medical practice, the cracks which had crept into our loving relationship—each of these maladies could be traced directly back to Sherlock Holmes. She was convinced that Holmes was not a human being composed of flesh and blood, but a pestilence which brought in its wake all kinds of evil.

I sprang from my chair and grasped Holmes's arm. "We are undone, Holmes! That's Mary coming up the stairs!"

"And what about it? I don't see what the fuss is about."

"I promised her I would no longer keep your company. I didn't tell her I would come here!"

"You nincompoop!" said Holmes in disgust. "What a foolish thing to do. Did you think she is blind and deaf?"

"I didn't know what to do. What do we do now?"

"Gird ourselves for the worst, I suppose," said Holmes. "Stand up and face it like a man!"

"You can face it if you like, but leave me out of it!"

"What do you mean, leave you out? You're the centerpiece of this mess, not me!"

A rap at the door interrupted our squabbling. After a moment's silence, Holmes called out, "Come in!" and Mary quietly entered the room. She was wrapped up in a grey coat, and her face was extremely wan and tired.

"Hello again, Holmes," said she, before turning her icy gaze upon me. "And what are *you* doing here?"

"Well, you see—"

"I'd thought that you were going to play billiards with Thurston?"

"And we did. By sheer chance, I happened to run into Holmes at the same bar."

"And then what?" Mary's charming eyebrows arched upward.

"It had been so long since we had last seen each other, that we couldn't pass up the opportunity to have a little chat about the future. Now I know exactly how this must seem to you, of course I do, but you must understand that we were trying to find a path forward, with your directive in mind..."

As I began to falter, Holmes took over the thread.

"And it just so happened that we received an emergency request."

"A request?" Mary frowned. "What sort of request?"

"I am perfectly well acquainted with your opinion of our collaboration, but this was a case of great significance to Her Majesty's government. I will beg your forgiveness, but I simply could not do without Watson's assistance. "

"You see, Mary? I couldn't simply walk away."

"Yes, of course. It all makes perfect sense," Mary nodded, before asking a question which took me completely off guard. "And what exactly does sneaking around after an old man have to do with Her Majesty's government?"

Holmes and I were dumbfounded. I asked her how she knew about the old man.

"I'd noticed you had been acting strangely, so afterwards I paid a visit to the club. I found Thurston, who informed me that you had left a message begging off from tonight's appointment. That made it perfectly clear in my head that you were going to Teramachi Street. No sooner had I arrived here than I witnessed you two leaving the house, and so I quietly followed along. I believe I am entirely within my rights as a wife; after all, it is you who have lied to me."

"Followed along?" I said, aghast. "The entire night?"

"I was a member of the school paper in my boarding school days, you know. I can play detective if I feel like it, and so I tailed you both the whole night! But you have not answered my question. What is so important about sneaking around after an old man?"

Mary split her glare equally between Holmes and me. There was nothing I could say. I had been so focused on Professor Moriarty that the possibility that we were being followed in turn had never crossed my mind.

Holmes quickly capitulated. "You win, Mary," he said. "We were following Moriarty, who has just moved in. He's not a criminal, or anything of the sort, just a retired college professor."

"In other words, you were following him for sport."

"I suppose that is true."

"Mr. Holmes, I must ask something of you," Mary declared, in the severe tone that she had acquired during her tenure as a governess in the household of Mrs. Cecil Forrester. It was the tone that indicated she was prepared to fight. "I want you to sever your ties with John."

"You don't mince words, my dear."

"It's the only way you will listen."

"Mary—" I attempted to interject, but Mary cut me short with a curt gesture.

"Quiet, John. Let me handle this." She gazed evenly at Holmes. "Mr. Holmes, I'm well acquainted with my husband's feelings about the matter. You were his colleague, and his roommate, and, what's more, the reason he and I met. It is not a small debt which we owe to you. But now you have become mutual hindrances to one another. You both ought to find your own paths, move forward under your own power. Yet when you are together you only waste time in commiseration. Just look at what you did last night, pretending to be detectives and following around an innocent old man for your own silly amusement. You surely must have realized this by now, Mr. Holmes. My husband has lost his grip upon reality. He is infatuated with all the adventures he had at your side, and as long as he is tagging along he will never be able to let go of his regrets. If you truly wish the best for my husband, you will end this unhealthy relationship. It is what is best, both for him and for you."

"Your point is well taken."

"Then—"

"But this is between Watson and me. As his wife you may of course discuss this with him to your heart's content. But it is not your place to tell me how I ought to live. It is clear that Watson here is very important to you, but he is also my dear friend. The slump that has afflicted me this past year is the greatest case of my life, and if I am to have any hope at all of solving it I cannot go without his assistance."

I could not remain unmoved by his plaintive words.

"Don't listen to him!" Mary snapped. "How many times will you be led astray by his silver tongue?"

Through the window over Teramachi Street light poured into the tense room, the same room which I had once shared with Holmes and had been the starting point for so many of our adventures. Where once the city of London had seemed such a grim, dismal place in our modern Victorian age, it had become a fount of limitless intrigue, and the cause of this transformation lay in none other but Holmes. I could not but be drawn to him by his ability to seemingly conjure up an adventure out of thin air. No matter how many times he disappointed me I could not bring myself to relinquish the hope that one day the Sherlock Holmes of old would make his triumphant return.

Holmes walked over to the window and raised the blinds.

"Will you give me a little more time, Mary?"

"I will not see John suffer any further."

"He is not the only one who is suffering."

"If you wish to suffer that is your prerogative," said Mary, a tired note in her voice as she averted her face. "But John has his own life to live. He is more than your personal biographer!"

Holmes said nothing, pressing his chin against the windowpane.

"Are you listening to me, Holmes?"

"Just a moment, Mary," said he, raising his right hand. "There appears to be a commotion outside."

As he spoke, I heard a growing hubbub from the street below. It was now the time of day where the streets would normally begin to stir, but this was not the normal morning commotion. Holmes threw open the window, letting us hear the voices more clearly.

"Careful!"

"Steady on there!"

Holmes leaned out the window and twisted his torso to look upwards. Immediately he drew back and ran to the door. "To the roof, Watson! There's not a moment to lose!"

"What's the matter?"

"It's Professor Moriarty. He's going to jump!"

In another moment Holmes had swept through the door and was running up the stairs like a gale.



In my days sharing 221B Teramachi Street with Holmes, I would often ascend the stairs to the roof whenever I was not sure how to write the chronicles of a case. It wasn't much of a view, what with the chimneys that sprouted up like mushrooms, and the drying racks, and the little shrines to Benzaiten. To the east, beyond the Kamo River, I could see the belt of crop fields below Higashiyama, and to the west the rooftops of the city were covered in smog.

I emerged onto the roof below an overcast sky after Holmes.

"Professor Moriarty!" Holmes shouted as he dashed ahead. The professor was standing atop the parapet facing away towards the street, his head despondently drooping low. With his black cloak draped around him he reminded me of an enormous crow.

Holmes sprinted past a Benzaiten shrine towards the professor. From the tremendous speed he was running at it was evident that he did not intend to patiently persuade the professor down from his perch. His judgment was sound. Hearing Holmes's footsteps approaching, the professor turned around. There was a strange expression on his face, halfway between a smile and a sob, but I had only the briefest moment to behold it before he began to fall backward. A cry rose up from the crowd below on Teramachi Street.

Holmes sprang to the parapet, leaned over, and grasped the professor's cloak with both hands. There was nothing keeping Holmes from being pulled over himself—he had acted with utter faith that I would be right behind him.

Without hesitation I grabbed on to his waist, but the force being exerted on me was tremendous. Holmes was being stretched like a rope. My legs were quite strong from all many days of rounds, and now those legs were all that stood between Professor Moriarty and Holmes, and oblivion.

I felt a pressure around my waist; warm breath tickled my neck. Mary had come at last, and she was holding on to me for dear life.

"Hang on, John!" she shouted. "Don't you let go!"

Holmes was hanging on to Professor Moriarty, I was hanging on to Holmes, and Mary was hanging on to me—it was like the tale of the enormous turnip, and Mary was holding it all together, if only just.

Holmes swung the professor up like a hammer thrower. The professor sailed onto the roof like a black ball, and we all collapsed in a heap.

Spent mentally and physically, we lay there gasping for a while. I heard cheers come up from the distant street below. At last, Holmes roused himself and asked, "I hope you are not hurt, dear professor?"

"I am a worthless human being," cried the professor, who was curled up in a ball and sobbing. "My God-given talent has gone from me!"

Holmes walked over to him. "May I trouble you to tell me more? I may just be able to help you."

Professor Moriarty sat up, and haltingly related his tale.

His slump had begun in the autumn of the previous year. His mind was as full of mathematical ideas as ever, yet none of them came to anything. In his distress he became an insomniac, and in an attempt to resolve his slump had retired from public life. The research he had been engaged in on the third floor, in short, was to resolve his slump.

Yet his efforts bore no fruit, and his malaise only worsened. In his despair he had resolved to throw himself into the Kamo River the previous night, but perplexed by the constant presence of Holmes and myself had not found the opportunity to do so. Thus he had wandered the entire night before returning to 221B Teramachi Street, where he had decided to throw himself off the roof before being thwarted by us yet again.

"What can it be, this devil that afflicts me?" the professor groaned, his head bowed, his voice breaking. "Suppose I make a mathematical discovery. At a glance, it appears unassailable. It is a joy like no other, I tell you, the joy of discovering a new truth with your own hands. But the following day, I discover a slight defect in the theorem. I attempt to repair the defect, yet my careful exertions only succeed in making the flaw ever larger, and after a vehement I realize that the 'truth' which I had previously rejoiced over is fit only to throw out with the refuse."

Holmes replied with great sympathy, "I understand perfectly how it is you feel. In fact I am even now grappling with precisely the same issue."

Professor Moriarty looked up at him in astonishment. "You mean you are in a slump as well?"

"Yes, and it is the greatest case of my life," said Holmes, and he held out his hand to the professor. "Working together we may yet solve this mystery. What do you say, professor?"



Mary and I went out to the Kamo River.

It was a chilly morning, and the hansom rattled onward beneath the cloudy sky. Mary kept stifling yawns as the cab swayed back and forth, apparently too tired to speak. It seemed all the excitement with Professor Moriarty had put the matter of Holmes and I out of her mind, for now. Our playing at detective had not been for nothing after all, for we had ended up saving the professor's life.

I thought back to all those flowers the professor had dropped on his path.

"So that's what it was," I murmured. "He was leaving them as a goodbye to the world."

"You're wrong, John," Mary said, still not moving an inch. "He wanted someone to pick up those flowers. He was crying for help."

I looked at her. Her face was scrunched up in thought like a young girl as she gazed out upon the passing scene. I could see the chill of the morning air, and the fatigue of the previous night's excursion, in her pale cheeks. Teardrops glistened, jewel-like, in the corners of her eyes.

"I suppose I can be angry at you another time." And she let her eyes close and her head slump to rest upon my shoulder.

Chapter 2

Irene Adler's Challenge

The first Sunday of November saw Mrs. Hudson and I sharing a carriage. We hailed it at Kawaramachi Sanjō, from which it crossed Sanjō Bridge and rolled leisurely along the cobbled streets. Our destination was the Pondicherry Lodge near Nanzen-ji, home to the celebrated spirit medium, Madame Richborough.

Mrs. Hudson had dressed herself up specially for the visit, and was acting as giddily as though she were on her way to a Sunday picnic.

"Just you wait and see, Mr. Watson, Madame Richborough will know just what to do!"

"She sounds like a formidable woman, from your telling."

"I am afraid my telling doesn't do her justice! She is the most formidable medium the world has ever seen, you know."

It was Madame Richborough's advice that had gained Mrs. Hudson a small fortune in real estate, or so she claimed. In addition to 221B the landlady owned a good many properties near Teramachi Street besides, and was well on her way to becoming a veritable tycoon of Teramachi.

"Only the other day," said she, with a look of great self-approbation, "I snatched up the building across from 221B on her advice. The dust had hardly settled from the renovation than I'd come across just the tenant for it. Irene Adler is her name, a former prima donna of the stage."

"Well, I daresay you stand to make a tidy profit."

"Yes, and I've Madame Richborough to thank for it!"

I'd done some investigation into Madame Richborough. She claimed to be descended from a line of astrologers that had served no less than the royal court, but that appeared to be a mere fabrication; her true provenance was a mystery. Several years ago she had begun to hold seances around Kyoto, professing to have mastered the secret spiritual arts of darkest India. Now she held a considerable number of followers among high society, and was a central figure in the spiritualist fad which was sweeping the land.

As I regarded myself a man of science, if only a trifling one, I regarded the spiritualist current of the age with considerable skepticism. Yet I had tried everything I could think of to solve Holmes's slump and come up with nothing, and if spiritualism offered even the slightest glimmer of hope then so be it.

"Something must be done about Holmes. If he spends much more time idling with Professor Moriarty it'll spell the end of him."

"You're not jealous that those two have become such good friends, are you?" smiled Mrs. Hudson. "What envious creatures you men are."

"I am not envious in the least. I am only irritated, Mrs. Hudson."

"If you say so. I must say I never expected that Mr. Holmes would get along so well with Mr. Moriarty, being...well, the way that he is. I suppose I can't complain, seeing that Mr. Moriarty has been as tame as a lamb ever since."

Pondicherry Lodge was to the north of Nanzen-ji, at the foot of Higashiyama. As we drove north up Shirakawa Street from the Nanzen-ji boat reservoir, we passed to our right many lovely villas and manors, the possessions of nobles and business magnates alike. Each boasted grounds of considerable proportions, tree branches peeking over the long walls that surrounded them, and the Richborough estate was certainly not any less grand than its neighbours. Our carriage passed beneath the stone gateway, and drove up the gravel-drive beneath the shadow of the trees up to the waiting mansion.



The arrival of November saw Holmes unmoved from his self-imposed quarantine in 221B Teramachi Street, the one difference being that Professor James Moriarty, the third-floor neighbour with whom he had so recently been ferociously feuding, now spent nearly all his time visiting. As soon as it had become clear that the professor was also in the throes of a deep slump the two had immediately hit it off.

"It's impossible, I tell you!"

"By Jove, so it is!"

And on and on it would go the whole day through. I found the situation quite disagreeable, for I had gone to considerable lengths to restore Holmes to the work of detection only for he and Moriarty to spend the whole day commiserating, neither deigning to lend an ear to my advice.

"Surely you're not jealous, Watson?" Holmes would tut, taking me to task for being so conceited as to worry that my position as his partner was being usurped.

"It is you my concern is for," I entreated him. "Surely you don't think you can sit in here doing nothing forever?"

"I am not doing nothing. I am pondering the Case of Sherlock Holmes," said he, smoking his pipe.

"Just so!" nodded Professor Moriarty, lounging on the settee. "We are doing everything we can. Never before have we faced such an impenetrable mystery!"

Their words might have seemed rational, but by any measure they were only averting their eyes from reality.

With the eventual addition of Shinchō Yard's Lestrade to their number, 221B Teramachi Street truly became a haunt of wretches.

"Your example has inspired me to face life anew, Holmes," Lestrade declared. "Now, I need only to learn to solve crimes again."

It did not escape Mary's notice that I was still visiting Holmes. But she said nothing, and I did not bring it up.

Though she had flown into a rage at Holmes the previous month, her anger at Holmes seemed to have subsided following our rescue of the professor from certain death. But I was certain that the volcano was only slumbering, and that the next time it erupted again would precipitate one of the fiercest battles our marriage would ever face.



The cab came to a halt before the doors of the great mansion, and a butler showed us inside to a waiting-room on the right side of the foyer. "Madame Richborough will be with you shortly," he said.

A mere waiting-room it may have been, yet it was so spacious that it could have contained my entire residence and practice. On the left-hand wall was a magnificent marble fireplace on whose mantelpiece was arrayed a row of Indian statuettes, while a rich tapestry draped the wood panelling. Through the window on the right we could see a sun-bathed garden boasting a spectacular view of Higashiyama.

As I admired the garden, Mrs. Hudson whispered to me, "Quite a villa, isn't it? They say it once belonged to Lord St. Simon."

"St. Simon?" I ejaculated with some surprise. "The same whose bride disappeared?"

"It was Madame Richborough who solved that case. And ever since, Lord St. Simon's become a fervent believer in spiritualism, and has provided her no little support."

"We'd better not speak a word of this to Holmes."

"Yes, I still recall how furious Lord St. Simon was at him."

The case of Lord St. Simon's missing bride had occurred last autumn, when signs of Holmes's decline were just beginning to become apparent. Holmes's inability to solve St. Simon's household problem brought upon him no shortage of slander: quack, pretender, layabout, and other epithets of the sort. Holmes was surely too proud to seek aid from a spirit medium who counted Lord St. Simon among her patrons.

Presently the butler returned and showed us up to the second floor.

"Mrs. ___ Hudson, and Dr. John Watson," the butler announced. When he had shut the door behind us I could hardly see a thing. A thick velvet curtain hid the window from view, such that it was nearly as black as night within the room. The only light came from a small stove on the left side of the room and a candelabra on a table at the end of the room. The flickering light danced upon a tiger hide on the floor and the Indian statuettes that decorated the room.

"Madame Richborough?" I called, and from the darkness to my right there was a sound of dripping water.

"Welcome, my dear Dr. Watson," said an unctuous voice from the gloom. "Mrs. Hudson has told me a great deal about you."

As my eyes adjusted to the darkness, I perceived a rather stout woman reclining upon a settee, surrounded by a mountain of pillows. She wore a dress of twilight ultramarine blue, and was puffing leisurely on a hookah.

"Come closer," she drawled, beckoning us with a wave of her hand. We carefully picked our way through the gloom and sat down on two chairs in front of her.

I didn't know how old Madame Richborough was, though I estimated she was in her late forties. She had large staring eyes set in her square face, and the thick makeup which caked her skin made it appear as though she was a disembodied mask floating in mid-air.

"I have been waiting quite a long time for this day, for the day that I would meet you."

"Waiting, you say? Waiting to do what?"

"Ever since Mrs. Hudson told me the news, the dreadful news that Mr. Sherlock Holmes is in a terrible slump, I have longed, and prayed, that I might be of some aid to him. I can think of no greater honour, than to deliver the famous detective from his travails. In truth, dear doctor, I am an avid reader of your chronicles of Mr. Holmes's famous adventures."

"Really? I would not have suspected it. It seems to me that spiritualism and detective stories are as irreconcilable as oil and water."

"You mean, you believe that spiritualists are completely illogical," said Madame Richborough, barely hiding a smile as she rose from the cushions. "But that is a misunderstanding, and hardly an uncommon one. We seek merely to extend the logical rigour of our modern age to the realm of the metaphysical. Many seek to demonstrate that the spiritual world exists using scientific means. We psychics offer our aid to their research by way of our professional work. Certainly you must agree that is an entirely logical approach?"

I nodded. "It is indeed."

"Then you will also admit there is no contradiction that I enjoy detective stories as well," said Madame Richborough with satisfaction. "You could even say I am a detective myself, albeit one that plumbs the mysteries of the spiritual realm. So you see, it is a sort of kindred affection I feel toward Mr. Holmes. Though it may be difficult for him now, I am confident that even he must one day admit to the existence of the supernatural. With our powers combined there would be no limit to what we could achieve, no mystery which we could not solve."

I retained my misgivings toward the practice of spiritualism itself, but Madame Richborough's words were not without merit. Her sedate disposition made me consider whether there might not be more to her than met the eye.

"On the topic of Holmes," said Mrs. Hudson, leaning forward. "Have you any thoughts?"

Madame Richborough shut her eyes and took a puff from the water pipe. "If Mr. Holmes is to break out of his slump, we must first bring to light the cause of it. Even the most discerning often fails to understand himself. The perplexing question of Mr. Holmes's slump illustrates this perfectly: if he does not take into consideration the part of himself with which he is least acquainted—namely, that of the spiritual realm—he will certainly have little hope of finding the answer he seeks."

Madame Richborough languorously rose from her settee and approached the large table which occupied the center of the room. A small pedestal was set upon the table, and atop it was a crystal ball nestled on a light blue cushion. At Madame Richborough's urging we sat down at the table across from her.

"This crystal ball concentrates the spiritual energy around us," Madame Richborough said softly. "You might say it is like a convex lens, focussing the rays of the sun. You, Dr. Watson, are Mr. Holmes's closest friend, and you, Mrs. Hudson, are his landlady. You both possess a measure of his spiritual energy, but only in the most minuscule quantity. Without the use of this tool, even one experienced in the spiritual arts such as I cannot bring this energy to materialize."

Madame Richborough held her hands to the crystal ball, drew in a deep breath, and shut her eyes.

"Now, still your hearts, and gaze into the crystal ball."

Mrs. Hudson clasped your hands tightly, and gazed fervidly at the orb. I felt rather silly, but I would have felt sillier coming all this way only to balk now, and followed Mrs. Hudson's example. The crystal ball glittered in the candlelight. There was a haze about Madame Richborough and her twilight blue dress, and I almost fancied that I could see right through her.

After a short time I suddenly felt a thrill up my spine. The room had grown markedly colder. The candles on the table flickered, yet the door was shut, and there was nowhere from which a draft could have entered. Glancing up furtively I saw that Madame Richborough had not moved, and her hands were still placed upon the crystal ball. A ghostly aura presided over the scene.

Mrs. Hudson gasped. "I see something!"

The crystal ball was emitting a faint glow. I returned my gaze to it and, to my astonishment, saw suspended within its depths the shape of a human being.

Its head was hung low so that I could not see its face, but I could see clearly that it was the figure of a slender young girl. There was something sorrowful about her appearance. I rubbed my eyes, but the figure remained.

"Do you see her?" I asked.

Mrs. Hudson nodded vigorously. "I see her! I see her!"

"This girl calls from the other side," intoned Madame Richborough solemnly. "It may be that she is the cause of Mr. Holmes's slump."

In the next instant the light of the crystal ball faded, and with it the figure of the young girl. Madame Richborough explained that the girl was the materialization of a wound imprinted deeply upon Holmes's psyche, from a case that had occurred long ago.

"That is all I can decipher. It would be best, I believe, if I could advise Mr. Holmes himself in person. If I could only discover what happened in that case..."

Mrs. Hudson left the room, but as I made to follow her Madame Richborough laid her hand upon my arm.

"I am at your disposal," she said earnestly, her face looming in the darkness like the moon in the heavens. There was a strange scent in the air. "If there is any aid I can dispense to Mr. Holmes, I shall be glad to do it."

After Mrs. Hudson and I left Pondicherry Lodge we went to Nanzen-ji. The shadow of Higashiyama towered above us, and the temple was wrapped in a chilly mountain air. Worshippers filled the grounds: young officers bundled up in thick overcoats, groups of young men and women, merchants and their families. Hansom cabs waited before the gates, their drivers smoking and idly chatting among one another.

As we strolled beneath the pine trees I felt at last that we were back in the land of the living.

"An impressive woman, that Madame Richborough."

"You've come around, then?"

"I must confess it was a most stimulating experience." Once more my mind turned to the girl in the crystal ball. Whoever she was, I was certain I had never seen her before. Neither Mrs. Hudson nor I were likely to have forgotten any case which would have left a lasting

wound upon Holmes's mind, and following this inference whatever case it was must have taken place before our acquaintance.

Ten years ago an old friend from my days at Bart's by the name of Stamford had introduced me to Holmes, and from that day on we had taken up lodging together. Come to think of it, I knew nothing of the cases with which he had been involved prior to that time.

"I believe we must find a way to bring Holmes to Madame Richborough."

"You believe you can convince him, then?"

"I shall drag him there by the scruff of his neck if I must."

We left the temple and hailed one of the cabs that sat idle before the gates. As it descended the slope from Nanzenji, the great city unfurled itself before us, wreathed in fog and soot, and the sun hung suspended in the haze above Mt. Atago.



That day 221B Teramachi Street played host once again to a gathering of the Losers' Club.

I went up to Holmes's room and found him sitting in his armchair smoking his pipe, conversing with Professor Moriarty, who was reclining upon the settee, and Inspector Lestrade. As was their custom they were idly prattling on, using their respective slumps as fodder for their conversation.

"It is imperative that one settles oneself before setting to the task, Mr. Lestrade," Professor Moriarty was saying. "Haste makes waste."

"Perhaps a demotion to Ohara-no-sato would be just the thing," mused Holmes carelessly. "You'd have all the time in the world to square up to yourself. Yes, time is what you need. We could even accompany you there. Imagine throwing yourself down in a grassy field and pondering your slump as you gaze at the clouds roll by. Would you like to come with us, Watson?"

"Don't be ridiculous," I said, lighting my pipe by the window. "I have Mary, as well as my practice to consider. What would I possibly gain to go with you to Ohara? And lest we forget, it is you who are in a slump, not me."

"There you have it, Professor," Holmes said in a loud whisper.

The professor shook his head gravely. "He who desires help most who admits it least."

Holmes cleared his throat. "Watson," he began; "You have a lovely wife, and the medical practice which you had so long coveted. By all appearances your life should be the envy of all. But beneath the facade all is not as serene as it may seem. Your practice groans under the weight of the debt you have shouldered, and yet you see but only a few patients from time to time. Your only hope to ease this burden would be to take up a secondary occupation, yet for nearly a year you have not written a single detective story."

"And I tell you that it is because of *your* slump!"

"It won't do to go on blaming me for your troubles," Holmes exclaimed triumphantly. "Let us examine the matter. Without me, you cannot write. That is to say, anything that ails me ails you; if I fall into a slump so too do you. Yet here you go on playing the innocent victim, casting off the fault to me. Cast off the mask of self-righteousness, Watson, and look to your own faults!"

Since he had founded the Losers' Club alongside Professor Moriarty, Holmes's speech had tended increasingly to employ sophism. The boundless mental energies which he had once employed in the cause of solving crime were now overwhelmingly exerted in the direction of avoiding reality. Day by day his slump was only worsening.

I sighed and looked through the window-pane, whereupon I happened to spy the figure of a beautiful woman passing by a window of the house across the street. It was gone in a moment, but in some way I was reminded of my Mary. This was not an infrequent occurrence. Often while going about my way in town I would come across an enchanting woman and recognize in some aspect of her bearing my wife. Nor was this limited to women only: I had noticed her likeness in Shiba Inus, snowmen, earthenware Fushimi dolls, *natsu mikan*, even *kibidango*. In all facets of nature living or not which harbour some degree of charm, I saw the face of my beloved Mary.

Therefore this latest occurrence of the strange phenomenon I dubbed the "Omnipresent Mary" soon passed from my mind. I shook my head to regain myself, and went on the counterattack against Holmes.

"It is you who refuse to see the truth of the matter."

"We are engaged in solving this slump!"

"You are only turning away from reality."

"Recognizing that one's powers have declined is hardly running away. It requires one to summon a great deal of courage and delve into a problem which affects every facet of one's life. Yet you prattle on about working, and solving cases, and proving my worth. No, as I see it it is you who are running away. You point the finger at me, and yet refuse to see the problems within yourself!"

"Very well," I said, suppressing my indignation at Holmes. "Let us suppose that your claim is true. I have done some thinking about your slump. Prior to our taking up lodging here together, there must have been a time when you were still a no-name consulting detective, in the infancy of your career. You must have suffered some failures as you developed your powers. Perhaps by examining each of those cases, we may find some clue to help you solve your present slump."

"An interesting observation," nodded Professor Moriarty. "Watson's idea seems sound to me."

"Holmes's fledgling years—why, that must be over ten years ago now," murmured Inspector Lestrade, half-closing his eyes as though in fond remembrance. He had known Holmes longer than I had. "You were so arrogant in those days, I couldn't help but resent you. I couldn't count the times I secretly longed to shove you into the Kamo River!"

"And Holmes's work? Would you have called him a genius in those days as well?" I asked.

"Certainly, I would."

"Any cases which caused him particular trouble?"

"Now that I think of it, none spring to mind."

The queerest part about this conversation was that Holmes, who had so furiously defended himself earlier, was now completely silent.

"Well, Holmes, can you think of any cases which confounded you more than the others?" I asked.

"What gave you the idea?" replied he, with a piercing glance. "Something is afoot here."

"What's strange about it?"

"Come to think of it, Mrs. Hudson had dressed herself in extra trimmings when she left this morning," said Holmes, and he narrowed his eyes. "You've been to see that medium."

I said nothing. Despite his inability to solve cases, it seemed that he still possessed a degree of his fantastic powers of observation, to my chagrin.

"You have!" he snarled.

"I don't see the harm. I thought we might gain some sort of clue," I said with a shrug of my shoulders.

Holmes bounded up from the armchair. His fury was dreadful to behold, and seizing the poker he bent it into a curve and hurled it into the fireplace with all his might

"Useless fool!" he bellowed. "You would seek the help of a charlatan? Have you gone mad!?"

Even Professor Moriarty and Lestrade were taken aback by his savage outburst.

"Surely there is no need to be angry. I only did it for your sake..." I pleaded.

"I may not be what I once was, but I am still the greatest detective in all the land!" Holmes shouted, a blue vein pulsing in his forehead. "I will never stoop so low as to depend on something as imbecilic as spiritualism. And I know that Madame Richborough counts Lord St. Simon as one of her patrons. That puffed-up lordling! Do you understand what it is you have done? You may as well have stepped up and slapped me across the face! For my sake, indeed! I could not ask for a more worthless partner!"

With an angry tut he lowered himself back into his chair and turned his face away. Moriarty and Lestrade awkwardly averted their eyes.

Mrs. Hudson came bustling in with a tea-set.

"Now, how about a nice cup of tea to soothe your nerves?" she remarked. "I could hear the commotion from outside, you know."



It was clear to me that Holmes had become set in his obstinacy. Nothing in the past year had he accomplished to deserve the title of the pre-eminent detective. Clinging to his pride now would certainly not avail him much. Spiritualism or otherwise, he owed it to himself to use whatever methods would work. Perhaps Mary had been right, for it seemed to me now that Holmes had no intention of leaving the comfort of his slump.

I stood at the window, my back turned to Holmes, for I was not in much of a talking mood. Accepting a cup of tea from Mrs. Hudson, I gazed down upon the early afternoon traffic which bustled along Teramachi Street.

As I peered outside, I observed a solitary gentleman come ambling down the pavement. Both his bowler hat and his suit were made of velvet, and his whiskers were very neatly trimmed. He seemed quite well-to-do, only he was looking anxiously at the door numbers as he passed. Having observed similar behaviour for many years I was confident that he was looking for the assistance of Sherlock Holmes.

The velvet-clad gentleman stopped before the doorway of 221B and nodded as if to say, "This is the place." But to my bemusement, instead of ringing the bell, he glanced across the street to the building on the other side. After a moment's hesitation, he quickly strode across to it and rang the bell. A housemaid opened the door and courteously greeted him.

"That's strange," I remarked, but nobody was listening, for Holmes had struck up an argument with Mrs. Hudson about spiritualism. The landlady pointed to her recent successes in real estate as proof positive that spiritualism must be effective, though Holmes drily observed, "And what do the spiritual world and the real estate market have to do with one another?"

"Then what about the Benzaiten shrine on the rooftop?" Mrs. Hudson replied. "I know that you visit it every morning to pray and toss in a handful of coins. And the daruma, whose one eye you have yet to fill in as a talisman against your slump? You claim that there is no scientific evidence in favour of spiritualism—do you claim the same for Benten and the daruma?"

"I indulge in those things to soothe my own mind, nothing more."

"Then what prevents you from turning to faith in spiritualism in order to soothe your mind?"

"Mrs. Hudson," I interrupted. "It was Miss Irene Adler who had moved in across the street, wasn't it? Now that she has retired from the stage, what is it that she does?"

"Goodness, hadn't I mentioned it?" said she, with a coolness in her voice. "Miss Adler is a detective."

Her blunt announcement dealt us all quite a shock. Holmes's fingers tightened on the armrests of his chair.

"*Mrs. Hudson,*" ejaculated Professor Moriarty after a short silence; "I thought you were on Holmes's side!"

"I am, and always have been."

"Then why have you leased a room to a business competitor on the other side of the street?"

"It is entirely within my rights to determine who I will and won't allow to rent my properties. And why, Mr. Holmes has refused to see a client in months. Don't you feel sorry for those people, coming all this way only to be turned away at your doorstep? The least I could do was ensure their journeys are not in vain."

"Yes, but I daresay she is beginning to steal Holmes's clients outright," I said, pointing outside the window. "I can see one of those clients now."

"Then you can steal them back! Come sir, there's no time to waste!"

I supposed this was Mrs. Hudson's way of stirring what little remained of Holmes's competitive fire. She reminded me of a stout lioness smacking her cub off a cliff to toughen it up.

Lestrade rapped on the window. "Look, there's another one!"

A portly man in a worn coat was standing on the doorstep of 221B. He hesitated to ring the bell, glancing back and forth at the building across the street.

"For shame, Holmes!" I said. "Will you let all your clients be stolen away by Miss Adler?"

"Something must be done. I will go detain him!" said Lestrade, and he dashed from the room like a foxhound hot on the scent.



I followed Lestrade down to the street, where the portly man had already crossed the street and was on the verge of ringing Irene Adler's bell. Lestrade and I hurried across the thoroughfare and hailed him.

"Would you be in need of a detective, sir?"

Seeing how the man was as he turned around, I arranged my face into a fulsome smile. "It's your lucky day, sir," I told him. "We are associates of the well-known detective Sherlock Holmes. It so happens that Mr. Holmes has just returned after disarming an international conspiracy, and stands ready to take on any case, for an exceptionally reasonable price."

"No thank you, gentlemen," said the man, frowning and shaking his head. "Holmes is finished. I've heard nothing but bad news about him for a year now."

As he reached to ring the bell, Lestrade took hold of his arm. "We'll have no more of this. Come this way directly!"

"What's the meaning of this?" cried the man, his eyes opening wide.

"Lestrade, this man is not a criminal!" I hissed.

"I just can't stand it any more! You heard how he spoke of Holmes. And any man who speaks ill of Holmes speaks ill of me!"

"What are you talking about!? Take your hands off me!" the man demanded, and a furious tussle ensued between him and Lestrade. As the man's cries for help echoed down Teramachi Street, passersby began to stare. Ladies beneath parasols glanced disapprovingly, cab drivers leaned out of their carriages, and uniformed manservants looked on with keen amusement.

A man in a cap approached. "What's all this hubbub about?"

Lestrade turned and scowled when he saw who it was. "There's nothing to see here, Peters. Be on your way now!"

"Nothing to see, you say? Well, I will be the judge of that."

I realized this man was the reporter from the Daily Chronicle with whom Holmes had argued at the pub in Kiyamachi last month. He reached for a notebook with a look of ravenous glee. Things were rapidly devolving.

"We'd better leave off," I whispered in Lestrade's ear. But Lestrade stubbornly refused to let go of the man's arm.

The door in front of us opened, and a tall woman emerged. "What's going on here?"

This was Irene Adler.

She looked much younger than I had expected. She seemed to be about the same age as Mary. Her upright bearing and mellifluous voice spoke to her years on the stage. She was high-nosed, with a stern and distinct brow and piercing almond-shaped eyes. She wore a simple dress, but that did not hide the aura of authority which radiated from her, and it was plain to see that she was a woman of considerable energy.

"You're Irene Adler?" the portly man called desperately. "I'm here to see you, but these men won't let me through!"

Miss Adler opened her eyes wide in astonishment, then glared at Lestrade and me as though we were two naughty students misbehaving in our class.

"Dr. Watson and Inspector Lestrade, I presume. I'm quite familiar with the both of you. I must ask you to release that man, or do you intend to steal away one of my clients?"

There was a murmur from the spectators, and Lestrade at last grudgingly released the man.

"Who's stealing from whom, now?" said a voice.

I turned around to see Holmes parting the crowd. He was still wearing his threadbare dressing-gown, gripping that briar pipe of his with the amber mouthpiece in one hand, while Professor Moriarty trailed behind like his own shadow.

"You must be Miss Irene Adler."

"And you Mr. Sherlock Holmes."

Holmes and Adler sized each other up.

"I must protest at you calling me a thief," Miss Adler declared. "If you will not carry out your duties as a detective, why should I not take on the job instead?"

"You mean to replace me?"

"Certainly."

"Then I must admire your confidence."

"My dear Mr. Holmes, why is it that you no longer take up cases? Shinchō Yard remains as hapless as ever, and for the past year a mountain of unsolved cases has piled up. The people suffer, and yet you refuse to help them. If you have lost your determination to be a detective then your time is over. It is time for me to step back into the spotlight."

At her valiant words the crowd showered her with shouts and applause. Beside Miss Adler, who was as radiant as if she were actually basking beneath a spotlight, Sherlock Holmes, unshaven and in his dressing-gown, cut a pitiful figure indeed. As I looked on with shame, the reporter from the Daily Chronicle raised a hand.

"If I may be so bold as to offer a proposal," said he. "Why not resolve this with a showdown of detecting? We'll run a special column in our paper with the number of cases that our

detectives have solved. Whoever has solved the most cases by New Year's Day will earn the title of Kyoto's premiere detective."

"An interesting proposal," said Miss Adler with a smile. "What do you say, Mr. Holmes? Will you take on the challenge?"

The crowd's attention shifted onto Holmes, who raised his eyebrows and pondered the matter over. I rushed over and took his arm.

"Don't do it!" I whispered. For the past year he had not managed to solve a single case. There was certainly no hope of his victory. Irene Adler would gain a considerable amount of publicity, while Holmes had nothing to gain at all.

"This is not the time to turn my back!" he snapped, contemptuously flinging off my hand. "Very well, Miss Adler. I accept your challenge."



The following day the Daily Chronicle ran the headline:

Irene Adler Issues Challenge

Sherlock Holmes in Crisis

Detectives' Reputations on the Line

Peters ended his column with the following line:

"Mr. Sherlock Holmes has had a sterling career. However, as this paper has reported, over the past year Mr. Holmes's behaviour has become so erratic that his reputation among the public has reached a nadir. Will Holmes fend off this challenge by Miss Adler and reclaim his title as Kyoto's top detective? We eagerly anticipate the revival of his career."

Miss Adler's rise was positively meteoric. As an actress she had graced the stage of the Minami-za, before announcing her shock retirement in the fall of the previous year; after a quiet year had re-emerged as a private consulting detective on Teramachi Street. Yet she would not speak of her private life, or what had led her to make such a drastic career change. To the reporters who hounded her she would say only, "I am under no obligation to tell you."

In response to her growing fame, Shinchō Yard sniffed that she was a rank amateur who was not worthy of their time. However, in short order she got the best of celebrated inspectors such as Athelney Jones, Bradstreet, and Hopkins, sending the force into a panic.

And unlike Holmes, Miss Adler was not content to sit back and let the police take credit. Whatever she achieved she ruthlessly seized for her own, to the delight of the onlookers. Only Lestrade, an afterthought in his dusty secluded office, escaped her fangs.

The wind was clearly at her back, and Miss Adler spread her wings to make the most of it, with that mysterious vigor that can only be manifested when Lady Fortune smiles upon a meeting of heaven-sent talent and dogged tenacity. This was the vigor that had propelled Holmes to his unprecedented successes, and had now gone from him utterly.



For the next two weeks I did not visit Holmes. My consultation of Madame Richborough had drawn his wrath, and he declared that I was barred from his quarters.

"You and I are through," said he. "Detection is an exact science, and I won't have someone who hobnobs with mediums as an assistant. I have Watson the goldfish. If nothing else, a goldfish knows its place."

The Daily Chronicle's *Battle of the Detectives* had caused a sensation all through Kyoto. Which would prevail: Sherlock Holmes or Irene Adler? In the waiting room my patients would talk of nothing else; I even overheard some of them placing wagers on the outcome. The most enthusiastic of that group, an ex-marine by the name of Johnson, would visit my practice every three days or so complaining of an ache somewhere or other on his body, though it was clear that his purpose was really to extract inside information from me about Holmes.

"I haven't seen him lately," I would tell him with a shrug.

"Don't you be a tightfist!" he grinned. "You're his partner, I know. What odds would you place on him to prevail?"

Only my vow to do no harm stopped me forcing a carboy of arsenous acid down Mr. Johnson's throat.

My wife bustled about cheerfully as the month opened, seemingly having forgotten all about Holmes. She had always been active at her charity, and now she had apparently begun to attend some sort of creative workshop. She frequently visited the library and would write at her desk late into the night.

The only time we had time to chat leisurely as husband and wife was at the meal table, but more often than not I would be gloomily contemplating that day's Daily Chronicle. I knew I shouldn't read it, yet I couldn't bear not to.

The column which chronicled the detectives' progress had two bold numbers, one each for the number of cases that Holmes and Adler had each solved. Miss Adler's number grew by leaps and bounds. In contrast, Holmes's number remained stubbornly at zero. Each time I opened the newspaper and saw that immovable zero, I would inwardly sigh, *I told you so!*

It all seemed a farce. It was as if Holmes's incompetence was being advertised directly in sitting-rooms all over Kyoto.

"You're thinking of that man again," Mary said, as I sat there glowering at the newspaper. There was something like pity in her voice. "Well, I suppose you're right to be frustrated. He hasn't got a chance of winning."

"You're exactly right, Mary," I sighed. "He should never have taken Miss Adler's challenge. I should have stopped him, even if I had to give him a punch in the face to do it. But what frustrates me most of all is that, even as he is humiliated in the most complete manner, he refuses to ask for help. It's as if he doesn't care about how I feel at all!"

"You know that's how he has always been."

"He is worse. I blame Professor Moriarty."

"You mean the old man we rescued last month?"

"That crackpot physicist won't leave Holmes alone for a minute. He's bent on taking my place as Holmes's partner. Well, I won't stand for it. I know Holmes better than anyone—why, I am the greatest authority on the subject in the world!"

"You're right, of course. But do you really think your visiting would help him?" said she with a solemn look. "His slump has put you through no little anguish, John. He cares nothing for you, save that he can use you for his own convenience. Remember how he drove you to collapse in the summer. Surely it would be better to let Professor Moriarty become Holmes's partner rather than let that happen again."

"But I am Holmes's partner."

"Holmes's time is over. Irene Adler is a genius."

Mary's hand was warm as she reached out and took mine. I gazed with sorrow down at the newspaper upon the table. Cases solved by *Sherlock Holmes: 0*.

Why, Holmes, why won't you take things seriously?

"I think this is for the best, John," Mary said, squeezing my hand. "For now, at last, I feel that I can have you back."



I was later to learn that over the first half of November, Sherlock Holmes took on well over thirty cases, an astonishing number for so short a time. Among those cases were more than a few which previously Holmes certainly would have refused. It appeared that Holmes had discarded what standards he had and was taking whatever he could get. It was plain that he owed this drastic change of heart to the appearance of a rival in Irene Adler.

The issue remained, however, that Holmes did not actually undertake to solve any of those cases.

As I could not visit 221B Teramachi Street myself, I would meet with Mrs. Hudson in a café on the corner of Teramachi Nijō to hear the latest news about Holmes. She informed me that, despite the prodigious volume of cases which he had taken on, he had not set out to investigate a single one.

"Then what has he been doing?" I exclaimed.

"He has been cooped up in his room with Professor Moriarty," said Mrs. Hudson. "They are researching their slumps, or so they say."

If in the future some soul should undertake to write the biography of my friend Sherlock Holmes, they would certainly be astonished at the sheer fecklessness of this period of his life. Though he took on every case that came his way, instead of attempting to resolve them he would spend endless hours in pointless debate with Professor Moriarty on the causes of their respective slumps. It was utter madness; no wonder that the number on the front page of the Daily Chronicle remained at zero.

"Whatever is he thinking?" Mrs. Hudson would sigh alongside me as we sipped our bitter brew.

It felt as though everything I had built with Holmes had crumbled. Over the course of his year-long slump Holmes's hard-earned reputation as the foremost detective in Kyoto had suffered enormously. But now that this duel was playing out in the papers and in the public

eye, what had once been only premonition had turned into hard, undeniable fact. It was the most perilous situation Holmes had ever faced, and I could ill afford to remain on the sideline. It was imperative that I persuade him of his danger and confront it head-on.

Having reached the limits of my patience, I marched to the door of 221B Teramachi Street. But I was not to see Holmes that day, for as I was about to ascend the stair, a black shadow fell across my path. It was Professor Moriarty, standing in grotesque silhouette before a lamp in a second-floor window.

"Go away," said he, his grave voice descending upon me. "You will not see Holmes today."

"You have no right to stop me!"

"Is that what you presume?"

"I am Holmes's partner!"

"Partner? I was under the impression that you were only his secretary," cackled the professor, staring haughtily down upon me; "All that you have written depends utterly on his genius. It was pure fortune which brought you to his doorstep, and you are acutely aware of it, as you are aware of the fact that there are any number of people that could replace you. Therein lies the reason for your persistence: without Holmes to do the detecting, you must return to the inconsequential life of a general practitioner. It is not pure friendship which drives you, but cold self-interest. Behold then, how Holmes and I are united by our pursuit of truth!"

"Fine talk, from someone who only seeks to drag another down into your pit of self-loathing!"

"How dare you!"

"I must congratulate you on finding someone with whom you can bask so comfortably in misery," said I with a glare. "But it is you who are ruining Holmes!"

"What a lucky man Holmes is, to have a friend so discerning as you!" Moriarty sneered. "I speak with authority because I have felt Holmes's suffering as though it were my own. He faces the very mystery of his own existence all alone. A simpleton like you would never understand what a cruel undertaking that is. You ought to quietly watch over him, and yet you insist on interrupting his meditations to bray, 'Stop slacking off!' and 'Get to work!' and other such pompous platitudes! I tell you, all your vain, vacuous speeches do not make a pennyworth of difference!"

"This is not the time to be hiding away, it is the time to work!" I shouted. "Look at the papers. Look at how he is being savaged!"

"Your obsession with mundane wins and losses is exactly what I would expect from one who would be taken in by a spirit conjurer's tricks. You fail to see what is truly at stake. The problem we ought confront—the singular, intractable issue—is that of our own slumps. Solve that, and the petty problems of the world will fall like chaff before Holmes. What have we to fear from a girl like Adler?"

There stood Moriarty, his stooped, black figure looming like a god of pestilence. It was a thing of irony that I had been the one to propose we tail him that fateful night, and I must confess that at that moment I quietly regretted not having allowed him to throw himself to his doom.

"Holmes!" I cried. "You cannot hide there all your life!"

But from the second floor there came no reply.



The cab crossed the Kamo and rattled past the fields towards the university town at the foot of Mt. Yoshida, where Cartwright made his residence.

I had to get rid of Moriarty at all costs. And when this thought sprang to my mind, it led next to Cartwright, Moriarty's former protégé.

I alighted from the carriage at Hyakumanben crossing and walked east along Imadegawa Street. As a student Holmes had frequented these streets, his lofty and overbearing use of his powers of inference keeping his school-fellows at bay. A magnificent sprawling building came into view; its thick walls, dark windows, and high spires thrusting into the cloudy sky reminded me of a feudal keep. Beyond the dormitory gates and well-kept lawns I could see into the corridors, which were presently deserted.

Cartwright's laboratory was on the north side of Imadegawa Street. It was a newly constructed building of tawny brick, and inside it I encountered the young man, whose eyes opened wide when he saw me.

"Dr. Watson!" he exclaimed.

"I hope I haven't disturbed you," said I. "I was hoping to ask you a thing or two about Professor Moriarty."

"Gladly, sir. As a matter of fact I was only about to take a rest myself." And he hurriedly showed me into his lab.

The room was like an enormous cavern. One wall was made up entirely of bookshelves filled end to end with thick tomes, and there was a blackboard covered with indecipherable formulae and diagrams. In the center of the lab was a table piled high with graph paper and reference books; it also hosted an orrery and a small model of the moon rocket.

It felt as though I had stumbled into a sorcerer's workshop. As I gazed around in amazement, Cartwright stoked a coal furnace and set a cup of tea for me on a table that looked out onto the inner courtyard.

"I understand that you and Mr. Holmes saved the professor's life," he said. "I don't know how I can ever thank you."

"No need for thanks," I mumbled. "It was pure luck, that's all."

"I thought I had mistaken him for someone else when I visited 221B Teramachi last week. He was like a completely new man! He seems to have hit it off with Mr. Holmes, and I'm glad that he seems to have a new lease on life. I must confess, I would never have guessed that he was going through a slump. The professor would never admit to having any troubles of his own, you see."

"It pains me to ask this favour, after all you have just said..."

"Name it."

"Will you help me convince the professor to return to his post at the university?"

I explained to him my view that, as true as it was that Holmes and Moriarty were in a slump, it seemed to me they were making far too much of it to the point that they had lost their grip on reality. In spite of having accepted Irene Adler's challenge, Holmes had not even attempted to solve a single case. And in the end, this disposition was only making the slump worse.

"I see what you mean," said Cartwright thoughtfully. "But you could also think of it another way. Perhaps Holmes and Professor Moriarty's slumps are in fact one and the same, and they really are trying to solve it in their own way."

"Explain what you mean."

Cartwright polished his gold-rimmed glasses as he spoke.

"The truly great mathematicians discover the inner workings of nature by intuition; only later do they prove or disprove their intuitions with figures. They possess a sort of compass which points them toward the mathematical fabric of the universe. But what to do when that compass goes awry? The most wonderful ideas in the world are of no use if they are repudiated by fact. Could that be what ails Mr. Holmes?"

It was quite an accurate description of Holmes's predicament. Consider the case of the Red-headed League; splendid as Holmes's reasoning may have been, it had been entirely and unsparingly been disproven by reality.

"But what could be the cause behind it?" I asked.

"I'm afraid I cannot say," replied Cartwright, replacing his gleaming glasses; "Professor Moriarty has had no one in whom to confide his problem, so I am quite glad that he has met a kindred spirit in Mr. Holmes. Perhaps with their powers combined they may find a way to repair that broken compass. Even if that does not happen, they have found a friendship in which they may find solace, and far be it from me to tear that friendship apart. I'm sorry I can't be of more assistance."

He hung his head.

"Never mind, I understand how you feel. This has been quite helpful," I declared, shaking his hand. As I exited the room I noticed on a shelf by the door a number of newsletters from the Society for Spiritual Phenomenon Research. I took one and flipped through its pages, seeing a number of prominent scientists listed as contributors. It appeared the society was not a convocation of spiritualists but a group dedicated to the genuine scientific research of spiritual phenomena.

"I joined the society this fall," said Cartwright timidly. "Professor Moriarty says spiritualism is a lot of hot nonsense."

"Are you a spiritualist?"

"I can't say rightly one way or the other. That's why I'm doing research into it."

As I perused the newsletters my eye fell upon a photograph of a face which I had seen before. Though it was grainy and in black and white, there was no mistaking that dignified bearing. The article which the photograph accompanied was an interview between one of the society scientists and none other than—

"Madame Richborough!" I muttered.

"You know her?" said Cartwright, looking surprised.

"She and I have met before. A most fascinating woman, I thought."

"As it happened, the good woman and I are engaged in a bit of collaborative research," said Cartwright, before hastily adding, "But don't tell the professor, please. I wouldn't hear the end of it."



That night I went down to a club by Kōjin Bridge to play billiards with some colleagues from the medical society.

There was no escaping talk of the detectives' duel, and I heard more than a few wagers being placed. I hardly expected anyone to bet on Holmes, but one of my colleagues was adamant that there was something unnatural about Holmes's not having solved a single case. He was convinced that this was some sort of stratagem, and that Holmes would come roaring back to take the match.

"There is still over a month before the game is over. What do you think, Thurston?"

Thurston had been a fellow student at medical school and was the most successful of us, having set up a large hospital in Kawaramachi Oike. He'd given me a great deal of advice as I set up my practice in Shimogamo. As he leaned over the billiard table he glanced up at me.

"If I was to bet I would surely choose Irene Adler."

"And your reasoning?"

"One look at Watson's dour face tells me everything I need, seeing how he's hardly smiled once the whole evening. He might as well be carrying a billboard advertising his partner's looming defeat," grinned Thurston. There came a crack of the cue ball, and I could only smile ruefully in reply.

Later on, when the other doctors had left for the night, Thurston and I retired to the lounge which overlooked the Kamo. We were not alone; other groups of men were conversing beneath that high ceiling in the glow of the gas-lamps.

We drank whisky and gazed out the great windows. Fog lay thick over the river, and across its span the city appeared only as hazy lights suspended in the gloom. Looking at the eerie

sight of the boats moored at the wharf, I was reminded of the great river which divides this world from the next.

After some time pondering the view, I asked Thurston, "Have you ever heard of Madame Richborough?"

"Madame Richborough?" Thurston looked at me quizzically. "You would be the last person I would expect to say that name. Awakened to the wonders of spiritualism, have you?"

"Nothing of the sort. I was merely curious."

Thurston nodded, and thought for a moment before speaking again.

"A friend of mine introduced me, and since then I've been invited to a number of her seances. I even heard the voice of my departed ancestors. I don't like to say so publicly, but her advice was of considerable help. Madame Richborough does possess a special gift, of that much I am certain."

"Then you believe in spiritualism?"

"I didn't say that. I said only that it can be of help. If you are thinking of consulting her I won't stop you. But I wouldn't throw myself too deep in if I were you. Haven't you heard what happened to Stamford?"

"I suppose I haven't seen him for some time, now that you mention it. What happened to him?"

Stamford was another friend from medical school, and was in fact the one who had introduced me to Sherlock Holmes when I was looking for a place to stay after returning from Afghanistan. For this alone I owed him a great deal, but somewhere in the hurly-burly of our lives we had lost contact.

"He's become one of Madame Richborough's most fervent adherents," said Thurston; "He styles himself a 'spiritual healer', fusing spiritualism and modern science. No respectable doctor wants to be seen with him these days. But I've heard tell of people claiming to have been healed by his practices. That's the trouble, you know. It doesn't matter whether it's fraud or forgery; people will see what they want to see. Ailments heal of their own accord, and the stocks rise as quickly as they fall. I hear that Lord St. Simon has made a fortune on the market thanks to Madame Richborough's advice. Well, just be cautious, that's all."

Parting with Thurston I made my way back to my house in Shimogamo. The lights were still on in the sitting-room, and I peeked inside to see Mary scribbling something furiously at

the breakfast-table, which was covered in notes and assorted scraps of paper. She was hunched low over the table, and she hummed as her pen raced over the paper. Her satisfaction was so evident that I felt an energy rising up within me as well.

"I'm home, Mary," I said.

She jumped up and let out a little shriek, a testament to how focused she must have been.

"I see things have begun to pile up," I said, pointing at the table.

"Yes," she nodded. "There's so much to do for the charity. Go on to bed without me."

"Don't overburden yourself, my dear. Good night."

I headed up to the second floor and got into bed, intending to read a book until Mary came up. But my powers of concentration eluded me that night. Up until that point in my life I had considered spirits and ghosts nothing more than mere superstition, to be exposed and driven out by the inexorable march of science. But man understands a mere fraction of the universe which we inhabit, and now I wondered whether one could truly understand such phenomena relying on reason alone.

Scientists such as Cartwright engaged themselves with the study of spiritualism, and even Thurston could not deny that Madame Richborough's advice had been on the mark. I could not remove the image of the girl in the crystal ball from my mind, and the fact that Mrs. Hudson had seen it as well meant that it had been no delusion.

She calls from the other side—so Madame Richborough had claimed. I supposed that meant the girl in the crystal ball was already dead.

Sherlock Holmes must have taken on a case involving that girl long before the two of us had met. The passion he had displayed when I inquired about his past cases perhaps then stemmed not only from his antipathy to spiritualism, but also from his reluctance to think about that great failure. And if Madame Richborough was to be believed, that long-buried case was somehow connected to Holmes's present woes.

Mary never did come upstairs, and as I turned over these things in my mind I floated off to sleep.



I visited 221B Teramachi Street one week later.

Mary had gone out in the morning, saying that she was seeing an old friend from boarding school, so I was alone when a boy arrived with a message from Mrs. Hudson. That was to my benefit, for what I did next I was able to do without Mary's scrutiny. I hurriedly concluded the rest of my appointments, hung a closed placard on the door, then caught a hansom and was off to Teramachi Street.

It was a grey, chilly day, and the trees which lined the embankment of the Kamo wore leaves stained a rich crimson. Mrs. Hudson was waiting when I rang the bell and showed me in a nervous excitement.

"They've gone for the day, have they?" I asked.

She nodded vigorously. "They've gone for a picnic on Mt. Daimonji, and I doubt they'll be back before the evening. They claim they are seeking a tengu to teach them its wisdom."

"A tengu!"

"That's right. I can't fathom what could be going through their heads."

I could not help the deep sigh which escaped my lips. These two men were among the foremost minds of their fields in detection and physics respectively, and yet the answer to which all their wisdom had led them was to seek the mentorship of a tengu? My indignation gave way to pity. The situation was clearly quite dire.

"You've already sent word to Lestrade?"

"Yes. He arrived earlier and is waiting on the second floor."

I quickly went up the stairs accompanied by Mrs. Hudson. Lestrade was warming himself at the fireplace in Holmes's quarters. I could hardly recognize his glowing face when he turned his head, so changed was it from our last encounter. A sparkle had returned to his formerly clouded eyes, and his cheeks were flushed and ruddy.

"Lestrade!" I cried. "You seem to have made a remarkable recovery."

"Yes, I feel as though I've found the old spring in my step again."

The advent of Irene Adler had been nothing short of a godsend for Lestrade. Now that his rivals on the force were having their thunder stolen by Adler, everyone had forgotten about Lestrade's slump. The other inspectors were mortified at the thought of having to bow and scrape to someone whom they had previously scorned as a rank amateur, though her superiority was now quite apparent to all.

"I've been cutting out all of the articles in the paper about their blundering and putting them in a scrapbook, which I keep underneath my pillow. I've never slept better, as you can see in my new constitution. I must remember to thank Miss Adler." Here Lestrade leaned forward with an expression of great sincerity. "But don't get it wrong, I always have been and always will be a friend to Mr. Holmes. As you see, I rushed here as soon as I got Mrs. Hudson's message. Things seem to have gone pretty far astray."

Lestrade was perfectly familiar with Holmes's newfound habit of taking on cases and leaving them unsolved. In fact, a number of those aggrieved petitioners had formed a Victim's Association, and only yesterday had marched to Shinchō Yard to lodge a complaint. Holmes had not solved any of their cases, and he would not tell them about the status of his investigations, they complained: what could he possibly be doing?

"It was all we could do to placate them and send them on their way," explained Lestrade.

"They have every right to be angry. For Holmes to agree to help them, then leave them in the dark...only to traipse off with Professor Moriarty for a picnic to Mt. Daimonji? He's lost his mind. We must act," I declared.

I explained to Lestrade what had transpired at Madame Richborough's. If her words were to be believed, Holmes's slump was tied to one of his cases from long ago, and that case was connected in turn to the girl in the crystal ball. But I doubted that a direct questioning of Holmes would lead anywhere. In the first place he hated spiritualism, and furthermore he would surely be unwilling to dredge up what was surely a painful memory.

"Holmes and Moriarty will be out for some time. Let's split up and look through Holmes's records for any case that might fit the bill. Once the facts of the case are clear we can return to Madame Richborough and ask her to guide us on," I said.

But Inspector Lestrade folded his arms and frowned. "I won't claim that spiritualism is all smoke and mirrors, but I would think twice before consulting Madame Richborough. The police have had our eye on her, but with so many of the rich and powerful among her faithful, we haven't been able to act. You're aware that Lord St. Simon backs her?"

"Then do you have another suggestion?" inquired Mrs. Hudson.

"Well, no..." admitted Lestrade.

"I realise that ransacking Holmes's records is not the ethical thing to do," I said. "Yet if we stand here and twiddle our thumbs, Holmes will surely be defeated by Irene Adler. You

need Holmes to break out of his slump. Or would you prefer to chase sheep rustlers around Ohara no Sato all day?" I said.

After a moment's thought, Lestrade nodded with conviction. "Very well. At any rate I have nothing to lose."

We dragged from Holmes's bedroom a large tin box. It was full of papers tied up into separate bundles as well as other assorted knick-knacks tossed haphazardly inside, all pertaining to past cases. *These were all done before my biographer had come to glorify me*, he had once tantalisingly mentioned, though he had never once shown me the contents of the box.

The distinctions of the case we sought were these: one, it was over ten years old; two, a young woman was involved (and likely died); three, that Holmes had failed to unravel it.

Lestrade sifted through the documents, cross-legged on the carpet.

"How old was this girl in the crystal ball?" he asked.

"Hard to say; I would place her in her mid teens," I answered.

"A girl of good upbringing, if I had to guess," mused Mrs. Hudson. "She had lovely golden hair."

For the next two hours we sorted through the mountain of documents in silence. It was onerous work. Holmes had never been in the habit of arranging his records, and his scrawling hand was exhausting to decipher, but once you did you could hardly help but become engrossed in the fascinating details of the case. Eventually we succeeded in going through the entire contents of the box, but found nothing resembling the case in question.

"Perhaps Holmes has beaten us to the punch," I wondered. We scoured every inch of the room, but found nothing more.

"That's that, then," announced Lestrade, clapping the dust off his hands. "For all we know it could be sitting in a strongbox at the bank or burnt to cinders in the fireplace. And it may be that this case that Madame Richborough spoke of never existed to begin with."

"Mrs. Hudson, has Holmes been anywhere lately?" I asked.

"No, he's remained perfectly sequestered here."

"You're sure?"

“Yes. The only time he goes outside is to visit the shrine to Benten...”

Mrs. Hudson and I turned to look at each other at precisely the same time.

We jostled to get out of the room and rushed up the stairs to the roof. A cold autumn wind was moaning, and the overcast sky threatened to open up as we crossed the barren roof towards the Benzaiten shrine. It had been there before Mrs. Hudson had acquired the lodging house, and aside from the deity which was enshrined in it we knew nothing about where it had come from. It had appeared to be abandoned, the exterior cracked and peeling, but with a few repairs by Mrs. Hudson and a fresh coat of paint on its scarlet pillars it was as pretty a shrine as you could find anywhere. Holmes visited it nearly every day, and the coins he tossed liberally into the offertory went directly to fatten Mrs. Hudson’s pockets.

I pressed my hands together before it, then opened the doors and searched inside.

“Well?” Lestrade asked anxiously.

My fingers brushed against an object.

“I’ve found something!”

Upon pulling it out I discovered it to be a worn, leather-bound notebook. We silently exchanged glances. Raindrops began to patter down from the ashen sky. Retreating to Holmes’s room, we opened it and discovered that it detailed a case that had occurred in the house of Musgrave—twelve years earlier.



The Musgraves are an old family with long roots in the west of Kyoto. Theirs was a cadet branch which had separated from the Musgraves of Kamigamo in the 16th century and built their manor house at Hurlstone. The northern Musgraves had gone extinct following the troubles of the 17th century, so nowadays when people talk about the Musgraves they mean the Musgraves of Rakusei. The previous head of the clan, Robert Musgrave, had been a man of considerable talent in business and politics, and rather than limit himself to the management of the ancestral estate had found great success diversifying his interests into steel and chemical manufacturing. It was his sturdy efforts which had led to the success of the Great Exhibition which was held in Kyoto fifteen years ago, and the famous Crystal Palace which was its centrepiece is still a popular attraction today at Okazaki Park.

“Progress and Harmony for Mankind”, the slogan of the exhibition, is also the motto of the Musgrave house itself.

Robert Musgrave wed Elizabeth Holdhurst, the second daughter of that family, but she was prone to illness and difficult in temperament. She cared little for Robert or household affairs, and their marriage was a rocky one. At the time of the incident, Lady Musgrave had already passed away, leaving a son and a daughter. The elder, Reginald, had been twenty, and the daughter Rachel fourteen.

Miss Rachel inherited her mother's sickly disposition and rarely left the house. Yet she was a child of great intellectual curiosity and vigour, and was better acquainted with the library at Hurlstone than any other. Like her mother she was a skilled pianist, and showed interest in astronomy and scientific research. At every full moon she would ascend with her brother Reginald to the rooftop and make observations of the celestial orb. Though she could not attend school, she took great delight in inviting the students of the Shishigatani boarding school to tea twice a year.

After Miss Rachel's fourteenth birthday, her father began to invite the scions of great families from all over Kyoto to banquets at Hurlstone Manor. The ostensible pretexts for these galas were many and various, but his true aim was to find a suitor for Miss Rachel. She was, after all, the most eligible young lady of the noble families of Rakusei, with a dowry to match, and so the sons of the nobility came flocking like moths to a flame.

Yet notwithstanding Lord Musgrave's own enthusiasm for the subject, finding a suitor was a harder thing to accomplish than he had imagined, said the servants, for Miss Rachel had no interest in marriage and was quite distressed by her father's quest. Thus things came to an impasse.

The incident occurred early in the winter of that year, on the same day that the students of the boarding school were to visit Hurlstone. For generations the Musgraves had been the trustees of that school, and each year they would invite several students for a tea party hosted by Miss Rachel, following which the students were free to spend time in the library or drawing-room as they pleased.

Miss Rachel was a perfectly charming hostess, as she had been in every year before. But as the evening drew nearer and the students gathered in the parlour to await the carriages which would bear them back to their dormitory, Miss Rachel was nowhere to be found. When it became clear that she would not arrive in time to see the students off, the butler, Brunton ushered them all into their carriages, then directed the staff to search the house from cellar to garret.

But Miss Rachel had vanished completely from the manor.

When Lord Musgrave returned from a business engagement he was informed of the disappearance of his daughter. Her brother Reginald was travelling abroad. Yet Lord Musgrave delayed in reporting the disappearance to Shinchō Yard, no doubt from a horror of the private matters of his household being dragged before the world.

The inspectors arrived at Hurlstone Manor the following afternoon, a full day after she had gone missing. Under their supervision a complete search of the grounds was conducted, and all the staff questioned; each of the boarding school students who had attended the tea party and suitors from the banquet was thoroughly interrogated. They even dredged the pond, yet at the conclusion of this exhaustive investigation not a single clue had been found.

Sherlock Holmes was summoned to Rakusei about two weeks after the disappearance of Miss Rachel. Reginald Musgrave had been an old friend of Holmes from college, and had always regarded his extraordinary powers of reasoning highly. Upon his return from his travels he learned of his sister's disappearance, and frustrated by the police's inability to find any hint of her whereabouts promptly requested the aid of Sherlock Holmes.

Holmes stayed at Hurlstone for some time conducting a thorough investigation of his own. The journal we found detailed the day-by-day proceedings of his search and the theories which he examined. But even his efforts found no conclusive evidence, and gradually his writings slowed to a trickle.

His stay at Hurlstone was quite unpleasant. It was a difficult case, like grasping at clouds, and it was made even more difficult by Lord Hurlstone's refusal to cooperate. Face-to-face he would berate Holmes as an "amateur detective", treatment which often put him into conflict with his son Reginald. Holmes noted in his journal: *There's something curious about Lord Musgrave's hostility.*

The final entry in the journal detailed a small incident which happened at Hurlstone. The strain of the lengthy investigation kept him up at night, and he paced the unlit corridors, his mind racing. As he wandered the deserted manor he quite unexpectedly came upon a young girl. Before he had time to react, the girl fled. Convinced that it was the missing Miss Rachel, Holmes blew the whistle which he kept around his neck, rousing the entire household.

With the help of the staff Holmes caught the girl, only to discover that she was one of the students who had attended the tea party. She was apparently something of a troublemaker at school who had developed delusions of grandeur about being a detective. *I could solve*

Miss Rachel's disappearance, easy! she had thought to herself, and snuck out of school back to Hurlstone.

Lord Musgrave was furious. Not only did he lodge a demand with the principal that the girl be expelled, he roundly castigated Holmes as a useless fool, which clearly struck a nerve. *Imbecile!* Holmes scrawled in the journal.

But the truth was that Holmes failed to solve the case.

The final entry concluded with the following words: Where can my God-given talent have gone?



Lestrade, Mrs. Hudson, and I went straight to Pondicherry Lodge. As before, the butler brought us into the waiting room.

"What a room!" Lestrade gawked. Through the massive window which faced the garden, rain-misted Higashiyama appeared much closer than it really was.

As the mansion was at the foot of Higashiyama, Mt. Daimonji was not quite within view, but it must also have been swathed by the dense drizzly fog. I presumed that Holmes and Moriarty must be at this very moment drenched, tramping over fallen leaves in search of their *tengu*. The mere image was pathetic. Between mountain spirits and spiritualism, surely spiritualism was the more dependable of the two?

In truth, I was beginning to believe in Madame Richborough's powers. Rachel Musgrave had been fourteen when she disappeared from Hurlstone twelve years ago: small in stature with blonde tresses, and wearing a simple white dress. That matched exactly the figure which we had seen in Madame Richborough's crystal ball. It could not be mere coincidence. Whether her life had taken by misadventure, or her own hand or that of another, if she had indeed passed on to the spiritual realm it was no wonder that no one had been able to find her for the past twelve years.

Furthermore, if the cause of Holmes's slump was indeed spiritual, it would explain perfectly why we had not been able to solve it. That was beyond the realm of detectives and doctors, and only the powers of a medium such as Madame Richborough would be able to lift Holmes out of it.

"I wonder how much longer it'll be?" wondered Mrs. Hudson.

Perhaps the madame's previous consultation was dragging on, for after we had waited some time the butler still had not come to show us into her chamber.

Lestrade reclined on a settee and pored over Holmes's journal thoroughly.

"I remember the Musgrave case, for I was dispatched to search for her. But I never knew that Holmes was involved as well." He looked up from the pages and stared morosely out of the window. "It was a strange case. With one of the great houses of Kyoto involved we were under a great deal of pressure to unravel it. Lord Musgrave is a politician of great influence, and the Home Secretary must have hounded the superintendent day and night to get it done. They sent all of the top inspectors to search every nook and cranny. But the wind changed quite suddenly. The bulk of the task force was recalled from the investigation; we hadn't found a single clue before they ordered us to pull out of Rakusei."

"That is quite odd. Did you ever learn what was behind that decision?"

"I'd just joined the force, so that was all I ever learned of the matter," murmured Lestrade, his voice becoming soft. "Something must have perturbed the upper echelons of the force. Before long they'd closed down the entire investigation, leaving the Musgrave disappearance unsolved. I suspect whatever happened had something to do with why Mr. Holmes failed to solve the case himself."

"You think someone didn't want the case to be solved?"

"Someone well-placed, in my opinion," said Lestrade ominously.

Twenty years on, Miss Rachel's whereabouts remained shrouded in mystery. Her disappearance cast a long shadow on the Musgraves. Her soft but indelible presence had held the household together, and afterwards Lord Musgrave threw himself into various enterprises, each more foolhardy than the last, and none meeting the success of his previous ventures. It was thought he sought to forget the loss of his daughter. But Robert Musgrave never recovered from that heavy blow, and last summer he had died a broken-hearted man, leaving Reginald to take over his affairs.

"Poor girl, that Miss Rachel," said Miss Hudson. "I suppose if she were still alive she would be about Mary's age now."

"But I don't understand," frowned Lestrade. "Why would Mr. Holmes go to the trouble of hiding away this notebook?"

"Perhaps he was embarrassed that someone would come across his failure."

"But having read it I wouldn't say it was so miserable a failure as that," frowned Lestrade as he flipped through the notebook. "As a detective he did what he could, and it doesn't appear that he made any fatal errors. In comparison to the case of the Red-headed League, it was practically a success. Why, after twelve years, would this case weigh on him again, much less drive him into a slump? It doesn't make any sense to me."

"Trust in Madame Richborough," said Mrs. Hudson soothingly. "She will explain everything."

Madame Richborough's previous clients must have finished their consultation, for we heard voices in the corridor, and a moment later two women came into the waiting room. "Why I never!" Mrs. Hudson cried. As soon as I laid eyes upon their faces I was astonished. It was Irene Adler, and my wife Mary.

"What are you doing here, John?" she asked.

"I could ask the same of you. Didn't you tell me you were going to meet a boarding school friend?"

"Yes, and I did. Irene was my classmate."

I was astounded to hear this. Mary and I had thoroughly discussed the topic of Holmes's drubbing at the hands of Irene Adler, yet never had she mentioned that she knew Irene personally, an omission which clearly now had been intentional

"Why didn't you tell me?" I asked.

"You never asked," she smiled sweetly.

"Fancy us meeting here!" said Mrs. Hudson. "We're here to consult the good madame about Mr. Holmes."

I nudged her arm. We were in the presence of Holmes's rival, and nothing good would come of us letting her know how precarious his situation was.

Mrs. Hudson gulped and stopped talking. I noticed Irene Adler glance at Mary, who gave a small nod.

Just then the butler came in and announced, "The madame awaits."



My eyes acclimated to the darkness no more quickly than they had on the first visit.

Madame Richborough was seated on the far side of the table with the crystal ball; behind her hung a thick, black velvet curtain. Her mask-like face was awash with pale candlelight. Three wooden chairs were fanned out before the table.

"I am familiar with your career, inspector," smiled the madame after Lestrade had introduced himself. Most people would have been intimidated, knowing that they were talking to an officer of the law, yet she did not seem fazed in the slightest. "I see that Sherlock Holmes is not with you."

"Holmes is a stiff-necked fellow, and it would take a great deal to persuade him to come here," I replied. "Instead we've brought something that may serve as a clue: a record of a case which occurred twelve years ago."

I placed the leather-bound notebook on the table and described in brief the facts of the case. Madame Richborough's eyes gleamed as she leaned forward. It seemed that her interest had been aroused.

"You suspect that Miss Rachel was the girl in the crystal ball, then?"

"Indeed. Madame Richborough, you said to us that that girl was the cause of Holmes's slump. Holmes's behaviour has been curious, and he is so loath to speak of his past cases that he went to the trouble of hiding away this notebook. I do not believe it can be a coincidence."

"And you are quite correct, Dr. Watson. This is no coincidence," said she, pulling the leather notebook across the table. Spreading it open upon the table she read it slowly, as if savouring each page. I imagined she was leaving no potential clue unturned. After she at last finished the journal, she sat back in her chair and gazed into space with a dreamy, vacant expression in her eyes.

"I sense a powerful spiritual energy radiating from this notebook," she murmured. "I suspect it is a vector for an entreaty from the other side. Miss Rachel is urgently trying to tell us something. It is no wonder that Mr. Holmes is in a slump, for there are spiritual energies constantly at work, pulling him back towards that unsolved case from twelve years ago."

"What is Miss Rachel trying to say?"

Madame Richborough sank into thought, her gaze lowered at the notebook.

"I wonder what would cause Holmes to suddenly abandon the case," she said. "The notebook ends abruptly after the account of the student breaking into the manor. What could have happened?"

We had also wondered the same thing. Lestrade recalled that the investigation had petered out due to political pressure. But Holmes had been hired to investigate privately by Reginald Musgrave, and was not subject to the direction of Shinchō Yard. Even if someone had tried to persuade him to withdraw, I could not imagine the obstinate, haughty Holmes I knew would stand down without a fight.

"If I may?" ventured Mrs. Hudson, hesitantly raising a hand. "As I went over the notebook in the waiting room, I noticed that that incident is not indeed the last entry in the notebook. There is a curious poem written near the end of the volume."

Madame Richborough began to flip through the notebook, and after passing a number of blank pages her hand paused.

"Yes, indeed there is," she said, and began to read it aloud.

"'Whose was it?'

"'Theirs who are gone.'

"'Who shall have it?'

"'They who will come.'

"'What shall we give?'

"'All that is ours.'

"'Why should we give it?'

"'For the sake of the great awakening.'"

We looked at each other. It seemed to be a list of questions and answers for a ritual of some sort, but we had no idea what it meant. Why would Holmes have written such a thing in his notes?

"Have you any ideas?" I inquired.

But Madame Richborough did not reply. She studied the notebook, her plump, indigo-swathed figure arched over the table intently. A crease formed on her brow, and her

eyes were narrowed, as if she were trying to dredge something up from the well of memory.

At last she sucked in a deep breath, her bosom swelling, and opened her eyes wide. Her countenance reminded me of Holmes, each time he declaimed the facts of a case. But Madame Richborough's expression now was even more exaggerated than that. A fervid light burned in her eyes, and her lips were pulled back in an uninhibited grin. It was a sinister sight, and one that I felt I was not meant to see.

Lestrade suddenly struck my arm.

"Dr. Watson, look!"

I looked in the direction that he was pointing, and observed that the crystal ball was glowing. Leaning forward I saw once again the faint figure of a mysterious girl, her head downcast. Was it Miss Rachel? Yet there was something different about her this time—and no sooner had that thought crossed my mind than she looked up, a defiant spark in her eyes. I gasped, shaken to my core.

"But isn't that Mary?" cried Mrs. Hudson. "What is she doing in the crystal ball?"

Mary waved, and it appeared that she was calling out. Then she held up a piece of paper, and written on it were the following words:

You are all being deceived.



"What's the meaning of this?" I inquired sharply, facing Madame Richborough.

Just as I did so, the door behind me burst open, flooding the room with light. Standing in the doorway was the gallant figure of Irene Adler, come to chase away the darkness.

Madame Richborough stood and grasped at a bell-rope on the wall, trying to summon a servant.

"No one is coming to save you," snapped Irene Adler. Madame Richborough released the rope and turned to face the intruder. Her expression was as inscrutable as a Noh mask.

"Our appointment is over, Miss Adler," said she in a grave tone. "I must insist you leave at once."

"I'm afraid I can't do that," replied Adler, striding into the room. Passing between Mrs. Hudson and me she walked up to the table and without a moment's hesitation picked up the crystal ball in both hands. So bold was her act that even Madame Richborough could not stop her. The crystal ball rapidly lost its lustre as it rose from the table, revealing a hole emitting light in the cushion below.

"There is a studio directly below this room," said Adler with an air of triumph. In that studio was an apparatus of mirrors and lenses, by which an image powerfully illuminated could be transmitted upwards into the crystal ball. Once it was explained to us it seemed an absurdly simple optical trick. Yet we had not seen through it because it had never occurred to us that anyone would set up such an elaborate deception.

"With this apparatus one can show an audience whatever one wishes," said Irene Adler. "As I have just had Mary demonstrate."

There was no denying that Mary had indeed shown up right before our eyes inside the crystal ball. That must mean that the Miss Rachel we had previously seen must have been projected in the same way. Now that Irene Adler and Mary's demonstration had exposed the trick, the mystique which I had felt surrounding Madame Richborough had faded away like mist burning away in the morning light.

I looked around and saw Mrs. Hudson, who looked so crestfallen I could not help but feel sympathetic for her. She had certainly put a great deal of faith in Madame Richborough, whom she had thought as the greatest medium the world had ever seen. On the other hand, Lestrade was staring at Irene Adler with the utmost admiration in his eyes. Certainly her bold execution of this manoeuvre was reminiscent of the exploits of Holmes's golden age.

Madame Richborough stood up, the black velvet curtain looming behind her.

"You understand nothing of spiritual phenomena, Miss Adler," said Madame Richborough calmly. "The spiritual phenomenon is that which hovers between the subjective and objective. It is influenced greatly by that which resides in the heart of the beholder. The believer will see what the doubter can never. Suspicion is the enemy of the spiritualist. In order for the medium to do her work, she must eliminate every doubt from her client, and induce in them an absolute faith in the spiritual realm. Sometimes that may require a contrivance, no more. Your declaration of triumph is premature, I am afraid."

"You admit that you are deceiving your clients?" pressed Irene Adler.

"I do not," said Mrs. Richborough, shaking her head. "Perhaps Dr. Watson is familiar with what I speak of. Sometimes when faced with an anxious patient, a doctor may tell a harmless little lie in order to assuage their fears and aid in their treatment. I am a doctor of the spirit, and all the world are my patients. Perhaps one day when the world has awakened to and embraced the truth of the spiritual realm, these measures will no longer be necessary."

"That day will never arrive," said Irene Adler, leaning forward. "Why, you yourself do not believe in the spiritual."

As they glared at each other over the table, Mary appeared at the doorway.

"How did it come off?" she asked.

"Perfectly," growled Irene Adler, not taking her eyes off Madame Richborough.

For her part Madame Richborough did not cower.

"What do you propose to do now?" she asked defiantly, rising from her seat, she asked defiantly. "Will you take me in? Inspector Lestrade sits there."

"There is no need for haste," shrugged Irene Adler, rising from her chair. "I had come today merely to exchange courtesies, but that has changed. You have attempted to win Dr. Watson and Mrs. Hudson to your side. Yes, I see through your deception. You seek to seize upon this weakness and bend Mr. Holmes to your will."

"I wish to help Holmes, that is all."

"Mr. Holmes does not need the help of the likes of spiritualism!" Irene Adler said forcefully. She turned on her heel and looked at me. An intense anger, and disappointment, burned in her eyes.

"Dr. Watson," she began severely; "I trust that you understand now Madame Richborough's modus operandi. For you of all people to be taken in by such a trick! Your role ought to be to support Mr. Holmes, not pull him into silly farces such as this!"

Her words cut at my heart like a knife. Shame, and a deep despair, rose up in me until it was almost more than I could bear. I had pinned my hopes of lifting Holmes from his slump on Madame Richborough, but now it was clear those hopes had been misplaced from the start. Once again, I was left empty-handed.

"You are entirely correct, Miss Adler," said I, stricken by her words. Turning around, I saw Mary watching me. The light silhouetted her in the partially opened door, and I could not make out her expression to tell what she was thinking.

"Come, the show is over. There is nothing to be gained by staying here," said Irene Adler with a tone that brooked no discussion. In the heavy silence, we stood up and departed from that gloomy chamber.

It was then that a curious shadow crossed my mind. It was clear that the spiritual phenomenon which Madame Richborough had demonstrated to us had been a fraud. Yet the facts of the disappearance of Miss Rachel Musgrave twelve years ago, and Holmes's involvement in that case, remained.

"Dr. Watson," called Madame Richborough from behind me, as if she knew at that very moment what was going through my mind.

I stopped in the doorway and turned around. In the flickering glow of the candles, Madame Richborough's face levitated in the gloom. Seeing her lone figure shrouded in that intimate darkness, I felt that sense of mystique return.

"Tell Mr. Holmes this," she said to me. "He cannot escape the mystery of the Musgraves."



We returned to 221B Teramachi Street in the pouring rain and found that Holmes and Professor Moriarty had just beaten us home from Mt. Daimonji. Both of them were wrapped in blankets in front of the fireplace; Holmes glowered sulkily at the fishbowl on his lap, and Moriarty appeared to be in a dead faint with his eyes rolled back into his head. Clearly their quest to seek a tengu master had gone considerably worse than they had planned.

Holmes looked up from the fishbowl when we entered the room.

"Where have you been, Mrs. Hudson?" he scowled. "I've had the most horrendous day. We lost our way in the downpour, and Professor Moriarty had a tumble. We could have died on that mountain. Yet after enduring an arduous trek all the way back, what do we find but an empty house, and not a person to boil a drop of water for us. You weren't consulting that fraud of a medium again, were you?"

"In fact you are right," she replied in a biting tone. "We were consulting that fraud of a medium."

Mrs. Hudson had been brooding ever since Irene Adler had revealed the trick of the crystal ball. She had not said a word during the carriage ride back. I supposed that Madame Richborough's deception must have come as a great shock.

Holmes's careless remark ignited all at once those feelings of outrage and disappointment she had carried back. Without warning she flung off her bonnet.

"You are entirely correct, sir. Spiritualism is nothing but a hoax!" she erupted. "Are you satisfied now, Mr. Holmes? How pleased you must have been to witness us bumbling around. Yes, Madame Richborough was a fraud. Yes, we were grasping at straws. But for whose sake do you think we went to such lengths—why, yours!"

After this vehement tirade she stormed from the room. I had the impression that she was simply letting out her ire on the first available target, but I did not disagree with the sentiment.

"What in the world was that?" said an amazed Holmes, holding the fishbowl tightly.

In his armchair, Professor Moriarty had roused up from his stupor.

"Has something happened? She was such an ardent devotee of Madame Richborough."

"It seems that the veil has been lifted from her eyes," said Lestrade, and he related what had occurred at Pondicherry Lodge. There was a particular ring of admiration in his voice when he told them what Irene Adler had done, and his eyes lit up like a schoolboy. He seemed to have been taken with Irene Adler's skills of detection, and the more he lauded her exploits the more sour Holmes's expression became.

"Well, I suppose she may have some talent," he admitted.

"Some talent?" cried Lestrade passionately, leaning forward. "There's no mistake, Miss Adler is a genius. I say, Mr. Holmes, why don't you consult her for yourself?"

"And what would I consult her about, dear Lestrade?"

"You could ask her for advice on the science of deduction, or her habits as a detective. I am positive that her advice would be of great value. Perhaps it would be enough to help you escape this slump of yours."

Holmes's expression went blank, but it was the pale blankness of suppressed fury, and a heavy silence descended upon the room.

"That will not do at all," said he at last, coldly. "Why should the famous Sherlock Holmes beg and scrape before that amateur detective for advice? But if you wish to seek her wisdom for yourself that is your own affair. After all, you are a public servant with a reputation to uphold."

"I didn't mean to..." Lestrade hung his head, and his words trailed off dejectedly.



Just before we left Madame Richborough's mansion, Irene Adler took my arm and drew me aside in the foyer. From outside I could hear the quiet patter of the rain.

"Why won't Mr. Holmes take on any cases?" she inquired, regarding me evenly. "What purpose is there in my having issued that challenge to him now? Victory by default is no victory at all."

A fierce rage smouldered in her eyes, and behind it I sensed a sort of expectation towards Holmes. Few others, I suspected, longed more ardently for Sherlock Holmes's restoration than the woman standing before me, who had issued that challenge to Holmes for all the world to see.

"You must restore him to his old self," said she. "That is your duty, Dr. Watson!"



Holmes stared gloomily into the fireplace, still wrapped in a blanket. I took the leatherbound notebook from my bag and thrust it before his nose. He glanced down at it, a furrow in his brow which was soon undone by a jolt of recognition, and without a word he took it from my hand.

"What happened at the Musgrave manor twelve years ago?" I asked.

Holmes scowled and averted his eyes. "That was long before our acquaintance, Watson, and it's no concern of yours. I was young. I was naïve. I failed. That is all there is to it."

"Tell me the truth, Holmes," I said, stooping down in front of him. "If that really was all there was to it you would not have gone to the lengths of hiding that notebook away. Something about it still bothers you. Won't you be straight with me now?"

But Holmes's lips were sealed tight. He clutched the blanket tight around him and glared disdainfully at me.

My suspicions grew ever stronger. Why was Holmes so determined to conceal the facts of this case? Madame Richborough had told me: *He cannot escape the mystery of the Musgraves.*

"You have been keeping things from me as well," he suddenly growled.

"What do you mean?"

"The latest edition of *The Strand Magazine*. What the devil do you mean by that?"

I had not opened the pages of the *Strand* since I had been forced to put the Holmes chronicles on hiatus. Reading it now would only make me envious of the other authors.

"So you insist on feigning ignorance," he snorted. "Well then, how do you explain this new column?"

From within the blanket he produced a magazine and tossed it in front of me. The new column he spoke of was grandly located on the very first page, and the editorial staff had breathlessly splashed gaudy copy such as "A star is born!" and "Kyoto's most popular mystery writer!"

When I saw the title and the author I reeled as though I had been hit by lightning.

The Case Book of Irene Adler

By Mary Morstan

I saw in my mind's eye once more Mary standing there in the drizzle. As we had left Madame Richborough's mansion, Mary had been close at Irene Adler's side like a shadow, watching me through that cold veil of rain. For some reason she had not registered as my wife, but as an unapproachable, mysterious presence.

"Mary has joined forces with Irene Adler," said Holmes coldly. "How can you have failed to notice the betrayal of your own wife?"

Chapter 3

The Disappearance of Rachel Musgrave

I will never forget the shock I felt that night reading "The Casebook of Irene Adler".

I sneaked the magazine home and stayed up until dawn reading it in my examination room. There were three sections in all: "The Natsumikan Club", "The Celebrated Major Brown", "The Adventure of the Philosopher Thief"; and once I had finished them all I sat back in wonder. Irene Adler possessed astounding faculties of reasoning, and her incisive deductions led her unerringly towards the truth. When necessary she would draw upon her experience of the stage to transform herself into an energetic young man or a frail old woman. And for those situations when she crossed paths with the rougher inhabitants of the city, she kept on her person a specially commissioned secret weapon from a Nagahama blacksmith which would answer for her.

In other words, what Sherlock Holmes had originated, she had perfected and made her own. And Mary Morstan was at her side, not only as Miss Adler's chronicler but as an active contributor toward her investigations.

I could not help but feel a twinge of envy towards Mary, for in the pages before me I saw exactly what I wanted to write.



My practice was closed on that day in early December. I put on my overcoat and left to visit Shimogamo Shrine.

The mornings had turned chilly now, and as I walked the grounds of the shrine I inhaled deeply, breathing in the scent of the ancient forest. After according my respects at the main shrine building I began to pace up and down the shrine road through the Tadasu Forest. Whenever I came to an impasse in my writing, I would often take a stroll here at the shrine, or along the banks of the Kamo. A brisk stroll had never failed to present a solution to whatever ailed me.

But that morning, I found that each step only brought with it a deeper despondency. "The Casebook of Irene Adler" had thrown all of Kyoto into a frenzy. The cessation of my writings on Holmes had left mystery fans hungry for something to fill the void, and it was onto this

pile of tinder that the publication of the Casebook threw a lit match. Accounts of her daring exploits in the papers quickly became the talk of the town, and it soon became known that Mary Morstan's husband was none other than John H. Watson. What had begun as a rivalry between detectives had morphed into a domestic showdown.

Mary claimed that her association with Irene Adler stretched back to their school days. She had lost her mother at a young age, and her father was an officer in an Indian regiment; consequently until she turned 18 she resided at a boarding school in Shishigatani. When she was 12 her father had returned to the country only to mysteriously disappear, though I have already written about the facts of that case in "The Sign of Four". I was already aware of the lonely days she spent at the isolated school at the foot of Higashiyama with neither kith nor kin to depend on, and how she had engrossed herself in the school paper: these things I was already aware of. And now Mary told me that Irene Adler had attended the same school.

"She was there for less than a year. She quit the school almost immediately."

"And you hadn't seen her since?"

"Yes, it's been nearly twelve years."

"Yet she seems to have agreed quite readily to let you write about her."

"We had our share of adventures at the paper, Irene and I," said Mary wistfully. "We made quite a team."

Their reunion had taken place earlier this spring, during a charity outing to a play at the Minami-za in Shijō. By sheer chance they had sat next to one another, and overjoyed to see one another again they retired to the theatre bar at intermission. So engrossed were they in their conversation that they were still sitting at the counter by the time the curtain came down at the end of the play.

Mary had heard rumours that Irene had become an actress, but it was there that Irene informed her that she had retired.

"I intend to reinvent myself as a detective."

At first Mary smiled, thinking that she was joking. But Irene was quite serious. I have already related the events that transpired after that: Irene Adler soon flourished in her new career, threatening to displace Sherlock Holmes from his seat as Kyoto's pre-eminent detective. And Irene Adler's magnificent reinvention was also Mary's.

"I told you many times to break things off with that man," she had said to me. "Yet you never took me seriously. You put Holmes before your duties as a doctor and as a husband. That is to say, he is more important to you than our marriage. Well, if that is to be the case then I will act as I see fit."

As I walked along the shrine road gazing up at the barren boughs, I was gripped by a feeling very close to resignation. Over the past year I had tried desperately to restore Holmes's golden age, sacrificing my life with Mary in the process. While all the time assuring her of my devotion, the truth of it was that I had placed Holmes first, and now I was receiving my just reward. Pride goeth before destruction. The age of Sherlock Holmes and Watson was over; the age of Irene Adler and Mary had come.

Mary was accompanying Irene Adler on an overnight investigation, and would not be coming home that day. Her place as Adler's partner had become quite solidified, and it was with a feeling of great chagrin that I returned to my practice.

"A telegram for you, Dr. Watson," said the maid, handing me a piece of paper. It had been a long time since I had received any good news, and I was sure that this latest development would not break that trend. I sighed and cast my eyes over the telegram, which ran in this way:

Sherlock Holmes missing.

Moriarty



Mrs. Hudson greeted me cheerlessly at 221B Teramachi.

"I hear Holmes has gone missing?" I said.

"Indeed he has," said she, taking my cane and coat. "He drifted out two days ago around noon, and since then I haven't seen hide nor hair of him."

"I see your concern," I frowned. "Where could he have gone?"

Previously it would not have been unusual for Holmes to disappear for days at a time, hot on the scent of a case like a trained foxhound, or poring over cases of crime at the library, or else studying medicine at the college. In any case there would not have been any cause for concern, but our Holmes was not the Holmes of old.

"And then there's Professor Moriarty to worry about..." fretted Mrs. Hudson.

"What do you mean?"

"He's like a statue, waiting for Holmes to come back," she said. "I don't think he's slept a wink."

Musing on the resemblance to the faithful Hachikō, I climbed the stairs and found that the curtains were thrown wide open in Holmes's room so that it was as freezing as the predawn moor.

Professor Moriarty was sitting in the armchair before the fireplace, wrapped in his black cloak; he looked nothing so much like a dying coal himself. I replenished the coals and stirred them, while Professor Moriarty rolled his hollow eyes to look at me.

"It has been fully two days since Holmes vanished."

"I'm sure he will saunter back when he is ready," I said, though there was little conviction in my words. Around Holmes's favorite settee discarded newspapers littered the floor, each of them containing breathless reports of the adventures of Irene Adler. Within those columns I spotted several mentions of Inspector Lestrade.

Following the previous month's incident with Madame Richborough, Lestrade had fallen head over heels with Irene Adler's no-nonsense style, and apologizing profusely for Shinchō Yard's previous snubbing of her eagerly sought out her advice. Now his name was mentioned with some regularity alongside hers in the papers. Holmes of course would never countenance such a betrayal, and declared he would henceforth have nothing to do with Lestrade.

Professor Moriarty stared somberly into the embers.

"An ironic tale, would you not say? The great Sherlock Holmes and the renowned physicist James Moriarty; once none could have outdone them, and now despite their best efforts, the only mystery which they cannot solve is that of their own slumps. No matter how desperately we search for an exit from this labyrinth, we only find ourselves stumbling further into the depths."

I looked pityingly at him.

"But surely your presence was a source of consolation to Holmes."

"I am not so sure. As you know I visited Holmes here every day; I was redeemed by him, and considered him a bosom friend to whom I could disclose my every distress. But

perhaps the affection only extended from I to him; perhaps he had grown tired of me," he groaned, burying his face in his great claw-like hands. "And that is why he has gone away."

It was not the proud scientist Moriarty who sat before me now, but merely a lonely, elderly man. Not knowing how I should console him, I walked up to him and placed my hand on his shoulder, which convulsed with great sobs.

"I took him for granted," he continued. "I hoped that he would remain in his slump because I was afraid of being left behind. Bosom friend, hah! I was a pestilence upon him!"

I am currently engaged with the case of myself, Sherlock Holmes had once said. I had thought it a mere prevarication, but now I was forced to consider whether it had been I who had been averting my eyes from reality. Perhaps somewhere in the labyrinth he had encountered a demon, and the only other who understood its terror was Professor Moriarty.



There was a knock on the door, and Mrs. Hudson entered the room. Professor Moriarty took a handkerchief and wiped away his tears. His haggard face testified that he had not eaten in some time, and his ashen skin made him look like a wax figure.

"I've been too worried about Holmes to sleep," he explained.

"Brooding won't help things, Mr. Moriarty," said Mrs. Hudson, pouring a cup of tea. "But a bit of sunlight and a warm meal will do wonders. The tea, sir, while it's hot, and a scone."

Mrs. Hudson was right: with the curtain drawn aside to let the sun in, and a warm scone slathered with butter to munch on, things seemed less dour, and a flush of colour returned to Moriarty's cheek.

Yet that did not change the fact that Holmes was missing. Mrs. Hudson said that he had left 221B around noon two days ago, bundled in his overcoat and scarf. His valise was still in his bedroom, and a litter of pipes lay scattered upon the mantelpiece, which he certainly would not have left at home if he had intended to be away for long. The drawer in his desk contained his checkbook and an amount of cash, so whatever money he carried on his person likely did not amount to more than some spare change. No money, no clothes, and not one of his beloved pipes: just how was Holmes getting along?

I recalled that Holmes had spoken fondly of retirement on several occasions after entering his slump. "Ohara-no-sato would be just the thing," he had said. "Nothing can reach that

northern village: not the clangor of the city, nor the mist that wreathes the Kamo, nor the meddling of Irene Adler. It would be a serene existence. I would chat with the moss-covered *jizō* statues, and quietly tend to my bees."

"Bees?" I asked.

"Honey is a health-giving substance, as is royal jelly."

"That may be so, but I am not convinced that you are cut out for the gardener's life."

"Perhaps I will set up my hut in a bamboo thicket, as one who has utterly renounced the worldly life. Each day I will dig up bamboo shoots, and simmer them with seaweed—ah, but man cannot live on *wakatakeni* alone. No, I suppose I must keep those bees. Would that be enough to sustain a man, *wakatakeni* and honey? I must admit my ignorance in the science of nutrition. Tell me, as a man of medicine, what do you think?"

"It is far too soon for you to speak of retirement. You will make a comeback yet."

"Will I? Clearly you are better informed than I. And tell me, when will that be?" said he with a touch of asperity, turning away.

I was struck by an epiphany: a hut in a bamboo thicket!

"Holmes must have gone to Rakusei!"

"Rakusei?" frowned Professor Moriarty. "Why would he have gone there?"

"There is an extensive bamboo forest on the grounds of the Musgrave estate. If Holmes was to shut himself away from the world that would be the first place that he would think of. And Reginald Musgrave is an old school-fellow of his—he would surely not grudge the building of a hermitage or two."

"But what about the incident which occurred twelve years ago? The estate holds such painful memories for Holmes: why would he retire to such a place?"

But no sooner had the words left Moriarty's lips than his eyes widened in realization.

"No, it is *because* of his trauma that he has returned. Those memories have tormented him for twelve years, and now he has come back to the Musgrave estate to take up the case whose solution eluded him in his youth."

A keen light shone in his eyes as he cried, "To Rakusei, Watson!"

There was a pull at the bell below.

"A client?" murmured Mrs. Hudson as she stood and hurried down to answer the door.

Professor Moriarty went up to the third floor to prepare for our excursion, while we waited in the hall by the stairs. But all my attention was captured by what was going on downstairs, for Mrs. Hudson seemed to be having a quarrel with whoever was at the door. By the time the professor descended the stairs with his cane underneath his arm, the situation seemed to have deteriorated, for we heard a violent pounding coming from below. We rushed down to find Mrs. Hudson leaning backwards against the door to keep it shut.

"It's a mob!" she hissed.

"You mean the Victim's Association?"

"I told them that he was away."

As Mrs. Hudson was explaining the situation, I heard the crowd howling, "Come out, Holmes! You can't hide forever!" I proposed to go out and deal with him as Holmes's surrogate, but Mrs. Hudson said that they would only string me up in his stead.

"You just leave this rabble to me. Go out by the back door," said she.

"We can't leave you to face them alone!"

"I'll have you know that I am the landlady of Sherlock Holmes. I am well accustomed to trouble," she replied, her cheeks flushed with exhilaration. "Now you go on to Rakusei and bring Mr. Holmes back, and don't worry about me. If it comes to it, I'll take Mr. Holmes's pistol and fire two or three rounds to scare them off."

Hers was an alarming statement in many ways, but I was glad to have her on my side. I left her with my thanks, then nodded to Professor Moriarty, and together we proceeded down the hall to the back of the building. Turning around, I saw Mrs. Hudson wave at me to go on.

"Well, well," exhaled Moriarty. "What a woman!"

From the back door we exited into the garden, a little space containing nothing but Mrs. Hudson's herb pots, a scrawny poplar tree, an outhouse, and the drying racks. We quickly passed through the wicket gate out into the alley. The sky was an enigmatic watery blue, and the wind which nipped at our cheeks brought upon it the scent of winter.



We took a carriage to Shijō Ōmiya, where we caught the Randen. The train rumbled through the busy streets of Ukyō, where low close-packed homes of brick and mortar and long temple walls passed by languidly beneath the bright sunshine.

"I must apologize to you," said Moriarty sincerely, "for the cruel words I have said to you."

"The fault is equally mine."

"We must work together if we are to save Holmes."

The railway station in Arashiyama was thick with tourists from all over Kyoto, as well as purveyors of the local variety eager to prey upon their pocketbooks. The mountains were engulfed in a layer of magnificent red leaves, and sightseeing boats traversed the Katsura River. At the end of the Togetsu-kyō Bridge we hailed a cab and directed the driver to proceed south along the ancient road. The trace of history was palpable in the close-set shops and inns that lined the path. Wispy clouds stretched along the pale canvas of the sky as though painted by a brush.

Eventually the buildings fell away to be replaced on our left by a vast parade ground, beyond which was visible a steam locomotive running hard for Osaka, drawing behind it a line of black smoke. In the distance it appeared no larger than a child's plaything. On our right, fallow fields and pastures were soon swallowed up by bamboo thickets. "We've entered the Musgrave grounds," announced the driver.

Professor Moriarty claimed prior acquaintance with Robert Musgrave, the previous head of the family.

"In fact I have stayed at Hurlstone manor more than a few times before."

"What was Robert like?" I asked.

"He always was more suited to be a magnate than a stuffy old aristocrat. His ken for business was undeniable; the Great Exhibition was made possible through his shrewd facility. It was he who made the Musgraves what they are today. Yet at the same time he was an arrogant man, unpleasant to share company with for very long. After the Moon Rocket debacle our contact ceased altogether."

"I remember that project. It caused quite a sensation."

Five years ago Robert Musgrave had announced the commencement of the Moon Rocket Project, in which he proposed to transport man to the surface of the moon on an enormous artillery shell. This latest flight of fancy proved to be too much, and people

began to whisper that the indomitable Robert Musgrave had finally cracked. Undaunted, Lord Musgrave mounted a massive publicity campaign, and before long he had supporters all over Kyoto. "To the moon!" was their rallying cry, and for a brief time stargazing and "The Tale of the Bamboo Cutter" experienced a surge in popularity. Calls abounded to add the moon to the possessions of the empire, on the basis that it was a strategic location which would surely be humanity's next frontier. An official committee was convened, composed of leading members from government bureaus, the East India Company, the army ballistics research board, and university applied physics laboratories. A section of the Musgrave bamboo forest was cleared in order to serve as a launchpad for rocket prototypes. But the path towards the moon was a long and arduous one.

"Humanity is not ready for the moon," declared Moriarty. "An enormous quantity of energy is required in order to escape the gravity of the earth. At first the plan called for an enormous cannon to fire the rocket into the sky, but even that would not supply the required amount. More acceleration was required, and so they proposed that the moon rocket carry fuel in sealed compartments, to be detonated in a series of stages. But such a tractable fuel is not easy to come by, nor have we the capability to construct a vessel which can withstand such tremendous shocks. With the resources of modern science it is simply impossible. Many times I told Robert Musgrave as much, but he would not listen, and instead insisted that he would *make* it possible."

With little to show for these furious efforts, the interest of the public waned. Even the abundant coffers of the Musgraves could not bear those enormous expenses indefinitely, and following the death of his father last summer Reginald Musgrave announced that the Moon Rocket Project was suspended indefinitely.

"What drove him to such obsession?" I wondered.

"I'm afraid I know no more than you," sighed Moriarty. "Some theorize that it was the disappearance of Miss Rachel. Robert did change after that; he never had been one to throw himself after flights of fancy. He was positively inhuman in his practicality, which was also his greatest strength. Yet in his final years Robert Musgrave thought nothing of profit, or loss; he was like a man possessed."

The carriage turned right and entered a narrow lane which passed through the bamboo thicket. On both sides we could see nothing but that sea of green. The Musgraves had a particularly deep relationship with bamboo; it appeared on their family crest, and they counted among their heirlooms the oldest known existing manuscript of "The Tale of the Bamboo Cutter".

"In a forest this vast one would certainly be able to build any number of huts."

"But the winters are cold, and in the summer the grove is swarming with mosquitoes. It would not be an easy place to live."

As we drove up the path a large iron gate appeared before us. The carriage halted in front of it, and an elderly man in gardener's garb came out of a brick guard shack on the left. Professor Moriarty leaned out of the cab and named himself, upon which the elderly man bowed, hobbled to the gate, and opened it, all at an excruciatingly slow pace. Past the gate the path turned into gravel, and the bamboo forest was replaced by a well-trimmed lawn dotted by various shrubs.

Hurlstone stood in a broad elliptical clearing in the midst of the bamboo grove. It was comprised of the original wing, which had been standing since the estate was constructed far back in the mists of time, and the modern wing, which had been added about a century prior, taking the shape of an L. The horizontal part of the L was the original wing, and its sixteenth-century roots were apparent in its old, gloomy appearance. Nowadays it was seldom used, and served only as a root cellar and a storehouse for the Musgraves' collection of heirlooms. The vertical shaft of the L was the modern wing, which in comparison was a cheerful sight, with the smoke puffing from the chimneys serving as a testament to the human presence within. Reginald Musgrave and all the servants slept there, and it was in front of this brighter of the two wings that the carriage stopped.

A middle-aged butler emerged to greet us.

"Good day, Brunton. It is good to see your face again."

"It is a pleasure to welcome you to Hurlstone once again, Professor," said the butler courteously, bowing his head. He appeared to be exactly the type of butler you would find serving an old family, as unflappable as weather-beaten granite. After hearing the object of our visit, he nodded and said, with no change at all in his expression, "Master Holmes is indeed on the premises."

Moriarty and I cried aloud and clasped each other's hands in joy. Brunton explained that Sherlock Holmes had obtained Reginald's permission to erect a little hermitage in the bamboo, refusing his offers to stay in Hurlstone and instead employing a stable-boy to transport his belongings to the hut.

"I should be happy to escort you to see him, if you will only follow me to first see Master Musgrave," said Brunton, and so we proceeded after him into the foyer.

While he went to summon his master, I had a look around my surroundings. It was a high-ceilinged room, furnished almost as a museum with glass cases which told the veritable history of the Musgraves: battle-tested weapons, samples of the many goods produced by the companies of the Musgrave conglomerate, commemorative medallions from the Great Exhibition, an exquisite scale model of the Crystal Palace. At the rear of the hall I saw a sweeping staircase, and on the wall of the landing were hung splendid portraits of the former heads of the Musgrave clan.

"An impressive display," I remarked.

This corridor leads to the old wing," said Moriarty, indicating with a jerk of his chin a hallway on the right side of the hall. "From what I hear there it holds a great many treasures which have never left the premises. After all, this is an ancient house."

Presently Brunton returned to fetch us, leading us through a door on the left of the hall to a study, a long, bright room with wide windows on the left looking out onto the lawn. On the right were bookshelves and cabinets, but what really drew the eye was an enormous map of the surface of the moon. It was made from a photograph taken through a telescope, a detailed relic of the obsession which overtook Robert Musgrave in his final years. Before the fireplace at the far wall stood Reginald Musgrave, conversing with two ladies perched upon on a settee.

"Professor James Moriarty and Dr. John Watson," announced Brunton.

The two women on the settee turned, as if they had been awaiting our arrival. I sucked in my breath, for they were none other than Irene Adler and my wife Mary.



One would be hard-pressed to think of anyone who better exemplified aristocracy than Reginald Musgrave. He was dressed in a suit of the finest quality, and no defect could be found in any aspect of his calm, elegant manner. His pale, stern countenance brought to mind a brooding medieval fortress. Premature strands of grey flecked his hair, and he held his small head high, with a tendency to point his chin at whomever he spoke to which added to his lofty charisma. Professor Moriarty had described his father as being an energetic man; the contrast could not be more stark.

As we approached him, my eyes went to Mary. Silhouetted by pearlescent winter sunlight, she kept a strange silence, as did Irene Adler who sat close beside her. What business could they have at Sir Reginald's residence?

Owing to Moriarty's acquaintance with Robert Musgrave, Moriarty and Reginald had known each other since the latter was a young man at school, and they greeted one another with evident delight, their last meeting having been at Robert's funeral. Moriarty had quit his post at the college not long afterward.

"I feared something had befallen you."

"But here I am, in no small part thanks to Holmes and his friends."

"How strange fate can be. I am honoured to make your acquaintance, Dr. Watson. Allow me to express my thanks; I have read all of your records, and through them stayed abreast of Holmes's many adventures."

"The honour is mine, Sir Musgrave."

"May I ask how you knew Holmes was here? I am frankly surprised that you have shown up on my doorstep; Holmes insisted that there was no need to let anyone know."

"A simple deduction," I said modestly; "Call it the intuition of an old friend."

"You are not Holmes's partner for nothing," smiled Sir Musgrave. "Holmes arrived at Hurlstone in the afternoon two days ago, alone. He said that he had retired from the detecting profession, and asked for my permission to build a hermitage within the bamboo groves. I replied that he was welcome to rest at the manor if he wished, but he would not hear of it and simply went off into the bamboo. Strange fellow, he's hardly changed at all since our school days."

"Holmes is here?" interjected Irene Adler, leaning forward. It seemed even she had not guessed that Holmes would be hiding in a bamboo grove in Rakusei, for her face was flushed with astonishment. "And he said that he was retired?"

"Yes, he said it quite clearly, though whether he truly meant it is another question altogether."

Irene Adler narrowed her eyes with a pale scowl of displeasure. "What's this about retirement, Dr. Watson?"

"Well, we did try our very best..."

"How disappointing."

"How dare you, Miss Adler!" Moriarty suddenly burst out, his voice quivering with anger.

"We have done our very utmost to stand Holmes back on his feet. We have tried to squeeze

blood from a stone! It is you who have driven Holmes into despair, yes, and now driven him into retirement!"

"What do you mean?" frowned Irene Adler, with a haughty puff of her chest. "I have done only what I ought to do, and no more."

"And what you have done is destroy his pride."

"That is his own problem to solve, not mine. Pride, tush! What good does pride serve? Better that he learn to throw it away."

"You go too far!" Moriarty snarled.

"You and Dr. Watson have coddled Holmes all this time, and that is why despite your best efforts he remains unable to leave his cradle. He must discard that worthless pride, and come to terms with what he can and cannot do. He must seek advice from those who know better than he, and improve what is lacking. Without courage and humility he will never solve this dilemma. If one cannot deal with one's own problems, how can one ever hope to solve those of another?"

Irene Adler's logic was unimpeachable, though whether it was practicable was another question entirely. A man who has fallen to rock bottom tends to develop a most obstinate disdain of listening to orthodoxy. I was sure that confronted with Adler's words, Holmes would retreat even further into the confines of his bamboo hut.

Professor Moriarty was quivering with anger; he looked as if he might explode into a thousand pieces. Yet it seemed that even this would not bring Irene Adler to budge from her own position.

Reginald Musgrave stepped in to diffuse the situation.

"Perhaps it would be advisable for you to speak to Holmes directly. I will have the butler show you to him directly," said he, ringing the bell to summon Brunton.

"Perhaps you might humour me with a little favour, Dr. Watson," Sir Musgrave continued; "Would you convince Holmes and bring him back here? Tonight Hurlstone will host a most unique gathering, and I would like nothing better than if you, Holmes, and the professor were to join it. You are welcome to stay the night. If you have any need at all Brunton will supply it."

It was a queer request, and one that I had not been expecting. As we dithered, Irene Adler asked, a little acidly, "I suppose you think I am not up to the task alone, then?"

"Nothing could be further from the truth, madam," replied Sir Musgrave placidly. "But Madame Richborough is an experienced old tigress, and she surely has made plans for every eventuality; it would behoove us to do the same."

"Madame Richborough?" interrupted Moriarty, with a scowl.

"No need for alarm, professor; I am no true believer," said Sir Musgrave. He went on to describe the many times that Madame Richborough had petitioned Robert Musgrave to be allowed to perform investigations into the spiritual energies which inhabited Hurlstone Manor, only to be rebuffed. Over a year after his father's passing, Sir Musgrave had decided to extend an invitation to Madame Richborough to settle the matter once and for all.

"But she is a fraud, a swindler!"

"And that is exactly why I have invited her, dear professor," replied Sir Musgrave, and a deep solemnity entered his voice. "Madame Richborough is an exceedingly dangerous person. She has steadily accumulated a devoted following over the past several years. We can no longer simply dismiss spiritualism as a childish fad; left unchecked it will no doubt become a grave threat to the progress of the empire itself. I have invited Miss Adler for her services as a detective, so that we might expose what lies behind the mask; I should certainly be glad to have Holmes's assistance as well."



After our interview with Sir Musgrave Moriarty and I exited the manor. It was a clear winter's day, but at four o'clock the shadows of the oak trees already stretched long across the courtyard. Following the stable-boy, who carried in his hands a basket, we walked across the broad lawn of Hurlstone, across which loomed a green wall of bamboo stalks, like an unexplored continent on the shore of the brimming sea.

"What is the size of the forest?" I asked the boy.

"It is vast, sir," replied he, "It is easy enough to get lost in there, and some have. We must all of us search, William and the rest of the staff, to fetch them out again."

"You mean the groundskeeper?"

"Yes, sir," he nodded. "He's a strange fellow, but with a good heart."

William was apparently renowned across the nation as an expert on the subject of bamboo forests, and had been engaged about a year earlier to manage the forest at Hurlstone. Due to the clearing of the launchpad for the moon rocket, as well as the diversion of funds away

from the estate, the once-grand bamboo forest had fallen into a state of disrepair, but under William's careful tending was reclaiming its former glory.

"He seems to be quite skilled," I observed.

"William loves his bamboo, he does," said the stable-boy with a chortle. "I've hardly seen him come out."

While the stable-boy and I were having this conversation, Professor Moriarty kept swinging his stick about and muttering to himself.

"Selfish, inconsiderate woman!"

"Come, professor, there is truth in Miss Adler's words."

"And that is what makes it all the more frustrating! If things were so simple we would long since have escaped this slump. It is precisely because it is not that we suffer!"

"But she means well."

"I am not as certain."

"I will agree that she is not very sympathetic."

I looked at the bamboo stalks swaying in the wind. In my mind I envisioned Irene Adler in the raiment of a primeval goddess; she was chasing Holmes around, firing off "Arrows of Truth". Holmes danced all around the lawn before darting off into the gloom beneath the bamboo. Yet Adler did not follow him in there alone, for she was accompanied by a second goddess who trailed her close like a shadow.

Mary's silence was to me the most perplexing thing of all. All the while that Adler and Moriarty were arguing, she had not offered a single opinion of her own. It was as if she was attempting to erase her own presence. She herself had seen, to her own chagrin, the intractability of Holmes's slump, and the futility of the logic that Adler so vehemently advanced, and in spite of it remained silent. That this was the product of some dispassionate calculation was plain to see.

Could it be Mary who was the true mastermind? Was it she who had persuaded Irene Adler to set up her office directly opposite 221B Teramachi Street, and challenge Holmes to a showdown of detection? Had she engineered this entire conspiracy after her chance reunion with Adler in order to drive away Holmes? But that was too repellent a thesis even to entertain.

We entered the forest.

After five minutes' walk we could see nothing but innumerable stalks of green bamboo on all sides. It was a resplendent view, if not a little eerie, and each time the cool wind rustled the treetops a tremendous creaking noise engulfed us from all sides. The pools of sunlight which filtered through the leaves here and there made it seem as though we were walking underwater. The ground was not completely flat, and every so often we crossed over dry hillocks and through dark, damp depressions.

"How is it you are so sure of your path?" I marvelled. In place of an answer the youth pointed to one of the stalks in our path. A red piece of yarn was tied to it, at just about his eye-height, and once I was made aware of this fact I soon noticed a number of similar pieces of yarn affixed to other stalks further along. By those signs one could find the way to Holmes's hermitage and back again, and were it not for them I would instantly have become irretrievably lost.

"Perhaps there's gold waiting to be found inside these bamboo shoots."

"This isn't a fairy tale," snorted Moriarty. "But you're not the first to wonder. The northern Musgraves went extinct centuries ago, yet to this day the Musgraves of Rakusei boast of riches few can even dream of. Gold-laden bamboo aside, there are many who suspect that this land hides some sort of secret, and Madame Richborough is no doubt one of them. Some even say the Musgraves struck a deal with the devil, and in exchange for those riches, the house is forever cursed. The Tale of the Bamboo Cutter is a metaphor for that forbidden pact.

"And there is also the case of Miss Rachel..." he added, after a moment's consideration.

"You think her disappearance was the work of a curse?"

"Of course not! Such stupidity is beneath me," he snapped, waving his cane angrily. "But the fact remains that the mystery was never solved. Even Holmes could not unravel that wretched case. I met Miss Rachel at banquets on a number of occasions. She was a sickly girl, but full of curiosity, and quite intelligent."

When the disappearance of Miss Rachel became public, whispers about the curse were not far behind. Call it petty jealousy or envy, gossip tends to swirl around ancient, wealthy houses, and even after discarding the less scientific rumors that flew around, the unexplainable circumstances of her disappearance remained.

My mind turned to Madame Richborough's impending spiritual investigation.

"I suppose Madame Richborough intends to solve that mystery."

"You may be right," scowled Moriarty. "But I don't see what that fraud hopes to accomplish."



We arrived at a small depression where the bamboo had been cleared away. At the center was a strange object which our guide informed us was Holmes's hermitage. It was a crude affair, made of simple canvas draped over a bamboo frame, and was not much larger than a casket. In front of the hut a tin pot rested over the flames of a fire pit dug in the earth, issuing an aroma of curry which seemed quite out of place in a bamboo forest. A young man in his twenties sat upon a cloth spread upon the ground, watching over the pot.

"Hello, William," said the stable-boy.

"Hello, John," replied the young man placidly.

I had been imagining someone much older than this dreamy-eyed youth, considering that he was entrusted with the care of the Musgraves' treasured bamboo forest. He wore a coarse brown jacket and a peculiar hat which resembled a withered lotus leaf, and was smoking what appeared to be a pipe whittled out of a bamboo stalk. His appearance was manful in its own way, and yet I could see in his expression an absent-minded detachment; perhaps this was what happened when one lived in a bamboo grove for a very long time.

"Mr. Holmes offered me the rest of his curried mutton," said he as he stirred the pot. "I do enjoy curry from time to time."

"I've brought some of Mr. Holmes's friends."

"Dr. Watson and Professor Moriarty. Mr. Holmes has often spoken of them."

Holmes himself was nowhere to be seen, and there was nowhere in the foliage-strewn depression to hide. Seeing us look around in confusion, William lifted an arm to point at the treetops. We all looked up to see the bamboo stalks swaying unnaturally; and hidden amongst the leaves was the seat of a grubby pair of trousers.

"I say, Holmes! What are you doing up there?"

"What I do is my own business," Holmes's voice drifted down in reply. "What are you doing here?"

"I've come to fetch you, of course."

"No, I'm sorry, I won't be going back to 221B Teramachi. I have renounced the material world and will spend the rest of my life building a kingdom of my own here in this bamboo grove. Henceforth you may consider me a creature of folklore, like a *tsuchinoko*. Good day, sir!"

"I don't understand half of what you mean...but why don't you come down from there?"

I shook the bamboo, but Holmes did not budge.

"Come, you can do better than that!" he smugly called, to my ire. But try as I might, Holmes's trouser seat only swayed back and forth overhead in unison with the flexible stalks.

"Holmes," called Professor Moriarty. "Will you not listen to reason?"

There was no reply, but Moriarty continued his kindly entreaty.

"These three days I have been distraught over your disappearance. I thought you had tired of me, and few other thoughts could have made me more miserable. I do not blame you. I understand completely your desire to seclude yourself in a bamboo grove. But I was deeply grieved nonetheless."

When Professor Moriarty finished speaking there was a long silence from the top of the bamboo. At last Holmes came clambering deftly down. His appearance was so changed that at first glance I could hardly believe it was him; like William he was wearing a gardener's overcoat, with a fowling cap on his head, and a slight scratch on his right cheek which I believed must have been from the bamboo. He took the basket from the stable-boy and sat down beside William.

"I never meant to wound you," he murmured, staring into the fire.

"I believe it," replied Moriarty with a small nod.

Holmes continued to stare mutely at the pot, so we all gathered around the fireplace and squatted down on the bare ground. For a time the only sound was the crackling of the fire.

"Let me introduce you to my master," said Holmes, pointing to William. "There is no-one on earth who knows more about bamboo than he."

William doffed his odd hat and scratched at his tousled head.

"Bamboo is all I know," he said. "I've lived my whole life in the bamboo, and I suppose I will die here. Not many folk will seek me out like you did."

"Like you, I am prepared to lay my bones to rest here in this bamboo grove."

"I wouldn't recommend it. That's not the person you are."

"He's right, Holmes," I said forcefully. "The clients you abandoned have formed a victims' group and are pounding on the door of 221B Teramachi as we speak; Mrs. Hudson is doing her utmost against them. How can you simply turn a blind eye?"

"None of that matters, not a bit," he interrupted, with an air of disinterest. "I am weary of trying to solve the mystery of my slump. I am no longer of any use to anyone, that's all. Now my only wish is to live quietly and peacefully."

"That is all well and good," said Professor Moriarty patiently. "But would you at least do us the favour of going to Hurlstone manor? Reginald Musgrave is in need of your assistance."

"What assistance can this worn-out husk of a man possibly provide?"

"Madame Richborough will be coming to Hurlstone tonight," said Moriarty, and he explained what Sir Musgrave had in mind. Holmes listened attentively, yet it seemed that even the prospect of unmasking Madame Richborough was not sufficient to rekindle his old detective's zeal.

"You'd better let Miss Adler handle it," he yawned.

Just when it seemed that we were at an impasse yet again, William intervened.

"If I may," he said, lighting a bamboo pipe packed with tobacco and handing it to Holmes. Holmes took a single puff and handed it back. A shiver went through the rustling bamboo, and Holmes's obstinate expression relaxed just a little more than it had before.

"Won't you help them, Mr. Holmes?" said William, studying the pipe.

"But—"

"Won't you at least try?"

Holmes hung his head like a schoolboy receiving a lecture.

"I am no longer fit to call myself a detective."

"No one is asking you to be a detective," replied William, with that curiously limpid gaze. "You needn't solve any mysteries. All you need to do is be by Reginald's side."

William's voice was like a mystic wind rustling the treetops; we all hung on every word.

I was struck that William had called Sir Musgrave "Reginald"; how many groundskeepers would boldly address their employers by their first name in front of a guest? And there had been a clumsy tenderness in his voice which reminded me of a father talking to his son, or a brother talking to a younger sibling.



The dinner party began at seven. Black-clad attendants glided about their work in the grand hall beneath the glittering radiance of an opulent chandelier. It was all so extravagant that I could not help but feel a little anxious.

"Stop fidgeting!" Mary hissed, though she herself was nervously tapping her foot. "What is Holmes doing in that getup?"

"He's renounced the material world."

"Honestly, the man is impossible."

When he had begrudgingly shuffled into Hurlstone, Holmes had what appeared to be a grey dust cloth wrapped around his neck as a scarf, and bamboo leaves protruded from his unkempt hair. Brunton, unable to bear the sight, quickly prepared a change of clothes, which Holmes stiffly refused.

"What's wrong with what I am wearing? Kindly leave me alone."

As a butler Brunton may have been loath to allow this, but as Sir Musgrave seemed content to let Holmes have his way, Brunton could only pick the leaves out of Holmes's hair with a repressed look of disapproval. For his part, Holmes took his seat at the table in his hermit's garb, seemingly unconcerned with how out of place he was in his lavish surroundings.

In contrast, Irene Adler took to the bright lights like a fish to water, striking up a lively exchange with Sir Musgrave.

"Do tell me more about this 'Society of Sophistry.'"

"It is a haunt of malcontents," smiled Sir Musgrave, sipping from a glass of wine. "From its very inception it has been so. Its founders were expelled from the Society of Debate, a gathering which venerated the Aristotelian system of logic, and in defiance established a society of their own. They would hold training camps in the summer, and hold debates with other schools, and have pointless arguments with one another, practicing the art of baffling one's opponent with nonsense. It was all a silly diversion, though one that I have found to hold surprising application in the real world."

"I would have never guessed that Holmes would be part of such a club."

"He stood head and shoulders above the other members. Didn't you, Holmes?"

"Did I?" replied Holmes in a nonplussed voice. "I have forgotten all about it."

"You were always so rigorous with your logic that the other members nearly expelled you once for being insufficiently specious. You refuted the accusation by declaring that in a sophistical space like the Society of Sophistry, the most sophistical argument was one that was not sophistical at all! It was a brilliant argument, one that struck everyone mute. I could not help but want to make the acquaintance of such an interesting fellow, and so we struck up a friendship, albeit a difficult one; for in your conceit you said many an unkind word to me."

"I, conceited? That's the pot calling the kettle black, Musgrave."

"My own self-regard could not hold a candle to yours."

"Maybe you're right. You bore yourself proudly in order to cover your natural diffidence, erecting an impregnable fortress to protect yourself. You always did seem to be afraid of something in those days, though you are much improved now."

"Yes, well, one does not like to dwell on the past."

During the whole dinner Irene Adler had not once looked at Holmes. It was as if she did not know what to do with him. Once or twice I saw her look as if she was mustering herself to speak to him, only for her to hesitate and then deflate.

Professor Moriarty was to the left of Sir Musgrave, far away enough from the end of the table where I was that I could hardly see him. Across from him were seated two people. One was Madame Richborough; the other was Cartwright, the physicist, who was here to bear witness to her spiritual investigation.

Moriarty's face had fallen when he saw Cartwright accompanying Madame Richborough to the mansion. For his part Cartwright had not expected to see his mentor here, and his face went ghostly pale. Neither mentor nor protege seemed to be able to speak to one another.

"I suppose you still think me a charlatan," said Madame Richborough to Irene Adler in a reedy voice.

"Yes, I do. Spiritualism is all nonsense."

"I am quite fond of skeptics like you. For the deeper the skepticism, the stronger the belief when they finally come around. And you will come around, Miss Adler."

"Don't be so sure," replied Adler defiantly.

Madame Richborough smiled at Sir Musgrave.

"You've prepared quite a warm welcome, I see: two well-known detectives in Mr. Holmes and Miss Adler, and Professor Moriarty, the celebrated physicist. A more distinguished audience I could not ask for."

"And a superb opportunity for you, I daresay. If you can prove the existence of spiritual phenomena in front of such an audience, I shall happily recant my former suspicions."

"Well I shall not, Sir Musgrave," broke in Professor Moriarty. "There is not a whit of scientific integrity in a seance!"

"The common cry of the scientist," said Madame Richborough. "Rather than confront that which does not fit your worldview, you brand it a deception. Is narrow-mindedness a scientific attitude? You are different, Cartwright, for you engage spiritual phenomena without prejudice."

"I seek only the benefit of humanity."

"If that's what you really believe, then you'd better get back to your laboratory, Cartwright!"

"What mankind needs, professor, is a science that is intertwined with the spirit."

"What twaddle!" the professor sputtered. "Science is universal precisely because it is untethered from the likes of immaterial spirits!"

"What does it profit mankind to gain universality, yet lose its soul? What is it that we believe—what is that we live for? Those are the questions which have led me to register myself in the Society for Spiritual Phenomenon Research. If spiritual phenomena can be engaged with by scientific means, then we may just be able to lay a bridge over the chasm which lies between nature and the soul. It is the correction of the course of all modern science which I seek."

"You disappoint me, Cartwright. You disappoint me greatly!"

Hearing Moriarty's invective, Cartwright hung his head dejectedly.

"You will come around by and by, professor," said Madame Richborough. "Cartwright seeks a fusion of the scientific and the spiritual realms. I shall spare no effort to aid his quest."

"Tell me, then, what these efforts of yours entail. *Kokkuri-san*? Automatic writing?"

"No tools are needed. At any rate an audience of skeptics would only throw up objections against them. I will simply join my heart with yours, and cast entreaties into the spiritual realm. It will require a change of location."

Here Sir Musgrave broke in.

"There is a very old room, at the east end of the original wing, which bears the peculiar name of the *Chamber of the East of the East*. It is the oldest part of that wing, having been built with materials from the sixteenth-century mansion which was the predecessor of Hurlstone, and it is the subject of many a rumour. Brunton is the most knowledgeable of any of us about the history of the mansion, and I daresay he could tell you a ghost story or two about that room. No-one goes in there now; it is as if the room is forbidden."

"That is where we shall hold the seance."

"Sheer folly. No doubt you've already prepared some deception or other," grumbled Moriarty.

Sir Musgrave turned his gaze to Brunton.

"There is no cause for alarm, Master Moriarty," said Brunton. "I have inspected the room myself from top to bottom and found nothing out of the ordinary. After preparing the room for the seance I locked the room and set trusted servants to watch it by shifts. Rest assured that no subterfuge has or could have been arranged."

"For those of us who pursue the mysteries of the spiritual, the Chamber to the East of the East is the locus of those swirling energies, almost a holy ground."

Madame Richborough's voice was thick and forceful as she continued.

"Are you all familiar with the Tale of the Bamboo Cutter? It tells of a princess born from a bamboo stalk who turns away several suitors, and eventually returns to her home on the moon. The Musgraves hold the oldest extant manuscript of the tale. My hypothesis is that the Tale of the Bamboo Cutter is a metaphorical account of a spiritual phenomenon which was experienced by some ancient ancestor of the Musgraves, in which the moon symbolizes the spiritual world. I am convinced that a daughter of the Musgraves entered

the spiritual world via a portal in the Chamber to the East of the East, and that the tale of the incident was passed down to posterity in the form of this fable.”

I have mentioned before that Madame Richborough’s face uncannily resembled a mask; now the likeness was completed with the hollow look in her eyes.

“Yes, in the Chamber to the East of the East lies a portal to the other side,” she repeated. “For years we have believed, dreaming of the day that we would receive an opportunity to ascertain it for ourselves. But the late Lord Musgrave would never have allowed it. As loath as I am to say it, his mind was poisoned by a superficial notion, that of the infallibility of science. When Miss Rachel disappeared twelve years ago, he refused to seek the help of us spiritualists. An unfortunate decision, and I am afraid a foolish one.”

“Mind your tone, madame,” said Sir Musgrave severely. “That is my father you speak of.”

“Mr. Holmes agrees with me, I am sure,” replied Madame Richborough, turning to face my old friend. “Lord Musgrave ought to have faced the mystery of his daughter’s disappearance head on. Some mysteries cannot be solved even by the greatest of detectives: these fall naturally into the domain of the spiritualist. What say you, Mr. Holmes?”

“You mean to say then that you can solve the mystery where others have failed?” said Holmes frostily.

“Precisely,” smiled Madame Richborough. “For you see, twelve years ago, Miss Rachel stumbled upon a gate to the spiritual world.”



After dinner we made our way to the Chamber of the East of the East.

Hurlstone Manor looked even more ancient in the darkness of night. As we traversed corridors adorned with weathered battleaxes and spears, it felt as though we were travelling back through the long history of the house of Musgrave, and the black corners where the lamplight did not reach appeared to me like murky stains upon that history.

I could only tip my hat to Madame Richborough’s mastery of theater. She had woven the Tale of the Bamboo Cutter, the Chamber of the East of the East, and the disappearance of Miss Rachel into a spine-tingling narrative and successfully etched it into our minds. For as we walked along the corridors, I observed that each of us seemed to be suppressing a gnawing apprehension. It was no wonder that Madame Richborough had gained such fame

as a spirit medium; after undergoing such a priming, people might well see things that might otherwise never cross their minds.

Holmes and I brought up the rear of the procession through those dark halls.

"Why did Madame Richborough say those things to you?"

"I don't know."

"You don't truly intend to retire, do you, Holmes?" I whispered, giving voice to the suspicion which had gnawed at me. "You came to Rakusei not to hide away, but to attempt to solve once more the case which eluded you twelve years ago."

"I have neither the desire nor the will."

"Then you intend to let Madame Richborough have her way with things?"

"What choice do I have?" he shrugged. "Come what may, I will stand by Musgrave, as William requested of me."

His turn of phrase, *come what may*, struck me as odd. For one he would never admit the existence of the spiritual, and he had been decidedly indifferent towards Madame Richborough's theatrics at the dinner. Yet there was a sense of foreboding in his words.

"You expect something to occur?" said I.

"Yes, something mysterious."

"What do you mean? What have you uncovered?"

"That's enough, Watson. As I have said, I am no longer a detective." He waved his hand irritably and would say nothing more.

After passing the billiards room and the library, we knew that we had entered the original wing by the chill in the air. The old stone building was sparsely lit, and it felt as though we were walking through some ancient ruin. Our little party ascended a staircase to the second floor, to a wooden-floored corridor, and at the end of the corridor was the Chamber of the East of the East.

A group of burly guards holding lamps manned a small table and chair in front of the door. They looked up with grimaces when Brunton approached, and whispered something into his ear. Even at a distance it was plain that they were greatly afraid.

"What's going on here?" demanded Sir Musgrave.

"The men say there was a noise inside," replied Brunton.

"It was a piano," one of the guards piped up. "The sound of someone playing a piano!"

"And light!" interjected another; "Light from beneath the door."

"I should expect so," frowned Brunton. "The fireplace is lit."

"It was not the firelight that we saw, I'd stake my life on it!"

The guards lapsed into a confused silence, clearly frightened out of their wits.

Brunton sighed. "But no one went in or out?"

"Yes, sir, you can be sure of it," nodded the guards. "Not a soul has passed by."

Madame Richborough gazed at the entrance to the chamber with a fervid light in her eyes. A brass panel adorned the center of the door, newer than the wood to which it was affixed, and etched upon it was an image of a moon over a bamboo grove, which I supposed was the crest of the Musgraves.

"No matter," declared Sir Musgrave; "Open the door."

Brunton produced an enormous ring of keys and unlocked the door.

The Chamber of the East of the East was a large, oblong room. It was largely unfurnished, save for a tenebrous round table in the center surrounded by wooden chairs. The dark wooden floor was bare of carpet, and each panel in the coffered ceiling bore a different painting, faded like the illustrations on an *ema* plaque. They appeared to depict scenes from the Tale of the Bamboo Cutter. The fixed windows were small, though the glass seemed to be relatively new, and through it we could see in the darkness the lush oak trees behind the mansion.

"I see nothing out of the ordinary," announced Irene Adler, after we had searched the room to no avail. The tinkling of a piano and the strange light which the sentinels had reported remained a mystery.

"You may begin, Madame Richborough," said Sir Musgrave.

Brunton stoked the fireplace and placed a large candelabra in the center of the table, setting the mood aptly for the imminent seance. Sir Musgrave ordered Brunton to wait outside in the hallway, and with a look of apprehension Brunton nodded and left the room, shutting the door softly behind him.



"I will now hold communication with the spirits," proclaimed Madame Richborough.
"Whatever may occur, I ask that you not leave your seats."

Cartwright took a wooden box which hung around his shoulder from a leather strap and placed it upon the table. The top of the box was adorned with several small pinwheels; in its sides were embedded a barometer and a thermometer and a level and a bevy of other assorted instruments, presumably to measure physical changes in the room.

At Madame Richborough's instruction we took our seats around the table. Holmes and Mary sat on my left and right. The glittering light of the candle exposed the varied expressions on our faces. Cartwright observed the instruments on the box solemnly while Professor Moriarty's countenance betrayed his clear disinterest in the proceedings, and Sir Musgrave and Irene Adler watched Madame Richborough unfalteringly, who for her part placidly continued her incantation.

—O spirits, answer our plea.

As I listened to her chanting, my mind turned over the events of the day. The disappearance of Miss Rachel twelve years prior—Robert Musgrave's Moon Rocket project—the Musgraves' expansive bamboo forest—William, the strange groundskeeper—the Tale of the Bamboo Cutter, and the secrets of the Musgraves which lay therein—and the Chamber of the East of the East. These many fragments floated across my consciousness, seemingly related and yet refusing to come together in a coherent whole. At last they were swallowed up into the darkness, and in their place swam up the orb of a brilliant full moon, like a hole bored into a black lacquered lid.

Suddenly Mary grasped my hand tightly. The pinwheels on the box spun and turned, and the candles flickered in a wind which seemingly came from nowhere. And as that wind whispered past our cheeks it brought upon it the faint tinkling of a piano. Surely it must be the same melody which had so unnerved the guards. I looked around, though I knew already that there was no piano in the room.

"This was one of Rachel's favourite melodies," said Sir Musgrave hoarsely. His face was taut, as if he sought to restrain his emotions from spilling over.

Madame Richborough alone remained unperturbed, as she continued her incantation. No, there was one more among us who viewed the ongoings with dispassion: Sherlock Holmes. He hardly moved a muscle, and had been staring fixedly into a dark corner of the room.

After a moment he leaned over and whispered in my ear.

"Watson. Have a look at that corner."

I did as he instructed. Neither the hearth nor the candles illuminated that corner, and at first I saw nothing. But I squinted my eyes, and as I did so I perceived all at once, almost like invisible ink appearing on a blank piece of paper, a small figure lurking in the gloom. I felt a cold thrill run down my spine.

"There's a person there!" I shouted, and in unison everyone turned to look.

Sir Musgrave let out a small, strangled cry. He began to stand, but Madame Richborough detained him.

"You must be still, Lord Musgrave!"

"It's her. It's Rachel!" he murmured, as though he was in a trance.

I myself was enthralled by the figure. Its face—the face of a young adolescent girl—was pale, as though it were lit by the moon, and its golden hair was tied up elegantly. It seemed that for Miss Rachel, the years since her disappearance may as well have not passed at all. A soft smile played over her face, and her eyes were distant and dreamy.

"My suspicions were correct," crowed Madame Richborough; "The Chamber of the East of the East is a gateway into the spiritual realm!"

In contrast to the madame's rapturous mien, Professor Moriarty's pallid face was the very picture of agony. It surely must be a shock to see the world of rationality which you had so ardently believed in crumbling before your very eyes. Abruptly he jumped to his feet, his chair clattering to the floor behind him.

"An actor, nothing more. I will reveal the trick!"

He charged at the figure, but as he stretched his hand towards it she vanished. In her place floated a luminous white orb, about as large in diameter as she had been tall: the full moon. It looked as though one could simply reach out and touch the craters which pocked its surface. Moriarty leaped backward in terror.

The floodgates which held back the gnawing terror burst at last. A howling gale extinguished the candles, and the fireplace groaned like a leviathan and spat sparks into the air. The moonlight grew brighter, washing over the terror-stricken faces which surrounded the table.

Mary let out a cry, and as if we had all been waiting for a signal to move the sounds of clattering chairs came from all around the table. The light which enveloped us was so bright that I could hardly see a thing. Cartwright shouted for the professor, while Madame Richborough desperately tried to restore calm and Sir Musgrave clamoured for Brunton and the servants. Panic reigned over the room as the piano thundered discordantly in the background.

Brunton burst into the room with a lantern, bringing an end to the madness.

"Is everyone alright?"

The sound of his voice brought us back to our senses. I looked around in amazement. All was quiet in the room once more: the candles were lit, and the fire quietly sputtered in the hearth. The wind had died, the piano had gone silent, and Miss Rachel and the mysterious moon were nowhere to be seen, while Professor Moriarty lay senseless upon the wooden floor.



I hastily attended to the professor. His present condition was the result of days of insomnia as much as it was due to the psychological effect of the seance, and I assessed that this mild spell of vertigo would have no long lasting effect upon my patient. A few deep breaths, aided by a glass of brandy brought by Brunton, gradually restored the colour to his cheeks.

"What happened?" asked Sir Musgrave to Madame Richborough.

"Professor Moriarty's demeanour raised the ire of the spirits," she replied with a chiding tone. "Whatever drove you to that behaviour, professor? I distinctly instructed you not to move. The experiment lies in ruins now, thanks to your petty suspicions."

Professor Moriarty hung his head.

It was clear at any rate that we had been overmastered by the Chamber of the East of the East. Not one of us proposed to resume the seance, and Sir Musgrave declared an end to the proceedings. Madame Richborough did not quite look satisfied, yet she withdrew without raising much fuss. Perhaps she was content to have silenced her skeptics with that irrefutable display.

"You will not forget your promise of backing, I am sure," she remarked to Sir Musgrave.

We retraced our steps back to the modern wing of the mansion. Madame Richborough and Cartwright retired first to their respective guestrooms.

Sir Musgrave invited the remaining participants to his study, for a post-mortem of sorts. Yet none of us could bring ourselves to speak, and we huddled in silence in our chairs around the fireplace for some time. None of us could come up with a logical explanation for what had just transpired in that chamber; Professor Moriarty was as white as a sheet.

"I cannot see how Madame Richborough could have had an opportunity to arrange any of her tricks," mused Sir Musgrave aloud. "I trust Brunton and the manservants completely. Once the seance had begun, Miss Adler and myself did not take our eyes from the madame for a moment. She could not have engineered what we witnessed. Your opinion, Miss Adler?"

"I regret that I am unable to offer any opinion at the moment," said she, gloomily.

"Madame Richborough is a far more formidable opponent than I had imagined," Sir Musgrave blandly continued, "Miss Adler, Holmes, and Professor Moriarty: a more seasoned panel of skeptics I could not have hoped to assemble, and still she has completely pulled the wool over our eyes. I promised the madame that if tonight's seance was a success, I would throw the resources of the House of Musgrave behind her endeavours to spread her spiritualist gospel. We have little time now, and I have no doubt that if we are not able to expose her sham, she will certainly claim her debt."

"Yes, I am only too aware of it," replied Irene Adler, still downcast.

Sir Musgrave stood up and gazed pensively at the fire.

"That was Rachel, of that I am certain. She has not aged a day."

In the pained silence that followed those words, Sherlock Holmes paced blithely around the study. Here he flipped through books from the shelves, there he ran his fingers across the giant map of the moon along Mare Fecunditatis. True it was that he had renounced worldly affairs, but surely it was not unreasonable to ask him to retain a measure of decorum.

"Don't just stand around, Holmes, help us think!" I said sharply.

"Trying to solve the mystery? That will never do," he replied, his back still turned to us. "The world is full of the strange and unexplainable, and magic is among them."

We all exchanged astonished glances. Where was the Holmes who had once so prized evidence, logic, the laws of reality? If one were to dismiss every strange or bizarre thing in the world with that one word—magic—then there would no longer be any need for the detective.

Miss Adler rose to her feet angrily.

"What do you mean by that, Holmes?" she snapped. "Am I to understand you have become a believer in spiritualism?"

"That is not it. I am no more a believer than I ever was."

Miss Adler scowled at his turned back, though that did not seem to make him any more inclined to offer an explanation.

"I'm afraid I must bid you all good-bye for the night," he said; "I have a moon gazing appointment with William and a bottle of libations. You are of course most welcome to join us, Musgrave." And with a short bow he strode from the room. I pursued him to the foyer, where Brunton had just handed him a square lantern.

"Stop!" I insisted, taking him by the arm. "How can you be so ungrateful after all that Sir Musgrave has done for you?"

"Did I not invite him as well?"

"A paltry token of gratitude!"

"That's quite enough, Watson," said he, shaking my hand off and turning away. "I hope you will not make me say it again: I am a detective no longer!"

There was a note of sorrow in his voice, and I could not find it in me to continue berating him.

Holmes lifted the lantern and walked off into the night, his silhouette dipping in and out of the billowing rows of shrubbery until he was lost from sight.

I dejectedly returned to the study. Neither Sir Musgrave nor Irene Adler nor Mary had anything to say. We were at a dead end. Unless Miss Adler pulled an epiphany out of thin air, Madame Richborough would prevail.

"Perhaps tomorrow will bring better tidings," said Sir Musgrave as we each returned to our rooms.



For an hour afterward I stared out the window in my night-clothes. The hush of night had fallen over Hurlstone; I supposed everyone had already gone to bed. But I was in no state to go to sleep, for the shock of the seance still reverberated in my mind. From my window I

had a view of the lawns, washed in the pale moonlight, and beyond them the mournful bamboo forest.

There was a hesitant knock at the door.

"Dear?" I heard Mary say. "Are you awake?"

I quickly strode to open the door, and Mary slipped inside. She wore a robe over her nightgown.

"I thought you might still be up," I said; "I can hardly bring myself to close my eyes."

We sat on the bed side by side, and for some time neither she nor I said a word. Our cold war, which had been sparked by Sherlock Holmes, had been carried over to Rakusei. I had hardly spoken to her here in the manor: not at our unexpected reunion, not at the dinner, and not at the seance. But as I leaned upon her, I sensed the high walls which had been erected between us crumbling away. It was not only I who was filled with doubt.

I put my arm around her shoulder, and felt her lean back into me.

"I've wanted to apologize to you," I admitted.

"What for?"

"For the reckless way I've gone about trying to save Holmes."

I stared into the window, where both she and I were reflected in the glass.

"I was willing to do whatever it took, even if it required sacrificing our marriage. Sometimes I'd wonder myself why I was so desperate, and then I would be reminded of the treasure-box. You remember it: the one which contained the great Agra treasure."

"How could I forget the most important event of my life?" she smiled.

Mary and I had met during the case of the Sign of Four. She had been governess in the household of Mrs. Cecil Forrester when she knocked on the door of 221B four years ago. Her simple visit had developed into a most fascinating adventure filled with the intriguing and the bizarre: murder by poison dart, a man with a wooden leg, and an Indian treasure-box hidden in the attic of an old manor. And as Holmes tracked down the truth of the case, so had the relationship between Mary and I blossomed, for the first time I laid eyes on Mary I had instantly fallen in love.

"What a fine opportunity this investigation has presented for you," Holmes had observed drily upon my proposal to Mary. Certainly I had been quite eager to put my best foot forward before her. As we sped along the Kamo River in pursuit of the fugitive craft towards Osaka Bay, my heart was speeding along in pursuit of Mary. Part of the treasure that the criminals had stolen away belonged to her, and I was determined to recover it no matter the cost.

We overtook the thief where the Kizu, Uji, and Katsura merge to become the Yodo River.

"You should have become one of the richest women in Kyoto then," I lamented.

"Yes, I suppose."

"But the box was empty."

The thief had scattered the contents of the treasure chest into the river just before we caught them, and even now I still remember the shock I felt when I opened the lid.

"In place of that treasure you gained only me, and every day since I have striven to become a man worthy of those riches. If I lost Holmes I was afraid that I would lose whatever worth I had. I was afraid that I would lose you."

"Whether you have Holmes or not, you are still you."

"Do you really think so?"

"I know so."

"But I cannot bring myself to believe it. I am afraid."

Mary frowned and sighed, though she didn't seem angry. Together we stared out the window in silence.

"What Holmes said after the seance was strange," she said, after a time. "Irene believes there is some deep meaning in what he said."

"Did she? I wouldn't have expected her to put much stock in anything he says."

"Irene still esteems him highly. Her powers and reputation may long since have outstripped his, but her respect for him is too deeply ingrained for her to forget. I believe she was quite eager to show her mettle before him. That she could not explain what occurred in the Chamber of the East of the East was quite a blow to her confidence."

Mary sighed deeply again, then continued sadly.

"I would like nothing more than for Irene to be her usual assertive self. We may not have been schoolmates for very long, but I remember that she was always self-assured. Whenever we were together it felt like there was nothing we couldn't do."

"I know the feeling, Mary," I nodded. "I know it very well."

My wife abruptly turned to look at me very seriously.

"I've been keeping something from you, John."

"What's that?"

"Irene and I were here, the night that Miss Rachel vanished."

I looked back at her, amazed. There was a strange gleam in her eyes.

Almost as if it had been pre-arranged there came a knock at the door.

"Pardon the disturbance, doctor. Is Mary inside?"

I got up and opened the door to find Irene Adler standing in the darkened hallway.

"Mary's quarters are empty, and I suspected she might be here. I hope I am not interrupting your conversation. But I'm afraid I am well and truly in a bind..."

"Not at all. Come in."

Irene Adler walked slowly into the room as though she were in a reverie. I had often seen Sherlock Holmes pacing the room with that somnambulist's gait when he was deep in thought about a particularly intractable case. I supposed that her mind had run itself into a loop overanalyzing everything that we had seen and heard.

She lowered herself with an air of exhaustion into the chair which I offered her. She was still wearing the outfit which she had on at dinner, but the confidence which had been on full display had dissolved like the mist, and she seemed altogether shrunken and worn.

"I can see you've had quite a time of it," said Mary.

"I give up," cried Irene petulantly. "It's maddening. None of it makes any sense!"

She buried her face despairingly in her hands. Mary got up from the bed and knelt beside her friend, putting a soothing hand on her shoulder.

"I was just telling John what happened, and what we saw 12 years ago."

"You mean the day that Miss Rachel vanished," said Irene Adler in a small voice, and so she began to tell the tale of that fateful day.



It had been almost exactly 12 years to the day, early in December. Mary and Irene had been pupils at the Shishigatani boarding school, for which each successive head of the Musgrave family served as trustee. The biannual Musgrave tea party stemmed from this long-held relationship. Twice a year, a selected group of students would be invited to a salon at Hurlstone. It was considered quite an honour, and each occasion was cause for fierce competition to determine who would be among the chosen few.

"We hardly imagined that we would ever be chosen," said Mary, to which Irene nodded her strong agreement.

"It was always the daughters of the most well-connected families, or the ones who stood head and shoulders above the rest in academic accomplishment. Of course we were neither. We were always stirring up some trouble or other at the student paper, and the instructors never thought of us as anything but a nuisance. Stuffy old Principal Appleyard would never have willingly allowed us on the list."

Yet on the day of the tea party, the two rabblers found themselves at Arashiyama Station, boarding a carriage bound for Hurlstone Manor. In part due to her opposition to the very existence of the tradition, Mary presumed that the as-yet-unseen Miss Rachel must be a deeply unpleasant person.

When the carriages emerged from the vast swath of bamboo, then, she was quite surprised to see Miss Rachel waiting at the entrance of the mansion to greet them. Contrary to the image of the entitled brat she had assembled in her head, Miss Rachel was soft-spoken and mild-mannered, and over the course of teatime her suspicions melted away.

Miss Rachel was not arrogant; in fact she was kind and courteous to each and every student, and curious to boot. If there was anything peculiar about her, it was only that she would occasionally stop talking quite abruptly and stare off into the distance. Looking into her eyes at those moments was like catching a glimpse into an empty room.

Miss Rachel was particularly keen to hear of Mary and Irene's adventures at the school paper. One special issue in particular had drawn her attention, in which the daring duo had laid bare, with the help of Irene's particular skill in lockpicking, chambers into which no student was permitted to step foot, including repositories for confiscated items, smoking

rooms for the teachers, and even Principal Appleyard's hidden wine stash. The students showered them with thunderous applause. The administrators suspended them.

"How ever did you learn to pick locks, Miss Adler?" asked Miss Rachel.

"I practiced every day," responded Irene, puffing her chest proudly. "One never knows when something will come in handy."

Miss Rachel next guided them to the manor library. Both Mary and Irene were awed by its sheer extravagance, to which the school library could hardly compare. Save for the windows, every wall was hidden by bookcases which soared up to the ceiling, each filled from end to end with the spines of books whose gold-lettered titles sparkled in the light. In the center of the room was a grand table on a lavish Persian rug, covered with half-read books and reading lamps.

"It is my job to manage the collection," said Miss Rachel.

As Mary and Irene looked around them in wonder, Miss Rachel flitted through the room like a butterfly and stopped in front of a particular bookcase, where a history book jutted out from an upper shelf. When she pulled on its spine the bookcase swung open, revealing a tunnel which concluded in a small repository containing rare and precious tomes. From among them she removed a large leather bound volume.

"This illustrated copy of the *Tale of the Bamboo Cutter* has been passed down through our family for generations."

Miss Rachel laid the volume on the table and began to slowly leaf through its pages for the two. As they reached the last page Mary let out an involuntary gasp.

"What is this poem?" she wondered.

At the end of the *Tale of the Bamboo Cutter*, the emperor orders his envoys to ascend to the peak of Mount Fuji and burn the elixir of immortality left behind by the Princess Kaguya at the peak: the smoke from their labours can still be seen to this day. However, the manuscript before them contained a mysterious addendum:

Whose was it?

Theirs who are gone.

Who shall have it?

They who will come.

What shall we give?

All that is ours.

Why should we give it?

For the sake of the great awakening.

The text had not appeared when Mary had studied the tale in school. Miss Rachel commended her on her studiousness; indeed, this addendum appeared only in the copy which belonged to the Musgraves. The catechism was recited as part of a ritual undertaken by each master of the household as he came of age, but as to its meaning no one was clear.

"They say that Princess Kaguya ascended to the moon from somewhere in Rakusei," said Miss Rachel in a provocative whisper. "What do you think?"

"It's very interesting," said Mary in a whisper of her own.

"There is a room in the old wing of this mansion called the Chamber of the East of the East," continued Miss Rachel; "Many strange things have happened in that room, and everyone gives it a wide berth. The key has long been lost. But I was reading the diary of one of my ancestors here in the library the other day when I came upon something most interesting. It said that the Chamber of the East of the East conceals a passageway to the moon, and it was by this route that the Princess Kaguya returned home."

Irene hung on Miss Rachel's every word. The tale seemed tailor-made to pique her detective's spirit.

"I can open the door. My tools never leave my side."

Miss Rachel smiled.

In the twelve years that had passed since that day, Mary had often wondered whether everything that had transpired had not all been part of Miss Rachel's design. Had she invited them to the tea party personally so that they would unlock the chamber? It seemed too convenient to have been sheer coincidence.

Evading the watchful eye of the butler, the girls stole away and rendezvoused at the gloomy staircase in the old wing.

The door of the Chamber of the East of the East lay at the end of the second floor corridor.

"Here it is," whispered Miss Rachel, a flicker of uncertainty in her voice.

There was the bamboo and moon, the Musgrave crest, engraved in brass upon the ancient door. Otherwise there was little of note about it, and yet Mary felt a chill when she saw it, though it may have only been Miss Rachel's warning about the strange things that had happened in the room, and the preternatural silence of the old wing. But Irene was not one to be daunted by such things. She knelt in the dusty hallway to do battle with the old lock, and in no time she stood and nodded to Miss Rachel.

"It's open."

Miss Rachel nodded back nervously, and placed a hand on the doorknob.

As she opened the door, there was a sound like a rippling stream. Warm air flowed through the doorway and whispered past us. When the door was fully open Mary was lost for words, for before her, through the doorway, was a vast bamboo grove, rustling in the breeze.

"Simply fascinating!" swooned Miss Rachel, and she proceeded inside. Mary and Irene followed after her, full of trepidation.

Miss Rachel felt the trunks as she passed. "They're real!" she gasped. Instead of wooden floorboards they walked upon loamy earth covered with fallen bamboo leaves; roots raced through the earth like the veins of a leviathan. Yet they could also make out a faint light coming through a narrow window in the distance, and above them, beyond the treetops, could be seen that antique, painted coffered ceiling. They were still inside the building.

Curiously, Miss Rachel did not seem to be afraid. It was astonishing that she remained so calm under the circumstances. She reached out, taking hold of a bamboo stalk in one hand, and swung round and round. "Whose was it?" said she in a low, sing-song voice, reading from that strange catechism at the end of her storybook. A sense of unease rose up in Mary, yet Miss Rachel continued to blithely sing, "What shall we give? All that is ours..."

Irene suddenly pointed into the thicket.

"Look, Mary!"

There she saw a grand old staircase. They crept toward it. It was a dignified, darkly gleaming edifice, exactly the kind of staircase one would expect to find in a mansion like this, and the bannister was cool to the touch. What was queer about it was that it did not lead anywhere. It ended just above the treetops, right before it touched the ceiling.

While Mary and Irene dithered at its base, Miss Rachel passed by them and slowly began to ascend it. With each step she took, the breeze which agitated the bamboo grew stronger. Where could it be blowing from, when they were clearly indoors? It was unpleasantly tepid, as if it were not air but the hands of another human being which caressed their skin.

The rustling of the bamboo grew ever louder, and the very air tingled, as though the Chamber of the East of the East itself was trembling in wondrous expectation. Mary had a premonition that something terrible was about to occur, that something very wrong was happening in front of her.

She had to stop Miss Rachel! Driven by sheer impulse she bounded up the stairs and dragged Miss Rachel back down.

"We've got to get out of here!" shouted Irene, and they dashed through the grove, which wriggled now as though it had a mind of its own. They didn't dare to look back, for it felt as though something was reaching out to snatch them up. When they had reached the exit and slammed the door behind them, a vast sound echoed like a giant sighing.

All was quiet once more, as though it had all been a dream.



You must not tell anyone what happened.

On the way back to the modern wing, Miss Rachel had been quite insistent that they keep mum. When she did not make an appearance at the closing of the tea party, Mary suspected that she had snuck back to the Chamber of the East of the East without them. But the students were hastily bundled off back to school, and she did not learn of Miss Rachel's disappearance until Shinchō Yard began to question them about what had occurred.

"Did you tell the police about what had happened in the chamber?" I inquired of Irene.

"Only the parts that they might believe," she answered. "They searched the chamber and found nothing. But I could not let things stand without investigating the chamber myself. So I snuck out in the middle of the night, stole a horse from the school stable, and went back to Rakusei."

"Without telling me, I might add."

"I didn't want to drag you into trouble, Mary."

Irene's circumspection saved Mary from being thrown out of school. She succeeded in sneaking back into Hurlstone manor under cover of darkness, but there her investigation of the Chamber of the East of the East reached a dead end, for the door had been tightly boarded shut.

"And to top it all off, Reginald had hired a detective to prowl the halls of Hurlstone. Holmes, of course. He mistook me for Miss Rachel and raised a great hullabaloo."

"So you were the would-be detective!"

"I suppose Holmes has long forgotten. I bear him no ill will; after all, he was simply doing his job. I was summarily caught and hauled before Robert Musgrave."

Her interview with the former head of the Musgraves took place in a dimly lit study on the first floor. Then at the height of his powers, Robert Musgrave was a ruddy-faced, imposing man, with bushy hair grown out long like a lion's mane. The fire crackled as he stared at Irene, his eyes smouldering with anger.

"I know you," he growled. "You are the one who enticed my Rachel into sneaking into that room. And now you are sniffing around again."

Irene eyed him back silently. Infuriated by her intransigence, Robert stamped his feet and paced before the fireplace like a bear.

As she watched him, it slowly dawned upon Irene that he was afraid. But what could the man who had been dubbed the Lion of Rakusei possibly be afraid of?

The image of that boarded-up door flashed through her mind.

"You're afraid of the Chamber of the East of the East!" she accused.

Her words clearly struck a nerve, and for a moment it seemed like he would keel over on the spot. His jaw hung slack, and his face turned ashen. He closed his eyes, as if to restrain the pain heaving in his chest.

"Get out. Never show your face here again."

Irene ran out to the waiting carriage, which transported her back to school accompanied by Brunton. Once they arrived at Shishigatani, Brunton summarily drummed Principal Appleyard out of bed and informed him that Lord Musgrave, in his capacity as trustee, would not be taking action against the school for Irene Adler's intrusion. In exchange, the

school would expel the named student; they would speak of the matter to absolutely no one.

Irene left the school one week later. Save Mary, no one saw her off at the gate. Irene told Mary that she would be staying with her uncle, who was a stage actor.

"I'm sure I'll find something to keep myself amused."

"Will we ever see each other again?"

"Of course we shall. The next time we meet we'll have a grand old adventure, you and I!"

And twelve years later, their promise was fulfilled.



"Having made my name as a detective, I thought that the time was finally right," said Irene Adler with a touch of chagrin. "I was convinced that I would return in triumph to Hurlstone and set things right."

It had been Reginald Musgrave who had invited her to attend Madame Richborough's spiritual investigation. For Irene the invitation could not have come at a better time.

Yet now the Musgrave mystery was more impenetrable than ever before. What had happened twelve years ago was a source of frustration not only for Irene Adler, but for Sherlock Holmes as well. In my mind the House of Musgrave was like a mysterious island surrounded by hidden rocks, irresistible to the well-known detective, for already two had been shipwrecked on its shoals.

"Holmes must be onto the trail of something. Don't you think, doctor?"

When Irene asked her question I was turning over in my mind the last entry in Holmes's journal: *Whose was it?* How had the mysterious catechism which appeared in the Musgraves' copy of *The Tale of the Bamboo Cutter* also come to be recorded in Holmes's case notes twelve years ago? What did it signify?

"You overestimate that man, Irene."

"Oh, Mary! Why must you be so cruel to Mr. Holmes?"

"That man is so embittered by his slump that he resents all who exceed him. Take the present instance: what he said, he said only to confuse you. You mustn't be led astray by such idle insinuation, Irene, lest you fall into a slump yourself."

"That is the redoubtable Sherlock Holmes you speak of!" snapped Irene Adler, with anguish in her voice. "He is the most formidable detective the world has ever seen. We cannot know even whether his slump is real. It may be that he is only affecting it for some unseen purpose. Yes, and behind that mask he observes as I struggle and flail about. What a fool I was! I never should have challenged him!" She buried her face in her hands.

"Must it be this way whenever I ask about Holmes?" sighed Mary.

Thankfully, there came another knock at the door to break the uncomfortable silence that had fallen. My bedchamber was certainly a popular haunt tonight.

This time I answered the door and found Professor Moriarty waiting outside. He claimed that he felt much better after a light sleep, though his face was still the wan hue of a wax figure.

"May I come in?"

"By all means. Mary and Miss Adler precede you."

Professor Moriarty was taken aback when he saw Irene Adler's downcast face.

"What's the matter?" said he.

Adler looked up at him. "I owe you an apology," she said, her voice listless. "At our first meeting I held you in contempt. Yet now I see that I was in the wrong to say those things to you."

"Not at all. I too must apologize to you." Moriarty sat himself down in a chair. "I admit that in the study I was enraged by your supercilious tone. Yet now at this remove, I see that your words were not without merit. Perhaps I was so angered because I, too, did not want to acknowledge what you openly pointed out. It is a deep fraternity which I share with Holmes, and yet secretly I worried whether that friendship was not in fact holding him back."

"But Professor—"

"Please, allow me to finish," said he. "What we witnessed in the Chamber of the East of the East was indeed disturbing. The sight of the ghost of Miss Rachel, not aged a day from her disappearance...it struck terror within me. It felt as if the foundations of the world were shaken, as if everything I had believed were crumbling to dust. If there is any mystery which a detective ought to solve, it is this one. And yet Holmes refused to face it."

Here the professor's tone softened, and he looked at Irene Adler.

"But you did not run. That is the kind of indomitable spirit which we need. The role of the detective is to uphold the order of the world. Anyone who does not fulfill that sacred duty is not fit to be called a detective. Holmes has lost the will to face the unknown; he has set aside that duty of his own accord. I recognize that I bear part of the responsibility in his actions. I am in no position to ask you anything, and yet I will ask that you solve the Musgrave mystery. There is no one we can turn to now but you."

Professor Moriarty's heartfelt plea had a rousing effect. Irene sat up, and her face tightened. A light had returned to her eyes. It was like seeing life being breathed into a discarded puppet.

Irene Adler took a moment to think.

"We witnessed a number of astonishing phenomena in the Chamber of the East of the East: the unseen piano, the spirit of Miss Rachel, and that ghostly moon. The piano could have been located in another room, the sound carried into the chamber by a speaking-tube. Sir Musgrave mentioned that it was her favourite tune. That may have been to put a suggestion into our minds. When that girl appeared in the darkness, anyone would have assumed that she was Miss Rachel. And the moon might have been a scale model, fitted with electric lights and lowered through a hidden panel in the ceiling—"

"But that would have required a tremendous effort to contrive!" I objected. "How could Madame Richborough have done it on her own?"

"It was a mistake to assume that Madame Richborough was the only one involved," replied Adler sharply. "She was not the one pulling the strings. Twelve years ago, Robert Musgrave sealed the Chamber of the East of the East out of some unknown horror. Following his death, Reginald opened the chamber and invited Madame Richborough to investigate it. It has been the Musgraves who have directed things all along."

"You mean to accuse Reginald of being the mastermind?" I asked in amazement.

Adler nodded. "We must investigate the chamber once more: this time, without Reginald and his men."



After dispersing to our individual rooms to make ready, we assembled at the top of the stairs. I brought with me a lantern and matches, while Irene Adler was carrying a small leather knapsack, which contained her cherished detective's kit.

"Brunton may be making his rounds," whispered Irene. "We must be cautious."

We descended the stairs before the watchful portraits of the former heads of the Musgraves, treading as lightly as we could. Beneath the pale moonlight which shone through the tall windows in the foyer, it felt as though we were submerged in the chilly depths of a gigantic aquarium. The displays which told the history of the Musgraves were cloaked in darkness. Luckily for us, the first floor was deserted; Brunton was nowhere to be found.

We traversed the hallways to reach the original wing. I led the way through the nearly pitch-black corridors and climbed the stairs to the second floor. But when I turned right at the corridor, I was astounded to see lamplight beneath the door to the Chamber of the East of the East.

Voices could be heard within the room, and by putting our ears to the door we discovered that they belonged to Madame Richborough and Cartwright. Irene Adler stepped forward and thrust the door open.

"What are you doing here?" she demanded.

The room was as drab as we had left it. A large lamp burned on the table around which we had sat during the seance. Cartwright was setting up measuring equipment on the table, while Madame Richborough stood behind him. A brief expression of shock crossed her face when she saw us, though she quickly composed it into a smile.

"Ah, how kind of you to join us."

"What are you doing sneaking about at night, Cartwright?" demanded Professor Moriarty.

The young scientist hung his head guiltily.

"Madame Richborough proposed that we resume the investigation."

"A likely tale! You've come to remove the evidence of your malfeasance."

"You will find that there is no evidence or soundness to your accusation, professor," smiled Madame Richborough. But when Mary strode to the table and picked up an old book which lay there, the smile vanished from her face like water being soaked up by a parched field.

"*The Tale of the Bamboo Cutter*," said Mary. "It was supposed to be under lock and key in the library. How did it come into your possession?"

"I must go back twelve years to answer your question," answered Madame Richborough frostily. "When Miss Rachel disappeared, inspectors from Shinchō Yard searched every inch of this mansion; they even dragged the bottom of the mere. The Chamber of the East of the East did not escape their notice, but they found no clues. But when Miss Rachel vanished, she left this storybook behind in the room. It was taken away before the police could discover it."

"No doubt by Robert Musgrave," interjected Irene Adler.

Madame Richborough smiled again, and when she continued her tone was eerie.

"We spiritualists have long known that there is an intimate link between the Chamber of the East of the East and the *Tale of the Bamboo Cutter*. This very chamber contains a portal to the spiritual realm—represented by the moon in the fairy tale—and the key to opening that portal lies in the addendum at the end of the book. Each succeeding head of the Musgraves has recited it at his coming of age ceremony because it is their greatest treasure. Yet that fool Robert forsook his duty as the keeper of the key. And so it is for twelve years, we have waited for our chance to open the door once more."

"You may dream up whatever delusions you please," snorted Moriarty. "What would Sir Musgrave do if he were to learn what you have just said?"

"Still you do not see, professor? Everything that has happened, has happened at his pleasure. His Lordship is a believer in the spiritual."

Professor Moriarty's eyes went round. "Impossible!"

Madame Richborough continued on triumphantly.

"You men of science believe that you alone can explain the secrets of the universe; you hide yourselves in your laboratories and worship the material as sacred. But it is a foundation of sand that you have built your temples upon. One day, the boundary between this world and the next shall be stripped away, and the supernatural will be unbound once more. Then all shall be as it truly is meant to be."

A tide of apprehension swept over the room. It felt as though there was someone hiding in the shadows, watching us quietly. I lifted my lamp up, but the corners of the room were bare.

"You must all be still," breathed Madame Richborough; and she began to solemnly recite that catechism.

Whose was it?

Theirs who are gone.

Who shall have it?

They who will come.

What shall we give?

All that is ours.

Why should we give it?

For the sake of the great awakening.

The very moment the last word had left her lips, a great staircase appeared on the other side of the table. There was no doubt that it was the same staircase which Mary and Irene had observed twelve years prior: it was a Gothic structure with an elegant balustrade which rose high into the air before ending abruptly at the ceiling. Even supposing that one had been able to tamper with the room beforehand, I could not fathom what trickery could conjure a massive staircase out of thin air.

"At last!" Madame Richborough yelled in triumph, and she began to walk up the staircase. Irene Adler and Professor Moriarty simply looked on; I took Mary's hand, and she squeezed mine back.

A warm breeze came up, as though we were standing upon a windswept moor. It did not seem to be of this world.

When Madame Richborough came to the top of the stairs, she reached out and touched the ceiling. At once she was engulfed by a blinding light, bright as midday, and for a few moments none of us could see anything. As our eyes adjusted, we realized that the ceiling had vanished. In fact so had the walls, and all around us we could see the vast bamboo grove which surrounded the mansion.

The light emanated from an enormous full moon, larger than any I had ever seen, which was descending through the heavens down to earth. It took up nearly half of the night sky, and it seemed as though I could simply reach out and touch the craters and crags upon its surface. That extraordinary staircase extended upwards past where it had met the ceiling

to the moon. Against the radiant backdrop, the figure of Madame Richborough looked like a puppet in a shadow play.

Professor Moriarty slumped in his seat.

"I don't believe it. I simply don't believe it."

"So this is the secret of the Musgraves," I murmured.

This must have been the bridge which the princess had crossed back to the moon in the Tale of the Bamboo Cutter—the bridge which Miss Rachel must have taken. No wonder that Sherlock Holmes had failed to solve the case twelve years ago. This was not the kind of mystery which appeared in detective novels, or the kind which any detective could handle at all.

Abruptly everything went dark. The brilliant moon was suddenly swathed in shadow. The strange happening had perplexed Madame Richborough as well, for she paused her ascent and was staring in disbelief. Before our eyes the light drained from the moon, beginning from its circumference and moving towards the center; leaving only a cadaverous husk.

I rushed to the bottom of the staircase.

"Come back!" I shouted, but Madame Richborough did not move. As I took a step forward Mary caught my arm desperately.

"No, John! You won't make it!"

A vast, echoing sigh trembled across the scene, and Madame Richborough was lost into the darkness. I stared up into the black sky, transfixed. Where once the moon had been there gaped now a yawning void, blacker than the blackest pits of night. I felt as though the world would turn upside down and hurl itself and all of us down into its bottomless depths.

From somewhere far away, Madame Richborough screamed.



When we came to, all was quiet. The lamp and my lantern quietly burned as before on the round table. Mary was clinging to my arm, while Irene Adler stared at the ceiling; Cartwright was sprawled forward upon the table, and Professor Moriarty was stooped down on the ground.

I took the lantern and went all around the room. Madame Richborough was gone.

If what we had just witnessed had been an illusion, it had been exceedingly convincing. But if it had been real, then it defied all explanation. I looked at Irene Adler, hoping that she might shed some light, but she appeared to be struck dumb, as did Professor Moriarty. Only Cartwright seemed to still have his wits about him.

"Do you think that Madame Richborough has crossed over to the spiritual realm?" he inquired.

"I don't know," I replied. "But I doubt it."

A thorough inspection of the room confirmed that the madame was no longer present. Neither was she in the hallway. But a different figure did present itself there: Brunton. He held a lantern aloft and looked at us in astonishment.

"What's going on here?"

"Madame Richborough has vanished," I explained. "The details must wait. Where is the nearest exit?"

Brunton brought us around to the back of the manor, where we saw a black copse of oak trees. We lifted our lanterns high in the air and yelled out for Madame Richborough, and were answered by a feeble voice crying for help above us.

"There!" shouted Irene Adler, pointing at the oaks.

We could just make out what appeared to be the madame's legs poking out from among the branches; apparently she was holding on for dear life. Brunton hurriedly brought a ladder and after a great effort brought her down, but the experience had left her gaunt and haggard, a shadow of her former self. That she came away with only scrapes and scratches was nothing short of a miracle.

"Wait!" demanded Irene as Brunton began to help her hobble back to the mansion. "There is something I must unriddle, Brunton."

"Yes, Miss Adler?" he blinked.

"What were you doing there in the hallway?"

"I was passing by on my nightly rounds."

"That is a lie. You were the one who let Madame Richborough into the Chamber of the East of the East."

Immediately Brunton's visage became stone. It really was the only explanation, for it was the butler who held all the keys of Hurlstone. Unless Madame Richborough had become a master locksmith, she must have had help from Brunton.

"You have betrayed your master, Brunton."

Yet Brunton's expression did not change.

"I am not at liberty to speak of the matter."

"You mean to say you acted on Sir Musgrave's orders?" pressed Irene, a gleam in her eye.

Now the butler looked away. "I can say nothing of the matter," he repeated. "I ask your pardon."

"Then we must ask your master directly."

"Master Reginald has gone out."

"Where?"

"He is visiting Mr. Sherlock Holmes."

Brunton's hesitating manner made it clear that Reginald was hiding something of great import from us. I was not going to sit and wait until the morning light to pursue the mystery. But Madame Richborough was obviously not in a state to go marching down into the bamboo; neither was Professor Moriarty, who was sitting in the shadow of the oaks. Cartwright and Mary assured us that they would stay behind to look after the frail duo.

Irene Adler hoisted her lantern into the air.

"Then let us be off, Doctor!"

We left Hurlstone behind and walked into the garden. Beneath the moonlight, the lawn undulated like waves, and the bare shrubs which dotted it reminded me of shipwrecked icebreakers. The very air seemed frozen, and above us the sky was radiant with stars. As we tread through the midnight stillness, I felt as if I were in a place very far from home. I longed for the familiarity of my practice in Shimogamo, and for 221B Teramachi Street. Of the many cases which Holmes and I had tackled together, none was as strange as this one. It was as if the mystery itself had come to life and was seeking to devour the world.

Was the Musgrave mystery beyond our powers to solve, after all? As I pondered over that question, I glanced to my side at Irene Adler. Judging from her taut expression, she too must have felt that same uncertainty as keenly as I did.

"What do you make of it all?" I inquired.

"I must confide in you that I haven't the faintest idea," said she. "Let us restrict ourselves to what we may be certain of. Musgrave is hiding something. And Brunton is his accomplice. But where does that get us? The things we have witnessed defy explanation."

She shivered, her white breath pouring out into the cold.

"You saw the black hole, doctor?"

"I did."

"I have never seen anything which frightened me more. I can hardly master myself still."

"You must, Miss Adler. You are the only one we can rely on."

The words had hardly left my lips when I began to feel ashamed. Was I so pathetic that I could only rely on the charity of others? I heard Holmes's voice in my head, chiding me: *Think for yourself for once.*

A sinister air pervaded the bamboo grove. Our lanterns revealed only innumerable stalks of pale, glinting bamboo in every direction, beyond which lay only impenetrable darkness. Painstakingly following the red threads which the stable-boy had tied to the bamboo, we arrived at the hollow in which Holmes's hut lay. But the hut was a deserted shell. The fire was out, though the pungent scent of mutton curry still lingered in the pot.

I have a moon gazing appointment with William and a bottle of libations, Holmes had said after the seance.

Our encounter with William swam into my head: those curiously limpid eyes, and the voice which had seemed to rustle the bamboo. Supposedly he lived somewhere within the grove; I assumed that Holmes and Sir Musgrave must have gone directly to his dwelling place.

Irene Adler suddenly looked up into the trees, casting the light of her lantern into the trees.

"Did you hear Holmes's laughter just now?"

"No, perhaps it was the wind."

"Let us go deeper, Dr. Watson."

"Not so fast, Miss Adler. Do you remember how many people have gone missing in this very grove? Never mind finding Holmes, we will be lucky to find our way out before dawn!"

At my words Irene Adler removed from the knapsack slung from her shoulders what appeared to be a small tape measure: another of her trusty detective tools, no doubt. From it she unspooled a sheer thread and tied it around a nearby stalk of bamboo.

"I invented this for use in tracking down criminals. It will show us the way back."

And so we made our way into the forest, trailing the thread behind us over leaf-strewn hillocks and through dales. Yet our lanterns illuminated only endless stalks of bamboo, extending as far as the eye could see.

"I hope Professor Moriarty is all right," murmured Adler anxiously. "He seemed pretty feeble when we left him."

The professor had not said a word since we left the Chamber of the East of the East. He had not shown the slightest sign of emotion either during the dramatic rescue of Madame Richborough or our ensuing interrogation of Brunton. It was as though he had retreated deep into a shell to be alone with his thoughts.

"It's my fault," sighed Irene. "He turned to me, in fear and distress. It was my duty as a detective to help him. And yet I could do nothing."

"There's no need to blame yourself."

"We are lost in the fog," said she, and there was a frustrated tone in her voice as she continued to speak. "Thus far I have been able to clarify nothing. Nothing has changed since twelve years ago. In fact I understand less, much less, than I did before. I have solved my share of intractable cases; I would not be ashamed to put my career against Holmes's. Yet what use is all that experience? None, absolutely none at all!"

I felt a gap of loneliness and isolation around her, the same gap which I had often felt around Sherlock Holmes. I had accompanied the great detective on many adventures, and with him at my side I always felt completely secure; never once had I doubted that he would solve the case. From time to time I would dabble in a little deduction of my own, but I cannot remember ever having proposed to take over the reins when Holmes was a little perturbed by the facts of a case. I only looked on idly as he struggled on alone, supposing that any mystery he could not solve was certainly out of my own reach: for I was but John Watson, the humble recorder of these adventures. It is a pretty thing to say that I believed

in the genius of Sherlock Holmes, but what it really meant was that I thrust all the responsibility onto Holmes and Holmes alone.

"I believe I understand the cause of Holmes's slump", said I. "I have depended too much on him. I expected him to solve everything. Whatever mystery imperiled our world, I never once doubted that he would set things right."

"But that is the role of a detective," observed Irene Adler.

"I think that he grew tired of having that responsibility foisted upon him," I replied, looking off into the bamboo. "As hard as it may be to believe, Miss Adler, Holmes has a heart too. He is not a calculating machine, or a god. I should have realized that."

Irene Adler was silent for a time.

"And yet I still believe in him," she said at last, with great effort. "Mr. Holmes will rise again. He is too great of a detective not to."

We had walked quite a ways, and yet the scenery remained unchanged; it was hard to tell whether we were making any progress or merely going around in circles. All around us the bamboo rose up like innumerable pillars in a weird shrine, and the leaves rustled and shivered in the wind. We had lost our bearing entirely.

"Where are you, Holmes?" shouted Adler into the darkness. Straining our ears, we heard an answering, "Hullo!" somewhere off in the darkness. Adler's face flushed with excitement in the lantern light.

"Holmes! Can you hear us?"

I added my voice and was rewarded with another faraway response, in an incongruously carefree tone.

"Here we are!"

"This way! Come on!" cried Irene Adler, bounding forward into the trees.



We emerged into a grassy expanse which sloped downward into a round crater, crowded all round by the thick bamboo. The dry grass underfoot faintly reflected the silvery light of the moon and stars. From the center of the crater rose up a brick tower which vaguely resembled a *takenoko*, and its foot was a bonfire where Sir Musgrave, Williams, and

Sherlock Holmes sat drinking sake. They turned to look at our approach, their faces red both from the heat of the bonfire and from their imbibing.

"Seats for two!" slurred Holmes, waving around a marshmallow on the end of a twig. "Come, have a sup and share the view!"

William spread out a blanket for us, and Irene and I took our seats. Sitting around a bonfire beneath the starry sky reminded me of camping in the backyard as a boy with my late brother.

"You have found your way to the launching pad of the Moon Rocket project," stated Sir Musgrave, looking upward at the tower. "My father Robert ordered this clearing be cut and this edifice constructed here. When he died the project was halted, and most of the machinery was carted away; now only the tower remains. One likes to be reminded that there was once a dream here, once. Now it serves as William's abode."

"It's far too much space for one man," remarked William, gazing across the field into the bamboo. His hair poked out from beneath his odd, floppy hat, matched by his unshaven chin. Yet there was something to his leisurely air which kept one from dismissing him as a simple bumpkin. Of the five of us, he alone seemed to inhabit almost a different time and space.

Irene Adler's attention was drawn to him as well, and as she uncertainly nibbled at a marshmallow she observed the strange groundskeeper in the corner of her eye.

"Have we met before?" she asked eventually. "Your face seems familiar to me."

"I'm sure it's a trick of the mind," he replied, claiming that he hardly left the bamboo grove; even the staff of Hurlstone hardly ever saw him. But this did not convince Irene Adler, and she continued to study him intently.

"This is the life, eh, Musgrave?" said Holmes emphatically, draining his sake cup. "A man needs relaxing times like these. Too often these days there's something or other clamouring for one's attention. Sherlock Holmes must solve mysteries! John H. Watson must write detective stories! Reginald Musgrave must attend to his estate! And so on. That is why we have lost sight of the true meaning of life."

"And what is that?"

"What do you think? Friends, bonfires, and drinking sake beneath the glorious full moon!"

Now that I think upon it, perhaps Holmes's amiable conversation with Reginald had been Holmes's way of encouraging his old friend.

An air of calm, or perhaps resignation, lingered around the curious gathering. Sir Musgrave must have realized when Irene Adler and I emerged from the trees that his plan had failed. And Holmes, who must have had an inkling of what Musgrave had been planning, was now standing by his friend, just as William had asked him to do.

"Something strange occurred not long ago in the Chamber of the East of the East," said Irene Adler. "We've come to inform you about it."

"I see. And Madame Richborough?" asked Sir Musgrave in a quiet voice; from his manner it was obvious that he knew the game was up.

"She is still in one piece," replied Adler.

Sir Musgrave nodded faintly.

"I know that it was you that arranged it all," Adler pressed on, her gaze resolute. "But I don't understand the rest."

"Of course you don't, Miss Adler," said Sir Musgrave reassuringly. "I did not invite you to expose Madame Richborough. I invited you so that I could ascertain once and for all that this mystery which has plagued us for so long is beyond the capabilities of any detective to solve. By no means was your performance inadequate. Even Holmes could not have unraveled it."

"Don't be so sure, Musgrave," said Holmes, warming his hands at the fire.

A flush of astonishment rose to Sir Musgrave's cheeks.

"You mean you have solved the mystery?"

"I do not solve mysteries," said Holmes matter-of-factly, looking into the flames. "I am retired, you know. I simply observe what is around me. I looked, and the mystery lifted like fog beneath the morning sun. It is no wonder that Miss Adler has had such a rough time of it; the nature of the mystery is such that the more diligently you probe, the more impenetrable it becomes. It is from we detectives that mysteries are born, you see. In truth we need neither logic, nor science, nor spiritualism. We ought to simply accept the unknown as it is: that is all we can do."

We gazed at him, mystified. In his quiet certitude we saw the Holmes of old restored to life once more.

"Mr. Holmes," said Irene Adler, in wonder. "Do you mean to say that you have also solved the case of Miss Rachel's case from twelve years ago?"

"I should not like to call what I did 'solving', exactly."

"Then tell us, where did Miss Rachel go?"

"She didn't go anywhere. She is still in that room."

Sir Musgrave asked very quietly, "How do you come to that conclusion, Holmes?"

"Because when you have eliminated the impossible, what remains must be the truth. No one saw her leave the grounds, and yet neither did the search unearth any evidence that she had met an untimely end. Miss Rachel did not leave Hurlstone Manor that day. Now turn your attention to what we witnessed in the Chamber of the East of the East: the piano playing her favourite melody; the phantasm of the girl herself; and the moon—her favourite celestial body, as I understand it. You often observed the night sky alongside her in your youth, did you not? All of these factors naturally led me to the truth. Miss Rachel has fallen into a deep sleep in the Chamber of the East of the East. What we saw during the seance tonight was a dream: Miss Rachel's dream."

"Just a moment, Mr. Holmes," objected Irene Adler with a frown. "The Chamber of the East of the East has long been known as a hotbed of strange phenomena. Even supposing your wild theory that what we witnessed was Miss Rachel's dream is true, she disappeared just twelve years ago. How do you explain everything that happened before that?"

It was plain that the incident from twelve years ago must still be at the forefront of her mind. When she and Mary had had that freakish experience, Miss Rachel had been with them.

"An astute observation," smiled Holmes. "The Tale of the Bamboo Cutter is a metaphorical retelling of the origin of the chamber. What if all of the fantastical things which have been seen in this room over the ages were dreamed by someone sleeping in this room? For the past twelve years Miss Rachel has slept in this room. Who was it that preceded her? What did they dream of?"

"The bamboo grove..." whispered Irene Adler, as if in a trance.

Our gazes converged on the keeper of the bamboo.

"You are of the Musgrave line, William," said Holmes. "And for a very long time it was you who slumbered within the Chamber of the East of the East. When Miss Rachel fell into her sleep, you awoke in her stead."

In the flickering firelight, William's face eased as though a burden had been lifted from his shoulders.

Was it I that was dreaming? I felt as though the grassland which surrounded the bonfire had separated from the earth and was floating up into the heavens. The old world I had believed in was crumbling away, and a new one was rising to take its place.

"Your conjecture is correct, Holmes," said Reginald Musgrave. "I hardly expect any of you to believe it, but William is the brother of my great-grandfather."

"Your father Robert did not believe me," said Williams, staring into the flames. "He thought me a common huckster who sought to usurp the Musgrave name for my own benefit. The world has changed much since I fell into my slumber in the Chamber of the East of the East, and he cast me out into it without so much as a penny to my name. But I have loved the bamboo since I was a boy, and had learned much in the way of caring for it. A kindly gardener took me in as an assistant, and so I traveled all across this country. The years passed in the blink of an eye, and when I at last returned to Kyoto last year I learned that Robert Musgrave had died."

William turned to look at Reginald.

"That was when I learned of the disappearance of Miss Rachel."



"I found Robert Musgrave's conduct baffling," continued Holmes, staring into the fire. "He expelled William from Hurlstone without conducting even a cursory inquiry. And he resented my presence at Hurlstone; not only did he seal the Chamber of the East of the East up tight, he even pressured the boarding school to silence Miss Adler. It was as if he sought to bury any possibility that his daughter would be found. He was clearly frightened of something, and I suspected on several occasions that he might be responsible in some way for her disappearance."

"My father hated the rumours about the chamber," said Sir Musgrave. "They have circulated for many years, and when my father heard the staff gossiping he flew into a rage. Nothing but fairy tales and superstition, he said. *Progress and harmony for mankind*: our father drilled the motto of our house into us. A high-minded ideal, to be sure, yet one wonders

whether it might not really be a statement of individual ambition, to shape the world as one deems fit. My father despised the unknown, the ungovernable. When Rachel disappeared into the mist, he must have seen it as a great betrayal, one that he found impossible to forgive."

Robert Musgrave died eleven years after Miss Rachel disappeared, and hardly had he been laid to rest when William came to Hurlstone, late in the summer of last year. No one realized that he was the same man whom Robert had drummed out over a decade prior. But his credentials as a horticulturist were beyond question, and Reginald quickly resolved to hire him to tame the overgrown grove at Hurlstone.

"At first I hid the truth from Reginald," said William. "I agonized over whether to confess to him, but over many a conversation here in the grove I came to believe that he was a trustworthy man. He did not seem the kind of man who would chase me away as his father did. Above all he was tormented by the facts of the case which had occurred twelve years ago, and I felt it my responsibility to tell him the truth."

It had been a clear autumn evening, after the day's duties were done. The soft chirruping of crickets came from all around as William stood in the round twilight clearing, the same clearing in which we now sat. The brick tower loomed overhead, and the pale crescent moon hung like a sliver of bone in the indigo sky.

Reginald walked into the clearing. He had gotten along with William from the first, and he would often come to have a friendly chat. That day he struck up a conversation about the ill-fated moon rocket project which his father had pursued so obsessively, and how it had all begun with the disappearance of his younger sister twelve years prior.

"That was when I confessed the truth to him," said William.

"And did you believe him?" asked Holmes to Sir Musgrave, who shook his head.

"No. At first I couldn't. Rachel's disappearance brought on a wave of patronizing parasites who professed to know the truth of what had happened to her: reporters, diviners, amateur detectives...Madame Richborough and her spiritualist friends were among them, of course. But there was something about William that kept me from dismissing him as a petty charlatan. I searched the family records and found that indeed that my great-grandfather's younger brother had vanished under mysterious circumstances from the library. I even discovered William's diary and found within its pages a bookmark of pressed flowers which I knew Rachel had made; there is no question that she had been reading it before she disappeared."

Following Rachel's disappearance, Robert Musgrave had sealed the Chamber of the East of the East, allowing no one to go in or out. Soon the Chamber was forgotten, save the occasional mention in ghost stories. The night he discovered William's diary, Reginald ventured alone into the old wing and stripped away the boards nailing the door to the chamber shut. The Chamber of the East of the East was open once more.

"I believed what William had told me. I believed that for twelve years, Rachel had been sleeping in that sealed room." Reginald tossed another withered branch on the fire as he spoke. "And I understand now why it is that my younger sister was drawn to that room. It was not Father nor I who held up the House of Musgrave: it was Rachel. It must have worn on her, always having to play the perfect mademoiselle: a kind mistress to the waitstaff, an obedient daughter to our father, a devoted sister to me. She longed to get away from it all, and Father's plans to marry her off must have been the final straw."

The day after unsealing the Chamber of the East of the East, Reginald Musgrave headed into the bamboo grove. William was waiting for him, and together they began to devise a plan.

"I wanted to bring my sister back."

"With Madame Richborough as a sacrifice?" said Holmes with raised eyebrows.

Sir Musgrave looked away.

Holmes continued: "The Chamber must have its sleeper. For twelve years it has been Miss Rachel, and before that it was William. In order to rescue your sister, you intended to have Madame Richborough take her place. And so you ordered Brunton to let her into the room. Fortunately things did not go according to plan."

Sir Musgrave hung his head in shame, as did William.

"So you saw through everything then, Holmes?" interjected Irene Adler abruptly. When Holmes did not respond, she pressed on. "Why did you not act? You ought to have stopped this plot!"

"You intend to believe everything you have heard tonight, Miss Adler," said Holmes finally, leveling his gaze at her. "Then consider what it means. In order to uncover the mystery of Miss Rachel's disappearance, you must accept as fact the mystery of the Chamber of the East of the East. Yet the instant that you do so, you have ceased to become a detective. How can you hold on to your faith in truth and logic in the face of the existence of the unexplainable? What use is a detective when everything can be dismissed by a single word:

magic? That is why I abandoned the investigation twelve years ago. Like Robert Musgrave, I too buried the matter in silence, so that I could preserve myself as a detective.”

“And now you want me to do the same?”

“You never should have involved yourself in the matter. This is what you will say: tonight, you saw nothing, you heard nothing, it was a quiet night at the Hurlstone manor. Some mysteries ought not to be solved.”

Irene Adler glowered squarely back at Holmes. In the golden firelight her face betrayed disappointment, and rage, and sadness. Then her lip quivered like a child’s, and tears brimmed at her almond-shaped eyes, glistening as they trickled down her cheeks. I could not remember the last time I had seen such raw emotion.

“How can you expect me to forget what I have seen?” she said quietly, wiping the tears away with balled fists.

“Miss Adler is right, Holmes,” said Reginald Musgrave. “One cannot simply forget.”

He looked around the round clearing, then up at the black shadow of the launch pad behind him. Above us the moon glowed silently in the sky.

“In his last years my father was obsessed with his moon rocket project,” he began. “I understand his pain now. To him, the mystery of the Chamber of the East of the East was something that ought to be buried and forgotten in the mists of history, an old wives’ tale that ought never be spoken of again. Surely it would never have occurred to him that it would reach out and snatch away his own beloved daughter. He could not simply accept that it could not be explained. That was why he sealed the chamber, and expelled William, and silenced all who knew about it, and tried so desperately to forget. Yet did that solve the problem? Of course it did not. Rachel loved the moon so, and I believe that in his own way my father was trying to bring her back. He died, in the end, of a broken heart.”

At the end of his tale he fell silent, pain etched into his features. Not one of us could find the words to assuage him, and so we could only stare glumly into the crackling bonfire.



When Irene Adler and I returned to Hurlstone, Brunton was waiting to usher us in. The hands of the great clock in the foyer pointed to 3 o’clock. To our inquiry Brunton replied that Madame Richborough had avoided any great injury and was resting in her chambers; Professor Moriarty and Mary had also retired to their respective rooms. After answering

our questions, a probing look came to Brunton's face, but Irene Adler did not seem inclined at all to mention our interview with Sir Musgrave.

"Good night, Brunton," she said brusquely, and then mounted the stairs to the second floor.

Brunton's shoulders sagged as he disappeared down the hall.

"One more thing, Brunton," I called.

"Sir?" he responded, turning around.

"Did you really have faith that Sir Musgrave would be able to bring Miss Rachel back?"

I detected a flicker of hesitation on the butler's face.

"I did."

"Very well."

"Miss Rachel was a remarkable young lady. If there was any chance we could save her, I believed we must take it."

After he had taken his leave, I looked around the many displays that filled the dimmed foyer. The scale model of the Crystal Palace which had once attracted so many marvelling stares at the Great Exhibition glimmered in the moonlight like a fairy tale castle come to life.

All the greatest scientific achievements of the empire had been on parade at Robert Musgrave's Great Exhibition; it had been a national point of pride to raise aloft the banner of Progress and Harmony. How ironic then, that beneath the modern facade of the Musgraves was concealed the occult secret of the Chamber of the East of the East.

As I climbed the stairs I noticed that Irene Adler was paused at the landing. Her profile was bathed in the moonlight which streamed through the tall windows. She was gazing at the portraits of the previous heads of the Musgrave house.

"What's the matter?"

I went up and stood beside her, and realized that her gaze was fixed on one portrait in particular. It was painted in the classical style, and depicted two gallant youths standing on a lawn in an elegant garden. Beyond the foliage could be seen the grey shadow of the old wing of Hurlstone. The features of the young men shared not a few similarities, and I

suspected that they must be brothers. In another moment I grasped why Irene Adler was so enthralled with the portrait: the younger of the two looked quite familiar. With a slovenly beard upon the face, and a darker tint of the skin—

“I was sure when I met William that I had seen his face before,” said she, and with a deep sigh she listlessly trudged up the stairs.

Alone I returned to my room and buried myself in blankets, but the strange events of the day kept repeating themselves in my head, and sleep eluded me. Each time I closed my eyes I found myself once more in that bamboo-enclosed clearing with Holmes and the others, huddled at the bonfire like we were stranded on the surface of the moon.

Had they been telling the truth? What on earth was the Chamber of the East of the East? Both Sherlock Holmes and Irene Adler had been involved in the case of Miss Rachel’s disappearance twelve years earlier. And Professor Moriarty had known the Musgraves through his work. Was it really coincidence that we had all been brought here tonight? Or was there some unknown magic at work? It was as if the hole which had been bored into the world by Miss Rachel’s disappearance was there even now, drawn in by some dreadful attractive force all who had been there at its creation?

I roused myself up from my thoughts when a soft knock came yet again at the door.

“Mary?”

“Yes, it’s me.”

Her pale silhouette crossed the room and slipped into bed, throwing her arms around me and heaving a deep sigh. She must have been waiting for my return from the grove. Mary asked no questions, and I did not offer any answers. We simply lay there feeling each other’s warmth, and gradually all of those ghastly whirling notions faded from my mind.

Good night, whispered Mary tenderly.



Mary had already risen when I awoke the next morning. A servant brought in a basin of hot water, and after washing my face I opened the window and leaned over the sill, taking a deep breath of chilly air into my lungs. The early winter sky was crisp and unclouded, and the stunning bamboo grove stretched beyond the sparkling lawn.

In the light of a new day, the events of the night seemed like nothing more than a bad dream. Spiritualism, seances, the Chamber of the East of the East... How had I allowed myself to be taken in by such fanciful ghost stories?

On the rooftop of 221B Teramachi Street, Mrs. Hudson must be going through her usual dumbbell routine as she did every morning; bleary-eyed workers must be trudging up the stairs to their offices; at Shimogamo Shrine the chief priest must be solemnly offering up prayers in the serenity of the Tadasu Forest. The world went on as it always had.

Mary and Irene Adler called as I was finishing getting dressed. Irene's eyes were bloodshot, and Mary could not suppress her yawning.

"Should we call on the professor?"

"Let him be. He has not slept well for some days now; what he needs is rest."

Together we went down the stairs to the dining room, to which Sir Musgrave and Cartwright had preceded us. Both still seemed to be dazed by what had occurred the previous night; we greeted them and took our seats. Morning light shone through the wide windows and fell on the rolling lawns outside.

By and by, Madame Richborough arrived. "Good morning," she murmured, as though she might faint at any moment. She was completely transformed from the night before; her hair was tousled, her ashen face devoid of makeup, her cheeks hollow and sunken, her eyes glassy. Here was someone who had clearly lost her pluck and vigor; her experience last night must have broken something within her. She slumped into a chair and stared blankly in front of her.

Brunton came in and whispered something into Sir Musgrave's ear. Sir Musgrave nodded and with a curt, "Your pardons," swept from the room.

The rest of us stared anxiously at Madame Richborough.

"Perhaps the time has come to retire," she whispered. "I once was a real spirit medium. My powers were true; I could converse with the spirits as freely as I wished. But as my fame grew, my powers receded. Miss Adler is right. For many years now I have relied on deception and fraud to sustain my name. The Chamber of the East of the East was my last hope; by opening a gateway to the spiritual realm I hoped that my powers would return to me. But it seems in the end I was only deceiving myself."

Horror was evident on her face as she concluded, "I have learned my lesson. I will never tempt fate again."

"But what of our dream?" asked Cartwright dispiritedly.

"Dream?"

"Of a fusion of science and the soul."

"There are better things on which to pour your exertions. You might fall in love, perchance."

Just as the madame said this we heard the sound of many footsteps coming down the hall. As we glanced at each other, a troubled Sir Musgrave came through the door, followed by a troop of uniformed policemen led by none other than a grey-coated Inspector Lestrade. Tension filled the room.

Lestrade was astonished to see us.

"Why, if it isn't Doctor Watson! And Mary and Miss Adler, to boot."

"What's going on here, Lestrade?" I asked.

"I'm sorry to interrupt your breakfast, but as you can see I'm here on official business. Ah, and there is the madame." Lestrade cleared his throat gravely. "Madame Richborough, you are under arrest."



Our morning drama concluded without incident. All the while that Lestrade was giving her the usual cautions, Madame Richborough sat there meekly without offering a word of defense, a shadow of her former commanding self. Lestrade remained after she had been led off, and explained why the warrant had been issued.

"At Miss Adler's suggestion I quietly made a little investigation of my own," he said. The recent spiritualist fad had led to a proliferation of self-styled spirit mediums all over Kyoto, Madame Richborough being one of the most well-known. With influential patrons such as Lord St. Simon at her back, she established her residence at the mansion near Nanzenji, and what with holding seances and personal consultations soon was flush of money. But she also seemingly had a hand with some questionable establishments on Shijō Karasuma, and so with the urging of Irene Adler, Lestrade began to dig into her dealings. What he uncovered was a web of fraud, blackmail, and underhanded real estate acquisitions, and before long he had gathered enough evidence to bring her in.

"I'll admit that I thought she would put up more of a fight," said Lestrade with a frown. "But you saw how she came in as docile as a lamb."

"Well done, Inspector," said Reginald Musgrave to the official detective, who responded with a gratified bow.

"Your servant, sir. I am extremely grateful for your cooperation in the matter."

"I can only hope that this will put a lid on the spiritualist fad."

"I am afraid that this may only be the beginning of it. Lord St. Simon will certainly not let Madame's arrest go unanswered, not if his lawyers have anything to say about it. And as we well know she has many other friends in high places. Who would have dreamed that spiritualism would attract so many followers?"

Lestrade basked in his success, but the rest of us were clearly of the mind that the victory rang hollow. True, one of our immediate problems had been brought to a resolution. But who among us did that really help? Reginald Musgrave's little sister was still missing, Irene Adler now faced a great conundrum in her detective career, Cartwright's dreams of a scientific-spiritual union had been dashed, and Sherlock Holmes was determined to live out the rest of his days as a hermit. We had all of us been soundly vanquished by the Chamber of the East of the East.

"You all look exhausted," remarked Lestrade. "And what are you doing here anyways, Dr. Watson?"

When I informed him that Holmes had cooped himself up in the bamboo grove on the estate grounds, Lestrade's expression clouded.

"I suppose he is still angry," he said. "He summoned me when he learned that I had joined forces with Miss Adler, and called me a traitor. But what was I to do? As an agent of the government I must act in the public interest."

"Holmes understands that, even if he won't admit it."

"I hope you are right," replied Lestrade with a sigh, looking out the window. "I still believe that Mr. Sherlock Holmes will rise again. He cannot spend the rest of his life in a bamboo grove. He is too great a detective for that. Ah, but you know that better than most, Watson. Why, I remember—"

He paused mid-sentence and narrowed his eyes.

"Now what can that girl be doing there, I wonder."

Brunton had been stationed by the door, and now he approached the window. We all turned to follow Lestrade's gaze out the great window.

On a rising slope beneath the bright rays which bathed the broad lawn of Hurlstone stood a young girl in a white dress. Her arms were spread out to her sides, as if she were enjoying the simple pleasure of being alive, and as an onlooker I could not help but feel a smile tug at my face. The oak leaves sparkled as though they were made of pure gold, and the girl's breath puffed out pale white as she stood there upon the sea of grass. Here was a scene bright, and wholesome, and full of life.

"Mr. Musgrave, sir!" cried Brunton, his voice rising almost to a shriek, and simultaneously Sir Musgrave bolted from the room.



We ran after Sir Musgrave, through the foyer and out onto the lawn which was overlooked by the dining room. When we reached that side of the estate Sir Musgrave was already running up the slope, while Brunton waddled along behind him. From atop the hillock the girl watched them, her hands clasped at her breast.

"Is that Miss Rachel?" I gasped. "Is it her?"

"It's her, I'm certain of it!" said Mary. Irene Adler was struck speechless.

When he reached Miss Rachel, Reginald Musgrave paused, panting white clouds of steam. Brunton came up to stand quietly at his master's side, his face screwed up in what I might in other circumstances have mistaken for anger. Once Reginald had caught his breath he extended a hand to the girl and said, as best as I could make out, *Welcome home*. An astonished blush rose to the girl's face; only then I supposed did she perceive the vast gulf of time which separated them now. She was still a youthful girl of fourteen, as she had been when she vanished, but the intervening twelve years had left her brother's countenance lined and worn.

After a moment's pause she took his hand.

"I'm home," she said, smiling at Brunton, who covered his face in his hands and sobbed.

"Miss Rachel has returned," I said to Lestrade, who had caught up to us.

"Impossible!" he muttered. "It's been twelve years! Where has she been, and how has she survived all this time?"

"Magic, Inspector Lestrade," said Irene Adler in a dazed voice. "It can only have been magic."

As we murmured amongst ourselves, a steady stream of servants and housekeepers came out from the mansion. A few of them had served the house for many years, and some of those had met Miss Rachel before. An excited hubbub broke out when they saw Miss Rachel standing there, and they fairly pushed us out of the way to race to her side. In no time at all a crowd had gathered around her, and Brunton's bawling could scarcely be heard above the cries of jubilation.

Two figures appeared at the edge of the lawn among the bamboo stalks. One was Sherlock Holmes, and the other was William, and at a nod from William the pair began to advance towards the gathering.

Holmes detached himself from his companion and marched directly to us.

"Holmes!" I shouted. "Miss Rachel's come back!"

But Sherlock Holmes's face was grave. What could possibly weigh on him so heavily when the case which had gnawed at him for twelve years had finally been unraveled?

His answer, when it came, sent a shiver through us.

"Where is Professor Moriarty?"



The professor's room was empty, and there was no sign that his bed had been slept in. It felt as if we were walking through the still halls of an empty shrine as we hastily made our way to the Chamber of the East of the East in the old wing. The sun shone peacefully through the windows down onto the round table in the center of the room, on which Professor Moriarty's cherished walking stick had been placed.

"It seems our friend came here again last night," observed Holmes.

Beneath the stick was a hastily scrawled letter, which seemed to have been torn out of a notebook.

"It's to me," said Holmes, picking it up, and he began to read it aloud.



MY DEAR SHERLOCK HOLMES:

Do not be sad—you, or Dr. and Mrs. Watson, or Miss Adler—that I have chosen this path. I believe that, ever since I fell into my slump in the autumn of last year, my fate has been ordained—that every path has led me here, to the Chamber of the East of the East.

It is regrettable that I could not discuss with you the astonishing truth which I have discovered, but I am certain that this is the only way to save Miss Rachel. Please convey to everyone my heartfelt gratitude. I leave my remaining belongings at 221B Teramachi to young Cartwright; my collection of treatises on mathematics and physics will surely be of use to him. I could not have asked for a finer protege, and my only wish is that he devote himself to his calling.

Last of all, sincerest thanks to you, my dearest friend. You were like a ray of light out of the heavens, illuminating a path out of a dark and despairing world. I am afraid that I was not an agreeable neighbour, and we may not have solved our slumps despite our best efforts; yet I am sure that I will not forget the many hours we spent in conversation together at 221B Teramachi Street.

May good health and every happiness be yours. Farewell, my friend.

Yours faithfully, JAMES MORIARTY.

Chapter 4

The Resolve of Mary Morstan

Our return from Rakusei brought us back to a semblance of normalcy. At first glance our lives went on much as they had before. I continued to soberly run my practice and go out on house calls, while Mary concentrated on documenting the cases of Irene Adler. But something had definitely changed. We had intended to venture no further than the warm shallows, yet somehow we had found ourselves swept out to sea. Now the water was freezing, and beneath our feet there yawned a bottomless abyss.

During breaks in my routine I would find my mind wandering back to the events of that long day in Rakusei: Madame Richborough's seance, the sudden appearance of that mysterious staircase, the noontime light of that enormous moon, the clearing around the Moon Rocket launchpad, the arrest of Madame Richborough, the return of Miss Rachel...each of these things seemed like a fragment from a dream, and yet they had all happened.

Professor Moriarty never returned to 221B Teramachi Street.



On his return home Sherlock Holmes was met by a large crowd composed of members of the Victims' Association. They came from all walks of life: typists and clerks, young nobles, burly labourers, ladies of leisure and their retinues, old married pensioners, and so forth. But what united them all was a hatred of Sherlock Holmes.

"You call yourself a detective?" they howled, pressing at the door. "For shame!"

The crowd quickly attracted a mob of patrolmen, reporters, and curious onlookers. Inspector McFarlane ordered the Victims' Association to disperse, but instead they began to rail angrily at the newspaper men about Holmes's slovenly ways.

As they had worked themselves into the peak of their frenzy Holmes made an appearance at the door. With one glance of amazement at the pistol in the detective's hand Inspector McFarlane started forward to wrest it from him, but he was too late: Holmes raised the pistol into the sky and pulled the trigger.

"Ladies and gentlemen," said he to the stunned crowd; "Your anger is quite understandable. But in truth it is not me you are angry with, but yourselves. Lounger, you cry: laggard, wastrel! But are you not all the same? Did you not come to see me because you could not bear the consequences of your own faults? We are each of us loungers, laggards, wastrels: for we are all human. Let us learn to be kind to one another."

Holmes's sophistry only threw fuel on the flames. Now the enraged crowd tightened like a noose around him, backing him against the door.

"Enough excuses! Damn your kindness! We want you to do the job you promised!" they cried.

It was then that the door of the office across the street flew open, and a mellifluous voice rang out.

"Pray, calm yourselves!" called Irene Adler. "Whatever troubles you have, I shall solve them for you."

Holmes and Irene Adler had come to a colleagues' agreement before they left Hurlstone: Irene would shoulder the burden of solving Holmes's outstanding cases, and Holmes in his stead would work under her direction.



Late in December I visited 221B Teramachi Street for the first time since my return from Hurlstone. By the time I reached Holmes's abode, the fog had crept in, and all of Teramachi Street was dissolved in a sea of mist. The sun had not set yet, but the surroundings were obscured into a twilight shade, and as I looked up from the threshold I saw emitting from the blinds on the second floor a pale orange glow. Seeing that the light was coming from Professor Moriarty's old room I supposed that Cartwright must be up there, clearing out the professor's things.

"What a thoughtless thing to do," sighed Mrs. Hudson as she took my coat. "I suppose one must make hay while the sun shines, but surely it would be common courtesy to inform me before gallivanting off to a hot spring retreat. I am his landlady, after all!"

"You must forgive him; after all, he has been severely strained," I reassured her.

Matters would only become more complicated if it became known that the professor had disappeared, and so we had agreed amongst ourselves to feign that he was on holiday at Arima Onsen instead.

In front of the fireplace a pile of cushions had been erected upon a blanket, and atop this edifice Sherlock Holmes reclined sedately like an immortal sage. Over his night-dress he wore a grey gown, and in between puffs on a black clay pipe was eating a jam-filled biscuit. His eyes flickered open when I sat down on the settee.

"I tell you, Watson," said he; "That woman will be the end of me."

"I see that Miss Adler is not sparing the rod."

"It is no one's fault but my own for agreeing to it. I have not had a good night's sleep here for the past week. She has had me sneaking into opium dens in Demachiyonagi, and eavesdropping in Ohara-no-sato, and brawling with anarchists atop the aqueduct at Nanzenji...yes, what a week it has been."

"Yet I see there is a healthy glow in your cheeks."

"I admit that it is not a bad arrangement," yawned Holmes, taking another draw on his pipe. "Miss Adler provides the solution for every case. The work itself is easier than I had anticipated. Why, if I had known that I might have gone to see her sooner."

The Holmes of old would never say such a thing, for he was always looking for more stimulating mysteries to confront. Only by throwing all his energies into a case could he feel fulfilled as a detective; yet now he was perfectly content to leave everything in Irene Adler's hands.

"You realize that she is your rival, don't you, Holmes?"

"What about it?"

"Have you lost your sense of independence? Miss Adler may be a superb detective, but do not forget that it was you, and you alone, who uncovered the truth of the Musgrave affair."

"I believe we had agreed to drop the matter, Watson," said Holmes with an irritable gesture. "In the first place it was never a case, thus there was no reason for a detective to investigate it. The Chamber of the East of the East is an enigma, beyond the ken of man. One must let sleeping dogs lie, you know."

"Then you will abandon Professor Moriarty to his fate?"

With the return of Miss Rachel the mystery of her disappearance had finally been solved. But it had come at a cost, for the chamber had claimed Professor Moriarty in her stead. One disappearance had been replaced with another.

Holmes looked into the fireplace, his eyebrows arched.

"Rescuing the professor could not be simpler," he said. "Why, you could simply find another sacrificial lamb to replace him, though you know as well as I do that would solve nothing. We could blow the chamber up with explosives: now there's an idea! But I'm afraid that our poor friend would never see the light of day again."

Holmes got up and then collapsed down into his armchair.

"This problem is too much for us to handle."

"Is there nothing we can do?"

"Nothing. All we can do is put it from our minds."

What had happened at Hurlstone as yet remained a secret to the public. No one knew that Miss Rachel was back, and as long as Mrs. Hudson could be convinced to keep quiet, no one would notice the absence of the reclusive Professor Moriarty. Even if Madame Richborough were to stand in the dock and spill all that she had seen, no one would believe her.

There was a knock at the door, and who should come in but Cartwright.

"Good day to you, Mr. Holmes, Dr. Watson."

"Ah, Cartwright," said Holmes. "Making progress up there?"

Cartwright sank onto the settee and let out a sigh, looking quite exhausted. His chestnut hair was disheveled now, his cheeks covered with grime, and his eyes peered out wearily from behind his gold-rimmed spectacles. He had spent the better part of the last day wrestling with Professor Moriarty's collection of books and notes; and besides, the shock of the events at Hurlstone must have dealt a staggering blow to his psyche. There were the paranormal phenomena in the Chamber of the East of the East, yes, but also the arrest of Madame Richborough, his partner in the investigation of the spiritual; and worst of all was the disappearance of Professor Moriarty, his revered mentor. It was certainly a wretched string of misfortunes.

"You may as well give yourself a little more rest, Cartwright."

"I'm afraid I can't do that. The professor charged me with this personally. I've got to do right by him and pick things up where he left off."

"That may be so, but haste makes waste, you know. I'd hate to see you fall into a slump of your own."

"I wish he'd come back. Then everything would solve itself," lamented the young man, burying his face in his hands. "I still can't make head or tail of it all. Where does the power of the Chamber of the East of the East come from? It's far beyond any spiritual phenomenon I am familiar with. But Miss Rachel really has come back, so we can only assume that it must be real."

He paused suddenly as if some realization had just occurred to him.

"I did come across something quite curious."

"What is it?"

"The professor's bedroom is locked."

"That's all?" asked Holmes with a frown. "Why, I'm sure that Mrs. Hudson would unlock it in a flash."

"That's the trouble. Mrs. Hudson doesn't remember having set a lock on the third-floor bedroom. Professor Moriarty must have attached it himself. Strangest of all, the professor has been sleeping in the sitting-room, for the bed was dragged there."

"Then what is in the bedroom?" wondered Holmes.



"I am a little uncomfortable entering the professor's rooms on my own," Cartwright admitted as he swung upon the door.

These rooms had once been my own, but now they were quite changed, and there was a smell of mould and dust in the air as if they had not been lived in for some time. The room was simply furnished; besides a long, dark oaken desk which stood beneath the window, the only other furniture consisted of a small bookshelf, a blackboard, and a simple cot. The carpet was littered with piles of books which could not fit into the overflowing bookshelf. In the corner there was a crate into which a hodgepodge of works and awards testifying to the professor's sterling reputation had been carelessly discarded: a treatise on physics entitled *On the Dynamics of the Asteroids*; the best-selling self-help book *The Binomial Theorem of the Soul*; plans for the Moon Rocket Project; certificates of merit from the Physical Society; and a medal bestowed upon him by Her Majesty.

"His living is practically ascetic," remarked Holmes as he surveyed the room. "It seems the professor had little interest in anything other than physics."

Cartwright added coals to the fireplace and turned up the gas lamp, though the room did not seem much brightened. The view from the window was obscured by the hazy mist, painted red by the setting sun.

The desk was covered by a stack of large papers, each packed tightly with scribbled formulas and diagrams. It was clear that the professor had not abandoned his work, and as I imagined him sitting alone at that desk, fighting desperately to break out of his slump, I could not help but feel a harrowing pity for him.

Cartwright approached a door at the side of the room and showed us that its knob would not turn.

"This is his bedroom. Locked, as you can see."

The room which lay beyond that door was smaller than the sitting-room. During my time here it had contained my bed and dresser. But as Cartwright had indicated, it appeared that Professor Moriarty slept in the sitting-room.

"I wonder what he is hiding in there," mused Holmes, kneeling down to squint through the keyhole. "Ah, now this is interesting."

"What do you see?"

"Something that I think you will find quite fascinating, my dear Watson."

Holmes stepped aside to allow me to peer through. It was bright on the other side, which must have meant that the window to the rear garden was uncovered. I squinted, and a queer scene swam into view: packed rooftops, and crowded chimneys, and Big Ben towering in the distance. How could this be? I looked into a room, and yet I saw the whole city of Kyoto.

I pulled away from the keyhole and looked at Holmes, who nodded solemnly. He had not had cause to make use of his burgling kit in some time, and now he drew from it a thin metal rod which he inserted into the keyhole. In no time at all I heard a metallic click; in a slump Holmes may have been, but his particular skills had not atrophied. He stood and put his hand on the knob.

"Well, gentlemen," said he, "I trust you are prepared?" He opened the door, and together we stepped into the room beyond.

In the center of the room a number of tables had been pulled together, and atop them had been constructed a miniature city. The tabletops were hidden from view by wooden blocks large and small, and in the spaces between the tiny buildings there were broad rivers, clock towers, palaces, and green parks. The pastel light which streamed in from the back yard cast lifelike shadow throughout the tiny town. Little wonder that I had taken it for a distant view of the real thing through the keyhole.

"Amazing," I gasped. "When can he have found the time to build such a thing?"

As I looked over the town, though, I noticed something a little strange. There in the center of the city, along the Kamo River, was the majestic form of the National Diet Building, and near the foot of the nearby bridge was the lofty shape of Big Ben. But Minami-za was not at the opposite bank where I expected it to be. And once I had noticed that discrepancy the others made themselves apparent. The Kamo slithered and snaked through Kyoto in a queer fashion, and tracing its path upstream I did not see the confluence where the Kamo and the Takano merge. Neither did I see the complex which comprised the seat of government, or Her Majesty's palace where they would be in real life. Both Mt. Daimonji and Mt. Hiei were missing, and most striking of all I did not see a single temple or shrine.

Cartwright lowered himself so that the city was at his eye height.

"This must be a model of an imaginary city."

"Yes, the resemblance to Kyoto notwithstanding."

"It's fascinating. I could almost imagine this city really exists."

The smoke from Holmes's pipe wreathed the city like the fog of the Kamo River.

Professor Moriarty had been tormented by insomnia. Work can be a balm to the mind, and I suspected that the professor had shut himself up in this little room during those long sleepless nights and built this model city.

"I wonder if you both could give me a hand," said Holmes suddenly. He was looking at the ceiling with his eyes narrowed, and following his gaze I saw, hanging from the ceiling by a slender thread, a moon the size of a lemon.

"There is something written on the moon, and I should like to find out what it is."

Together with Cartwright I hoisted Holmes up. Holmes reached his hand up and brushed the moon with his fingers. It spun round and round, and as it did he scowled at it.

"London," he muttered.

"London? What is London?"

"I don't know. But that is what it says," Holmes returned in a mystified tone, watching the moon spin.



I departed 221B Teramachi Street and flagged down a hansom. As it rattled through the streets of Kyoto, I looked out into the sea of fog that covered the streets and fancied that I was driving through a city in a dream. The streetlamps which stood along the long wall of Her Majesty's palace burned quietly in the night like a row of jewels. My thoughts were fixated upon the model city we had discovered in Professor Moriarty's bed-chamber.

A wild fancy came into my mind—what if that city really did exist? That swirling river with its many bridges, and the great clock tower, and the streets with carriages flying up and down—what if that city were called London? And perhaps this imaginary city had a Sherlock Holmes of its own, with his own John H. Watson, living quietly at a place we might call 221 Baker Street owned by a landlady named Mrs. Hudson. And most importantly of all, Mr. Sherlock Holmes of London solved cases left and right, not even affected by so much as the shadow of a slump.

Holmes of London: the more I thought about it, the more fascinated I became with the idea.

Mary had not yet come home when I arrived at my practice in Shimogamo. I was too excited to turn into bed just yet, so instead I went into my office and turned on the light. It was then that I realized that the thrumming in my breast was in fact the desire to put pen to paper which I had for so long forgotten.

I rummaged in the cabinet behind me and took out my copies of Holmes's adventures. All told, twenty-four of them had been published in the Strand Magazine, and gathered into two compilations, entitled *The Victories of Sherlock Holmes* and *The Glories of Sherlock Holmes*. All of these stories, of course, took place in Kyoto.

As I flipped through the pages of my own work, I was reminded, not only of the excitement of those cases, but of the environment in which I had penned those words. Some I had written with the stench of Holmes's chemical experiments in my nostrils, others in a hotel room on the trail of an investigation, and still others had been written right here in this room, in the home which I now shared with Mary .

I replaced the manuscripts into the cabinet, then laid out a fresh sheet of writing paper on the desk.

Over the past year, Sherlock Holmes had tried and failed to solve all sorts of cases around Kyoto. Yet I did not think that meant his deductions or conclusions were worthless. “The Adventure of the Naval Treaty”, “The Man with the Twisted Lip”, “The Adventure of the Blue Carbuncle”—it would be a shame to allow Holmes’s brilliant conjectures in each of those cases to go uncelebrated merely because reality had not lived up to them. It was all backwards, I concluded.

If the world rejected Holmes’s deductions, why not create a new one worthy of them instead?

I thought for a moment, then wrote down a title:

THE RED-HEADED LEAGUE

I felt a sort of defiance well up within me. Last autumn Sherlock Holmes’s great failure in this case had signified the beginning of his slump. Now I intended to rewrite it into a blazing triumph, one that would strike a blow against the reality which had so cruelly trampled it down into the mud.

I felt a new life reverberating within my frame. My pen skated across the paper with an astonishing speed, like a ship with its sails billowing in the wind, and in its wake was birthed a brand new world: London, 221B Baker Street, Sherlock Holmes.

“What are you doing, my dear?” I dimly heard someone say, as if from a great distance.

I was abruptly pulled away from London and back into the real world. Looking up I saw Mary standing at the door to my office, wearing a coat and a look of concern. Apparently it was not only once that she had called my name, but I had been too engrossed in my work to notice that my wife had come back.

I roused myself up and looked at her with a dazed smile. “Why, Mary,” I said, “I’ve just begun a new adventure.”

“A new adventure?” she asked quizzically.

We stared at each other silently for a moment. Then Mary walked briskly in and lit the fireplace, adding coals. Only then did I realize that I had been working in the cold, and was forgotten to take off my overcoat. I laid down my pen and placed my benumbed hands to my mouth to warm them. Mary stooped down and planted a kiss on my cheek.

"I'll put on the kettle," she said, with a smile on her face.

After she had left the office, I looked down at the manuscript.

"Well," I muttered, and I took up my pen again.

Thus was born Sherlock Holmes—of London.



I believe that my readers remember the detective showdown which took place in the pages of the Daily Chronicle. Irene Adler's bold challenge over the title of the greatest detective in Kyoto concluded in her overwhelming victory. Perhaps some of those cases had been voluntarily yielded to her by Holmes, and perhaps Holmes was actively aiding Adler as an assistant—but in any case those facts were never made known to the public.

On the day the winner was to be announced, the broadsheet ran a special column on the victorious detective's many successes as well as an interview with Shinchō Yard's Inspector Lestrade, but what references there were to the defeated Holmes were surprisingly gracious. Even they must have been loath to gloat, so soundly had he been beaten. There could be no clearer signal that at long last the world had given up on him.

"I couldn't be more relieved," remarked Holmes as he scanned the paper. "It's easier to let go when one has lost so thoroughly. I've never felt so easy."

Following the conclusion of the duel, the Daily Chronicle sponsored a grand party at the banquet hall of the Langham Hotel in Kawaramachi Oike to celebrate Adler's victory. Neither Holmes nor I were quite self-effacing enough to attend the festivities, but Mary, as Irene's assistant, put on her best dress to go. Later that night in bed, she regaled me with all the details.

"The hall was so filled you could hardly move! It was like being in the Gion Festival."

The party was more than a simple celebration: it was the coronation of Irene Adler. Not only was it attended by newspapermen and the benefactors of Adler's work. The top brass of the Shinchō Yard, politicians, nobles, and everyone who was of any little fame at all in Kyoto was squeezed into that hall.

"They must all be quite eager to make the acquaintance of Miss Adler," I observed.

"Knowing a detective is sure to come in handy."

"I've never seen such a vain proceeding."

"I am not surprised."

"They mobbed Irene the whole time, and I could hardly tell one person from the next!"

Unlike Irene Adler, a former star of the stage, Mary was unaccustomed to the glamour of the spotlight. For her it had been a novel experience but not altogether an enjoyable one.

Suddenly she turned over to face me.

"I've just remembered, Lord St. Simon was there."

"Lord St. Simon?" I asked, rolling over myself to look at her. "Madame Richborough's patron?"

Madame Richborough's trial was set to begin soon after the new year. As prolific and influential as she was, her arrest had sent a shockwave through Kyoto. "They're trying to keep spiritualism down!" claimed some, and using that momentum Lord St. Simon energetically led the movement to free the madame, raising funds and arranging for the best lawyers to defend her which money could buy.

"Why would he have been invited?"

"He wasn't, of course. He forced his way into the hall."

Mary and Irene had been at the center of the crowd when Lord St. Simon made his entrance. Calmly pushing aside the throng, he regarded Irene with a familiar air.

"Splendidly done. Truly, Miss Adler, I am impressed!"

Lord St. Simon was a pale man with a high nose, and his evening dress was impeccable. He wore a snow-white waistcoat and a gleaming pair of patent-leather shoes. From a distance his careful appearance made him seem boyish, but in truth he had already passed forty. Strands of white were peppered through his hair, and on closer observation his complexion showed the signs of his age.

Irene introduced her companion to him, but he only made a small noise and nodded barely, not deigning even to glance at Mary. It appeared that of the two he regarded only Irene as an equal, garrulously praising her work; his breath was not worth wasting upon a mere assistant.

"I am here today to express my profound gratitude," said he, "for I hear that you had some hand in the detainment of Madame Richborough. You have aided me extremely, then, for I too had been swindled by the madame."

It was quite difficult to take him at his word, however, for it was apparent that he had gained much by supporting Madame Richborough. His funding of her defence must be as much to protect himself as her.

"You are very magnanimous, Lord St. Simon," said Irene. "Few would be willing to defend someone by whom they have been cheated."

"I am not without sympathy for Madame Richborough, after all."

"I understand your meaning."

"Deception must not go unpunished, and yet I do not think that her actions were taken entirely out of malice. Her actions have aided many. The least we owe her is a fair trial, I think. Would you not agree?"

"Entirely. The law must always be impartial."

"How glad I am to have met you, Miss Adler!" said Lord St. Simon with a broad grin, nodding with an affected enthusiasm. "Coming across a great detective is like finding a precious jewel in the street. I hope that your career will be long and prosperous!"

And he strode off the way he had come, sweeping the crowd out of his way.

Mary was astounded. To her Lord St. Simon had seemed almost like a talking automaton, for not a single glib word of his had the ring of plausibility. And when he had turned to go, the smile had vanished from his face instantly.

Looking to her side, she saw Irene Adler's piercing eyes watching him depart, and heard her spit, "Coward!"



For the last few weeks of the year, the Watson household was the very picture of tranquility.

I shut myself in my office and wrote of the adventures of Holmes of London, while Mary tore herself away from her desk to attend her charity committee meetings again and visit the household of Mrs. Cecil Forrester where she had once been employed as governess. At night we would talk about that day's writing in front of the fireplace in the sitting-room. Our relationship felt like a boat that had escaped the horrifying rapids by the skin of its teeth and was now floating placidly upon the calm lake beyond. There could hardly be a more peaceful way to greet the new year.

The Red-headed League—the curious tale of an organization which allowed entry to only the most fiery-headed of men. The Blue Carbuncle—an adventure involving a goose and the most valuable gemstone found within its stomach. The Man with the Twisted Lip—in which the secret of an opium den and an extraordinary beggar is revealed. Holmes's brilliant deductions played a paramount role in these tales, of course, but I would be remiss not to point out my own invaluable role in polishing rough stones into flawless gems.

At first Mary was unsure what to make of this strange Holmes in a strange land, but as she flipped through the pages her opinion began to shift. Fantastic though the setting may have been, she could not but recognize that each of these stories was a masterpiece of the detective genre. Having earned my wife's seal of approval, I rapidly gained confidence in my collection of London-based stories.

"London, really!" Mary could not stifle a smile as she flipped through the pages. "At first I couldn't believe what I was seeing, but the more I read the more I could almost believe that this London really does exist. What a curious thing it is."

Our first shrine visit of the new year was to Shimogamo Shrine. It was a bright, clear morning, and on our way there we passed many *kadomatsu* basking beneath the glorious sunshine. It was refreshingly cool in the Tadasu Forest, and after praying at the main hall we walked back down the long shrine road, saying our hellos to acquaintances as we passed. The normally quiet gravel path was thronged with other worshippers here for their own first visits of the year.

"This will be a good year," said Mary to me encouragingly.

"I hope so."

"I'm sure of it. Think of what you've already written."

"But still I fear that Holmes of London is not ready to face the world."



Madame Richborough's trial began on January 15th.

At ten o'clock in the morning, I took a cab to Marutamachi Street and got out in front of the Royal Courts of Justice, which lay to the south of the royal palace. Across the dusty avenue, ancient trees towered proudly over the palace walls, and red-coated sentries with black hats stood watch flanking the imposing iron gates of Sakaimachi-Gomon nearby.

I had come to the Law Courts many times to observe trials in which Sherlock Holmes had had a hand, yet the steepled, white-stone edifice never failed to inspire awe. The interior was a tangled maze of corridors leading to innumerable offices and courtrooms.

I saw a few clusters of people in front of the gate, shivering in the cold and whispering in hushed tones. After I handed the fare to the driver and began to walk towards the gate, they all stopped talking at once. There was something unnerving in the way they stared at me, and I quickly crossed through the cab stand and into the vestibule, where as fortune would have it I ran into Inspector Lestrade. Following his arrest of Madame Richborough he had had no shortage of work; it was clear that his star was tied to Irene Adler's.

"Those are followers of the madame that you saw in front of the building," he explained as we traversed the corridors towards the courtroom. "She had the utmost reputation as a spirit medium, so you can imagine what an uproar this has stirred up among the spiritualists."

We entered the courtroom to find the gallery packed nearly to full. Irene Adler and Mary were already seated, and among the crowd I spotted Reginald Musgrave and Cartwright as well. I took a seat next to Sir Musgrave and scanned the crowd again, which was full of well-known faces. Among them I saw prominent spirit mediums, distinguished researchers from the Society for Spiritual Phenomenon Research, and critics of spiritualism from the scientific community, all testament to the intense interest in the trial.

Ahead and to the right I spotted Lord St. Simon. I had never seen him myself before, but his affected dress gave off aristocratic pomp in spades, so that he was impossible to miss. He was perusing a newspaper through his gold-rimmed spectacles with a look of boredom.

I turned to Reginald Musgrave.

"Are you acquainted at all with Lord St. Simon?"

"Indeed. He and I have known one another for a long time," he replied, looking at Lord St. Simon. "A courtroom is the last place I would have expected to meet him."

Madame Richborough appeared at the dock, flanked by two bailiffs. She wore a coarse grey garment, and her lank hair was tied up carelessly. I had not seen her since that dramatic night at Hurlstone, and it seemed that life in custody had drained her spirit, for she appeared considerably shrunken from before. She looked many years aged, even though it had been a scant two months since Mrs. Hudson and I visited Pondicherry Lodge and were duped by the madame's trick with the crystal ball.

The judge was seated in the bench at the top of the court, and to the right the jurors filed into their box. The clerk of the court stood and read aloud the charges: fraud, blackmail, unlawful acquisition of property. Madame Richborough was charged with being the perpetrator of a vast conspiracy, and considering the scale and complexity of the case the proceedings were likely to take some time.

"How does the defendant plead?" asked the judge.

"Not guilty," answered Madame Richborough listlessly. "I deny the charges. I am only a simple spirit medium."

I was taken aback by her plea. It seemed to me that for her the battle was already lost. Irene Adler and Lestrade had already gathered a plethora of evidence and witnesses; the prosecution would surely have little trouble in demonstrating that Madame Richborough had been at the center of those crimes. Surely the court would not allow any consideration of the spiritual realm to weigh in its decision. An admission of guilt would certainly predispose both judge and jury towards clemency.

But as the prosecution laid out the evidence, another possibility made itself apparent: Lord St. Simon was behind it all. Madame Richborough was merely an empty shell who did his bidding, and by portraying herself as a simple spirit medium she was encouraging the theory that this trial was an act of oppression against spiritualists everywhere. That would certainly inflame the movement in Kyoto, and even if Madame Richborough were to be sent to jail, her influence as a spirit medium would remain, and even grow.

At the end of the day's proceedings, after Madame Richborough had been escorted from the courtroom, a disturbance broke out among the onlookers. "Injustice!" shouted the angry protesters. "It's a farce!" The bailiffs instructed the mob to clear the courtroom to no avail, and soon the anti-spiritualists added their voices to the melee. I saw Irene Adler and Mary shouting something towards me, but their words were lost in the frothing din.

"What a mess," sighed Inspector Lestrade.

This is what Lord St. Simon wanted, I realized, looking around the room. But the instigator of the melee himself had already vanished.



The offices of the Strand Magazine occupied the fourth floor of a chic building in Shijō Karasuma. They had once been located in a soot-stained plaster building near

Kawaramachi Marutamachi, but the incredible success of the Holmes adventures had enabled them to move to the heart of Kyoto's glamorous business district.

The Shijō Karasuma intersection was a sea of mist and smoke as I made my way to the offices that day, jammed with pedestrians and carriages alike. The lingering New Year's spirit of good will toward men had faded, replaced with the more usual bloodyminded spirit of commerce.

No sooner had I pushed open the glass front door than a young woman at a desk near the back of the room called out to me.

"Doctor Watson!"

Miss Violet Smith was my editor. Her desk was at a wide window overlooking the intersection, buried within a mountain of books and galley proofs. The room was heated by a wrought iron stove, and in the almost sultry air, the usually rosy-cheeked Miss Smith was as red as an apple. She clutched three manuscripts tightly to her chest: "The Red-headed League", "The Adventure of the Blue Carbuncle", and "The Man with the Twisted Lip". I had previously sent them to her to judge whether they might be candidates to be serialized. The chief editor stood beside her, passing his hairy hand over his brow.

Perhaps not, I thought, looking at his expression.

"We might talk in that room over there," suggested the chief editor, taking me to a small adjacent room.

I sat in the armchair on one side of a long table, while the two editors sat on the other.

"We've read your submissions," said the chief carefully, "and are in agreement that they are excellent and original contributions to the detective genre. However..."

The facts of our subsequent conversation, and the chief's position, are these. Holmes's slump had compelled the indefinite cessation of his adventures in the Strand Magazine, but the series remained extremely popular. There was great demand for its return, but it was real adventures which readers clamoured for, not some fictionalized recreation in a made-up town called London. The publication of these new adventures would only cause admirers of Holmes to turn away, and the franchise would be finished. It was the opinion of the chief that to run such a risk would be unacceptable.

I left the building and lost myself in the crowds of Shijō Karasuma.

The crowds were dreadful, and simply crossing the street was a life-and-death endeavour. I waited for a crowded stagecoach to pass by before threading between the stream of carriages, after which I walked east down Karasuma Street. Looking south I saw, rising through the mist which lay over the city, the tall brick silhouette of Kyoto Tower.

I turned and wandered into the alleys.

How disappointed Mary will be.

I decided that I had better keep this from Mary for the time being. I could not pretend that I was not disappointed that Sherlock Holmes of London had been rejected. But at the same time I had also anticipated that this might happen. Thus far, all the things that had been published under the name John H. Watson had been, no matter how embellished, records of fact. I could not blame the editors for being bewildered by the sudden appearance of this new world called London.

I had been writing at a ferocious rate since the close of the previous year. Each new tale I finished added another layer of realism to London, and eventually I began to feel as though my recollection of the city was real. Whenever I would take a stroll to work out how to arrange a story, I would vaguely see the features of London superimposed over the familiar streets of Kyoto. Each time I turned a corner, I half-expected to find that I had blundered over the borders of reality into London, and that if I were to hail a cab to 221B Baker Street, I would find Sherlock Holmes at the height of his powers, never having known the lows of a slump.

My stroll took me into Nishiki Market. Beneath the arcade roof, shoppers and tourists jostled at the narrow shops closely packed along the street, and merely passing through was a difficult task. I was so preoccupied with my thoughts that I nearly ran into a man who appeared suddenly out of a narrow alley.

"Excuse me, sir," I said, just avoiding a collision and proceeding on my way.

I had taken no more than a few steps when I heard the man say behind me, "Why, surely that is Watson?"

He hurried up to me. He wore a fine black coat, his top-hat shiny and his thick whiskers waxed. I did not care for the familiar way he grinned at me, and seeing my confusion he tapped me on the shoulder.

"Come on Watson, tell me you haven't forgotten your old chum?"

“Stamford!”

“I’m wounded, really!”

“Forgive me, old friend. But I must say you’ve changed considerably.”

“Many things have happened since last we met. Life is a strange thing; if I recall, it was precisely here at Nishiki Market that I ran into you, newly returned from Afghanistan.”

The memory was fresh in my mind, as if the intervening ten years had only been ten days.

“You were a lonely man in those days,” said Stamford, giving me another light tap on the shoulder. “I remember that a simple tap just like this sent you into a paroxysm of joy. I took you down to the dissecting-rooms afterward to meet Sherlock Holmes, and from that day on it was all smooth sailing after that for you. Surely I deserve some credit for that! Yet I haven’t made a solitary appearance in your writings since ‘A Study in Scarlet!’”

There was something condescending about his manner, yet I could not counter his claim. For many of the events in my life—moving in with Holmes, the success of the Holmes stories to great acclaim, becoming a husband to Mary, opening my practice—I owed to Stamford, and yet I had not once remembered Stamford to thank him.

“You look like you’re doing quite well for yourself, Stamford.”

“Oh, I keep myself busy. It took a little time, but fortune at last deigned to smile upon me,” he grinned. “I haven’t seen any new stories from you in quite some time. What has Sherlock Holmes been up to? Once it seemed like you two had the world at your beck and call, but now Irene Adlai or whatever her name is seems to have snatched up the mantle.”

As I dithered for a response, Stamford glanced at his pocket watch. “Dear me,” he cried, “I must really be getting on to my house call! We’ll chat again some time, I’m sure.”

And so saying, he turned and strode off into the crowd.

I stood there in amazement for some time, feeling as though I had hardly gotten a word in at all. I recalled then a rumour I had heard from Thurston at the club near the Kōjin Bridge, about Stamford extolling a merging between spiritualism and modern medicine, and calling himself a “spiritualist physician”.

He’s a fervent believer in Madame Richborough, you know, Thurston had said.



From Nishiki Market I headed towards 221B Teramachi Street.

In the month since the events at Hurlstone, Irene Adler had unraveled all of the cases which Holmes had left to her, and in commemoration of her feat tonight we were holding a small gathering. As Mrs. Hudson took my coat in the hallway I heard a jovial noise coming from upstairs. Holmes's laughter was particularly boisterous.

"Holmes is in a good mood tonight, I see."

"He has every reason to be. That Victim's Association will trouble him no further. No longer must he worry about being strung up by his own clients. But Mr. Holmes has been working hard, running about at Miss Adler's beck and call."

The moment I opened the door to the second-floor suite, I was met with a glad cry of "Watson!"

Holmes was sitting with his legs folded beneath him in his armchair. Across from him on the settee were Irene Adler and Mary, and Inspector Lestrade was standing before the hearth. An array of refreshments which had already been greatly reduced was set out on the side table.

Holmes waved me over as he said, "I was just talking about Miss Adler and her turbulent manner of treating her assistants."

"I'll hear none of that, Mr. Holmes. Remember that you took on all those cases of your own accord. We needed to appease the Victim's Association, and swift action was the only way to do it. If I was brusque it was only in service to the solution."

"Yes, but disguising me as a carp?" Holmes remonstrated. "They nearly hurled me into Lake Biwa, you know."

"Didn't I arrive in time to prevent it?"

"What an interesting case that was!" said Mary with a little chuckle, shared by Irene Adler.

"I wasn't expecting you to be invited as well, Lestrade," I said.

"Holmes paid a call specially to Shinchō Yard to propose that we end our differences. I suppose with Holmes and Miss Adler having joined forces, there was no reason that our estrangement should continue. And so at long last I have returned to the fold."

By and by Mrs. Hudson joined the convivial gathering.

It had been a long time since 221 Teramachi had felt so cheerful. A fog of melancholy had surrounded the place since Holmes fell into his slump. But now, as I watched Irene Adler spar with Holmes, it was as if the fog had lifted completely. Looking through the clouded glass to the street below, I saw bundled-up pedestrians passing to and fro on the pavement past the light of the street-lamps and shop windows, their breaths pluming out white in the cold. Occasionally some of those figures would pause and glance up at the very window through which I was observing them, as if gazing at distant fireworks.

Ours was a paltry celebration in comparison to the festivities that had taken place at Langham. It was distinctly free of celebrities or noblemen or reporters; the warm room was filled with only those who would have been at Holmes's side even if he was not a famed detective. Yet the one person who had been most faithful to Holmes was absent—Professor Moriarty.

Mrs. Hudson brought in a large cake studded with red candles, setting it down on the table with a grunt. Holmes stood up and took out a matchbook, lighting each candle with great aplomb.

"A token of appreciation, Miss Adler. There are as many candles as cases that you lifted from my shoulders, with my gratitude."

After a moment's astonishment Irene Adler's face turned red. At Holmes's urging she blew out the candles to our applause.

"Well, well. I feel much better now!" said Holmes, standing up once more and rubbing his hands together. "I'd like to take the opportunity to give my thanks to the rest of you as well. Mrs. Hudson, thank you for putting up with my mulish, difficult tenancy for all these years, and restraining yourself on what must have been a number of occasions from throwing me out. Inspector Lestrade: I am sorry for severing our ties for my own selfish reasons. It was only due to your assistance that I was able to solve as many cases as I did. Thank you. Mary. I drew your husband into my slump, with which he has seen no end of trouble. Please accept my deepest apologies. And Watson. Without you, the detective Sherlock Holmes would never have been born. Without Watson, there is no Holmes."

My chest grew tight, and I found myself lost for words. In all my years working with him Holmes had never expressed his gratitude so plainly. The others seemed to share my emotion at his heartfelt words: Irene Adler, Mrs. Hudson, Inspector Lestrade, and Mary were all moved to tears.

"And now to close my remarks," said Holmes with a beatific smile. "Thank you, one and all. As of tonight, I am officially retired."



Holmes's announcement shattered the air of jubilation, and for a moment we were all stunned.

"I have already sent the announcement to the broadsheets, and I expect it will run in tomorrow's edition."

"Why didn't you speak to us first?"

"Because you would have tried to stop me."

"Of course we would!"

"You see? And so I kept my counsel."

There was nary a trace of regret in Holmes's cheery tone. He sounded like a schoolboy announcing he was off on his way to a picnic on Mt. Daimonji.

"I've contemplated this ever since I fell into this slump. Yet I could never make up my mind. I too possess sentimental qualities like any other human being, you know. When I secluded myself in the bamboo forest at Hurlstone, I must admit that I was filled with regret. But now I have none. Since returning from Rakusei, and with the assistance of Miss Adler in clearing up my remaining cases, I have made my peace with the idea of retirement."

"Do you mean to say, Mr. Holmes, that this is *my* fault?"

"I mean nothing of the sort. I am entirely in your debt, Miss Adler."

Irene Adler stood up and rounded on him.

"Mr. Holmes, I did not take on those cases in order to drum you into retirement. I did it to snap you out of your slump. What you have done is close to a betrayal. The Victim's Association has been disbanded at last—your return is before your very eyes! Why would you give up now? What of your duty to society as a detective?"

"I had given up that title a long time ago," said Holmes. "That burden rests on you now, Miss Adler."

Irene's burning glare rested on Holmes a while longer, but then she abruptly turned it upon me.

"Have you nothing to say, Dr. Watson? Or will you let your friend let things end in this fashion?"

But I did not know what to say.

Was stopping Holmes the right thing to do? His mysterious slump had lasted over a year now, and it had not been only he who had suffered; both Mary and I had experienced a great deal of pain. And for what? To gather material for my stories? To revive our golden age? To provide a service to society? Was not freeing Holmes from his duty as a detective the best decision we could make? Certainly there is more to life than detection.

"Dr. Watson!" Irene Adler insisted. "Why do you remain silent?"

"That's enough, Irene. Let him be," said Mary, standing up and interposing herself between Irene and me. "You don't know how they have suffered."

For a moment Irene Adler seemed to be cowed by this unexpected source of resistance, but she soon recovered from her surprise.

"I understand that you want to stand by the doctor, Mary..."

"I have stood by him. And I have seen how he has suffered, and I have had enough of it."

"And is that why you want Holmes to retire?" asked Irene Adler. A slight frown had worked its way onto her face, and she scrutinized Mary closely.

"So that's what you were after," she muttered after a moment. "You wanted Holmes to quit, and that is why you encouraged me."

Mary stared back at her and said nothing, which was as good as a confession. Yet she made no attempt to defend herself.

"I have no ill will against Mary," said Holmes. "It was I who made my problem Watson's, who put him in an impossible situation. All this time she has had to bear her indignation; it is only natural that it would boil over one day."

"And are you satisfied, Holmes?" asked Irene Adler after a short pause.

"I have hardly ever felt more relieved," said he.

"Then I will not detain you any further. Do as you wish," said Irene Adler curtly, and she walked briskly to the door. There she paused and turned to glare at Mary.

"But you, Mary, I cannot forgive."

And she threw open the door and swept from the room.



The next morning's edition of the Daily Chronicle carried the following article:

"Mr. Sherlock Holmes Announces Retirement

"Sherlock Holmes has officially announced his retirement at a press conference in his offices at 221B Teramachi Street. In a career spanning over a decade the well-known detective solved a remarkable number of cases of considerable complexity, but since the autumn of two years ago the activities of Mr. Holmes have seen a precipitous decline.

"In his remarks to the assembled body of journalists, Mr. Holmes admitted that his attempts to pursue his investigations had occasionally made those situations only more inextricable, saying, 'It is in the public interest that I have made the difficult decision to step down.' While expressing concern for the deterioration of public safety that we have seen on our streets, the detective also expressed confidence that the efforts of Miss Irene Adler, a woman of astonishing capacity and aptitude, would more than make up for his absence.

"After setting his affairs in order, Mr. Holmes intends to depart on a personal excursion to the South Pacific."

The news of Holmes's retirement sent a shockwave through Kyoto.

It was laughable to see many who had formerly jeered Holmes's struggles abruptly change their tunes. "It is true that he has fallen on hard times, yet it is unfortunate to see his career end so prematurely..." And so on. Despite their sudden nostalgia for his talent, not one of them had reached out with words of encouragement during his slump.

The papers were filled with retrospectives on his illustrious achievements of yesteryear. Reporters flocked to my office looking for a quote, but I was not in much of a mood to give them one. I felt as though a weight had been lifted from my shoulders and a hole had been opened up in my heart all at the same time; there was disappointment at Holmes for retiring, and in myself for having failed to stop him.

With the departure of Sherlock Holmes every eye was fixed upon Irene Adler. In deed and in name she was the inheritor of his formidable reputation as Kyoto's greatest detective. And yet it was she who regretted his retirement the most.

All the more reason, then, for her anger towards Mary.

But you, Mary, I cannot forgive.

Neither Mary and I expected her anger to subside soon, and our fears were confirmed a week after the announcement in the papers.

I was in my consulting-room putting my records in order, when a black blur flew down Shimogamo Boulevard past my window with tremendous speed, followed shortly by the horrendous screech of bicycle brakes being abused. I apprehended immediately that it was Miss Smith from the Strand Magazine. Hurrying down, I found her in a state of great exertion on my doorstep. It appeared she had raced here on her bicycle all the way from the offices in Shijō Karasuma.

"There's a pressing matter I must speak about with you and Mary immediately," she panted.

While Mary put the kettle on I led Miss Smith to the sitting-room which looked out on the garden.

"You'll be interested to hear that Miss Irene Adler has just paid a visit to our offices," said the editor with a grave frown. "She has dismissed one Mary Morstan as her biographer. And accordingly she has requested that we cease publishing the column known as the 'Casebook of Irene Adler.'"

"I see," murmured Mary. "I feared this might happen."

"The editing floor is in an uproar. Next month's edition is devoted to Irene Adler, and we were on the cusp of sending the galleys off to the presses. But we cannot simply ignore Miss Adler's wishes."

"She must be getting even with Mary," I observed.

"I can't blame Irene for being angry; after all, I have been using her."

Mary explained to Miss Smith how she had pressed Irene Adler into her campaign against Holmes.

"It was I who drove Holmes into retirement," she finished.

"No, Mary. It was his slump that was to blame. It was only ever a matter of time before he hung up his hat for good, and even he acknowledged it."

"Well, Mr. Holmes may have forgiven me, but I doubt Irene will."

A heavy silence settled upon the chilly room. Miss Smith sighed and gazed out into our garden. A gust of wind stirred up a flurry of snow, and for a moment a pale blue shadow settled over us as if the sun was blotted out.

I could see that Miss Smith was thinking very hard. Until just a little while ago there had been no limit to her ambitions. The roaring success of "The Casebook of Irene Adler" had more than compensated for the hiatus of the adventures of Sherlock Holmes. Each story that had appeared thus far had been a masterpiece, and a further nine pieces awaited publication in the pages of the Strand. Irene Adler's star only continued to rise, and it was widely anticipated that the collection of her stories which was due to come out in the fall would break publishing records. The editors of the Strand, including Miss Smith, must have felt like wild-catters striking black gold, with all of the ambition that comes with such a windfall: a second omnibus, a third, perhaps even a novel. How quickly those ambitions had crumbled.

Eventually Miss Smith spoke with an air of resolve.

"I will postpone the publications of the casebook until I have managed to persuade Miss Adler. But it is not all bad news. I believe this is our opportunity to reveal your new stories to the world, Dr. Watson."

"You mean Holmes of London?" I asked in astonishment. "I had gathered that the chief was not convinced."

"Things are different now. With the Irene Adler special on hold there is a wide gap in our schedule, and precious little time to fill it. It just so happens that Mr. Holmes's retirement has made him the talk of the town. You can leave the chief to me. Sherlock Holmes has retired in Kyoto; why not bring him back in London?"

"It will be the triumphant return of Sherlock Holmes!"



"The triumphant return of Sherlock Holmes..." murmured Sherlock Holmes admiringly to himself.

The chief editor of the Strand Magazine had given in to Miss Smith's pertinacity: the next month's edition would carry Holmes of London. The whole office was now engaged frantically in overhauling the layout from Irene Adler's special to Sherlock Holmes's.

Holmes was simply delighted when I dropped by at 221B Teramachi Street to tell him the news. He was particularly tickled with the new setting of London.

"A splendid idea," said he. "Moriarty's parting gift has turned out to be an unexpected bounty."

Three stories were set to be published in the issue: "The Red-headed League", "The Blue Carbuncle", and "The Man with the Twisted Lip". The unusual decision to publish all three at once was in part made out of necessity to fill up the whole special, but it was also something of a stratagem that Miss Smith had devised to pacify the devoted readers of crime fiction who might grumble about the new setting. Anyone who did not recognize this as part of the true Holmes canon would be overwhelmed by the sheer volume, she reasoned.

"The revival of your writing career is at hand, Watson."

"Perhaps so. But it's Mary I am worried about. She and Miss Adler have not spoken since the night of your retirement. Miss Adler has dismissed her as a biographer, and she blames herself for the whole affair, you know. I only hope that they can be reconciled."

"You and I had our share of quarrels."

"That's quite true."

"What is an argument but evidence of friendship? There's nothing to be worried about," Holmes shrugged. "Miss Adler will come around sooner or later."

Now that the uproar from his retirement had died down, Holmes was busy scouring his quarters clean. Heaps of books and miscellanea dotted his room like an archipelago floating in the Pacific: thick scrapbooks filled with newspaper clippings, magnifying glasses, tape measures, a burgling kit, chemical vessels. Scattered about were a plethora of mementos from his past cases: a medal from Her Majesty, a shriveled monkey's paw, weird and exotic carved sculptures, a perpetual motion machine created by a reclusive inventor.

"It all seems like a dream, now," remarked Holmes as he glanced around the room. "Was I really such a well-known detective?"

"Of course you were. Think of all the cases you solved."

"Holmes sat down in his armchair and lit his pipe.

"I haven't the slightest idea now how I was able to do all of those things. I remember how topsy-turvy things were, and the supreme confidence I possessed in those days. But now it seems to me that everything happened by coincidence. For brief moments in time, the entire world happened to revolve around me. I cannot shake the feeling that all my ability and effort had nothing to do with the final outcome."

He did not look sad, neither did he seem to be trying to rationalize the past. He seemed to be genuinely mystified that he had once lived through such a golden age.

I sympathized with his feeling. At the height of his powers Holmes had been almost superhuman; sometimes I had the perverse impression that the only reality that could possibly exist was the reality that he envisioned. If, as he now mused, that power transcended ability and effort, then all of our efforts to rehabilitate him had been in vain.

"Tell me, Holmes: do you really intend to leave for the South Pacific?"

"I did say that at the press conference, didn't I? I had only meant it as a jest, but now the idea is becoming more attractive to me. I am sick of the city, and crime, and of the fog that hangs over the Kamo River. A deserted little island would be just the thing. No cases to solve, for one."

He looked at me with a twinkle in his eye.

"Why don't you come along?"

"You know I couldn't," I blurted out in astonishment.

"I was joking," he chuckled. "You have your practice, and Mary to think of. And now you have the sacred duty of writing the Holmes of London adventures. I'm happy for you, Watson. I am. I will go to the South Pacific alone, where I will have all the time in the world to ponder how to spend the rest of my life."

For a brief moment I felt the kiss of the tropical sun brighten the room. Faraway islands, and open blue skies, and coconut trees, and white sands, and lapping waves: a world less suited for Sherlock Holmes I could hardly imagine. Yet in that moment I could picture him wearing a straw hat in a warm breeze, striding along the endless white sands.

Mrs. Hudson appeared at the door.

"You've a visitor, Mr. Holmes."

Holmes frowned and waved dismissively.

"I am a detective no longer. Whether they are a reporter or would-be client, tell them to go away."

But Mrs. Hudson did not move from the doorway.

"Well, I'm afraid I can't do that, sir. Not to Miss Rachel."



We had not seen Miss Rachel since her dramatic reappearance last year. Our first encounter had hardly been an ideal opportunity to converse with her. For one, all of Hurlstone had been in an uproar, and besides we had to deal with the great shock of Professor Moriarty's vanishing. And for Holmes it had been far from a satisfactory resolution to the case that had nagged him for twelve years. He had practically fled the estate soon afterward.

Mrs. Hudson soon reappeared at the door, followed by Rachel Musgrave.

"Thank you for taking time out of your busy schedule, Mr. Holmes."

"I am not busy in the slightest. My hands lay idle, now that I have retired from the profession. Pray take a seat," replied Holmes languidly, and he indicated the settee in front of the fireplace.

The twelve years she had spent within the Chamber of the East of the East had left no visible impression upon the appearance of Miss Rachel. She wore a plain white dress, and looked an unremarkable girl of fourteen like any other, like Mary and Irene Adler had been in their boarding school days. And yet there was around her a kind of supernatural aura, as if her physical being was surrounded by a hard, transparent shell.

"Allow me to express my gratitude, Mr. Holmes."

"I hear you have moved to the city."

"That is correct. Upon your advice I have taken up residence in a villa in Karasuma Oike."

"A wise decision. After all that has happened I believe it is better that you keep your distance from Hurlstone. You will soon find city life the most natural thing in the world."

There was a tender note in Holmes's voice, and it was apparent that Miss Rachel meant a great deal to him. She was not just the younger sister of his schoolmate, she was the girl that as a brash young man he had failed to save.

Holmes chatted with the young lady about how Reginald was faring, and waxed poetic about some old school doings, and regaled her with an amusing account of how he had constructed his hut in the Musgraves' bamboo grove last year. I supposed he meant to put her at her ease, and by the time Mrs. Hudson brought in the tea her nervous expression had softened.

"So Mary is your wife?"

"Yes. We first met when she came to seek Holmes's assistance."

"I'm so glad that Mary and Irene are doing well," said Rachel with a smile, though it quickly dissolved into a frown. "What a dreadful ordeal I put them through. When I found William's diary in the library, and read the addendum in the Tale of the Bamboo Cutter, I felt a call from the Chamber of the East of the East. I only ever invited them to the tea party because I thought they would help me carry out my plans."

Rachel stared at the fireplace in silence. She seemed to want to say something, but whatever it was she was unsure how to broach the subject. Rather than press her, Holmes simply stared at the flames with her.

After a moment, Rachel said in a small voice, "I still don't understand what happened to me."

Those twelve years she had slumbered in the Chamber of the East of the East had passed like a single night for her. Whatever she had experienced during that long night had faded from her memory in the light of day.

"I remember walking up that mysterious staircase. And something must have happened when I reached the top. But I hardly remember anything at all. That chamber has been here since the time of the Tale of the Bamboo Cutter, lurking within Hurlstone like a curse. William was bewitched by it, as was I, and now it has taken Professor Moriarty. What do you think, Mr. Holmes? Why does such a thing exist in our world? And what is its true nature?"

"You mustn't trouble yourself with those questions," said Holmes sternly. "Now that you have been returned, you need only concern yourself with the question of how you will live the rest of your life."

"But it frightens me, Mr. Holmes," said Rachel, leaning forward. "Sometimes my mind becomes confused. Sometimes I wonder whether I really have come back."

Even having left Hurlstone behind and moved to the villa in Karasuma Oike, Rachel was still pursued by the phantom of that forsaken room in the old wing. Sometimes she would dream of the tea party, of sneaking away with Mary and Irene and creeping down the silent, unlit hallways to unlock the door to that cursed room.

Each time she would wake up in a cold sweat, with the silent call of the Chamber of the East of the East echoing in her mind. It was as though no matter where she went there was a bottomless pit lying in wait beneath her feet, waiting for her to take one false step. Perhaps those twelve years in the chamber had left their mark on her, or it was a product of the guilt she felt for Professor Moriarty, who had rescued her through his own sacrifice. In either case, I suspected that with time these nightmares would trouble her no longer.

I shuddered when I saw Rachel staring into a region of empty space, for it was quite apparent that she was looking into the Chamber of the East of the East.

"It feels as though there is another version of me which was left behind in that room."

A shadow passed over her face, and she began to wobble. Immediately Holmes sprang up from his armchair and caught her before she crumpled to the floor. Together we laid her down on the settee and set a cushion beneath her head. Holmes stood by her side as I attended to her, a pained expression on his face.

"Is she all right?"

"It's nothing of great concern. I suspect her nerves are greatly strained."

In a little while her eyelids fluttered open, but her gaze was distant. Holmes knelt down beside the settee and took her hand.

"It's all right, Miss Rachel," he said.

A faint smile came to her lips, and in a small voice she began to speak.

"When I saw the light in your windows as I came to visit, I felt a glad warmth in my chest. I suppose that must be what a traveler feels spotting the merry lights of an inn after the sun has gone down on the moor. And I am sure that is the same feeling which your clients must have felt.

"I have wanted to thank you," she continued, her eyes half-shut as if she was in a trance. "Twelve years ago you were involved in the investigation of my disappearance. Reginald told me so. But in fact I had already known. As I slept in the Chamber of the East of the East, I could sense you searching for me."

Holmes stared at her, not breathing. He appeared to be both disconcerted and greatly moved by her words. For the briefest of moments his face grew taut, and there was a keen glitter in his eye; but it soon passed.

"But I was not alone. I was joined by many in searching for you," he assured her.



The Holmes special was published early in February.

In the days leading up to its release, Miss Smith frantically edited the three stories as though she was threatened by the whip of an overseer, while I was beset with anxiety. With so little time left I could think of nothing else. Yet there was nothing for me to do but wait, and as I did my apprehension only grew, for it had been a year and a half since the adventures of Sherlock Holmes had last appeared in the pages of the Strand Magazine.

All the readers of crime fiction in Kyoto were waiting for the revival of Sherlock Holmes. But what they clamoured for were real-life exploits, not yarns about a fictional detective in a made-up city. The closer publication date drew, the more convinced I became that the readers would reject this new iteration of Holmes. In my downcast mood I could hardly bring food or drink to pass my lips. I had dreams of mobs of infuriated readers marching on my practice with torches and pitchforks in hand.

"Perhaps I had better lie low until it has all blown over," I groaned.

"Why should you need to go into hiding?" questioned Mary.

"I can hear the outcry already. Some of Holmes's most ardent admirers blamed me for his slump, you know. They are already disappointed enough with the news of his retirement; I can only imagine what they will say about Holmes of London."

"It's only your nerves. You know how long it's been since your last outing," said Mary, patting my back. "Don't fret. Everything will be all right."

As the day approached, rumours began to swirl that the special that was due to appear in the latest edition of the Strand Magazine was hastily being revised. When it was revealed that the issue would now revolve around Sherlock Holmes, all of Kyoto was stunned and elated. "At last we will know the truth behind his retirement!" some speculated, while others insisted that he would in fact retract his retirement. I prepared myself for the worst.

At last the day was upon us.

I would have hidden myself at a remote inn in Kurama, if not for the patients who still needed my attention at the clinic. Instead I quietly went about my business. In the evening Mary, who had gone out to reconnoiter the mood in the city's bookshops, told me, "It seems to be quite popular." I said nothing.

Three days later, I received a telegram from Miss Smith.

Issues flying from shelves. Reprint underway. Violet Smith

I was not such an optimist to let down my guard at the news. *It is only Holmes's enduring reputation*, I told myself. No one really wanted to read these ersatz stories; soon enough the negative voices would rise to drown out the positive. Over the past year the readers had steadily abandoned us; the longer the hiatus had gone on the more vociferous was their disappointment. Their disappointment in Sherlock Holmes was also disappointment in John H. Watson. Now, with the publication of *Holmes of London*, surely even our most ardent supporters must finally forsake us.

My self-doubt eventually transformed into resentment against the readers. *Rant and rave all you like, but all good things must come to an end.*

One week after the publication, I was hunched morosely before the fireplace after a long day's work when I heard Miss Smith's bicycle whizzing through the street. Without so much as ringing the bell she barged through the front door of my practice and marched directly towards my office.

"Dr. Watson!" she yelled, "Dr. Watson! Why have you not answered my telegram?"

Without pausing to allow me to reply she continued on excitedly.

"The issues have been flying off the shelves, and the presses can't keep up with all the demand! Did you read the Daily Chronicle? There's a furious debate about whether *Holmes of London* really constitutes detective fiction, and there's no shortage of readers with bones to pick, but all press is good press. Have you begun writing the next story? You haven't? Why not? Where's your pen? Get to work! The serialization begins next issue, and we need to have enough material to put out a collection by the end of the year. We'll call it: *The Triumphant Return of Sherlock Holmes!*"

She said all of this in one breath, and then immediately turned and dashed away like the wind.

For a long while I didn't know what to think.

Did this mean that the stories were successful after all?

I made up my mind at last to visit a bookshop.

The winter sun had already set. The streets were steeped in a navy hue, and across Shimogamo Boulevard the Tadasu Forest was veiled in shadow. The lamplighters were out, and each time another gas lamp was lit, a nascent darkness was born around the edges of the light. It was a lovely sight, and I stood there for a time watching the lamps flicker into life down the street. Further south the buildings opened up at Aoi Bridge, and when I reached the bridge the last vestiges of daylight were fading from the sky.

The Masugata shopping arcade was just a little further past the bridge, and at the entrance I saw a banner with the words, "The Triumphant Return of Sherlock Holmes". Yet the wooden shelves were bare. The shop owner, with whom I was well acquainted, informed me that all the issues which had arrived that day had been snapped up almost as soon as they were put out. As I stood there in amazement, I was approached by a man with a heavy moustache wearing a top hat.

"Pardon me; do I address by any chance Dr. John Watson?"

"I am."

"What an honour it is!" cried the man with twinkling eyes. "I have just had the pleasure of reading your latest stories. Sherlock Holmes, in a new land! And you paint London with such veracity, it is as if the town really exists. I can picture it in my mind's eye now. It's astonishing how you dreamed it all up. It's a masterpiece, sir!"

"Thank you, that's very kind of you."

I shook hands with him before leaving the shop.

A masterpiece! The words made my heart glow, and wanting to savour that sudden burst of joy I walked down from the Aoi Bridge to the bank of the Kamo. The sky was a deep imperial blue, like the finest imported china, and the riverbank was submerged in a deep aquatic hue. I was alone there; on my left the bare bushes on the embankment stretched along into the distance, and on my right the lights on Shimogamo Boulevard glittered over the dark surface of the water. It had been a long time since the world had seemed so beautiful to me, and I whistled a tune as I strolled north along the river.

After a few minutes, a voice called out to me.

"John Watson!"

I turned around to find Mary standing there.

"Mary! But how long have you been following me?"

"Quite some time, actually."

Apparently she had seen me coming out of the bookshop in Masugata, having been doing some shopping there herself. Laughing with delight she skipped up to me.

"I didn't want to disturb you."

"What is there to disturb?"

"Why, you were so flushed with pleasure!"

She took my arm, and together we continued our stroll down the Kamo River.



That night I took a cab to Teramachi Street. The air was frightfully chilly, and the clouds hid the stars from view. I expected it would start snowing directly.

The cab stopped in front of 221B, and I lit onto the frozen street. It appeared that Holmes was away, for the lights on the second floor were extinguished. But tonight he was not my aim. I crossed to the green door on the other side of the street and rang the bell.

"John Watson, here to see Miss Irene Adler," I said, and was shown up to the sitting-room on the second floor. I had never seen her working quarters before, and yet it all was familiar to me, for it was very like Holmes's room. The beakers and violin were absent, of course, and the room was scrupulously kept. But the armchair and settee before the fire; the writing-desk at the window; the cabinet filled with encyclopedias and biographies: it was almost as though I were peering into a mirror which reflected the room on the other side of the street, which I could see even now through the parted blinds.

Irene Adler was standing in front of the fireplace.

"How can I help you this evening?"

"I've come about Mary."

She smiled, a tight, scornful grin.

"Did Mary ask you to come make amends?"

"No, it is entirely of my own accord that I am here."

The estrangement between the two which had started the night of Holmes's retirement had continued; Mary stubbornly refused my entreaties to speak with Irene. She seemed convinced that their friendship was over: she had broken her faith so deeply that Irene would never forgive what she had done.

"I was only a biographer, after all. Irene is still a first-rate detective, with or without me."

But I was convinced that was not the case.

I faced Irene Adler squarely and said, "Will you not make things up with Mary?"

"That's quite a bold thing to ask, Dr. Watson," replied Irene in an even tone, which on the contrary only made her reply more intimidating. She was practically throwing off sparks of anger, like the wrath deity Fudō Myōō, and her unchanging gaze reminded me of the one that Mary had given me, when she had flown up to 221B Teramachi Street the morning after Professor Moriarty had led Holmes and I on that merry chase. It was as if the two women were connected by some fundamental mechanism, and the displeasure which I had once seen on the face of Mary now made itself visible in Irene Adler.

"Mary hated Sherlock Holmes. She could not bear the fact that her own husband was being led around by the nose on account of that man's slump. But she could not drive Mr. Holmes away on her own. And so she enlisted me, and my powers, to aid her cause. It was treachery of the highest order."

"It is true that Mary meant to bring Holmes to heel," I began. "But whatever her original motive, she truly enjoyed her adventures with you. The enthusiasm with which she wrote *The Casebook of Irene Adler* is the proof. In the end she could not have cared less what happened with Holmes. And you were a beneficiary of Mary's efforts as well. I hope you do not presume that your success was a product solely of your own talents."

"Do you call me proud?"

"I mean that you need Mary. She regrets the hurt she has caused you, and is convinced that you will never forgive her. But you and she are not meant to part ways. You are to her as Holmes is to me. He and I came as far as we did because we are almost like two halves of one person. He needed me, and I needed him."

"Without Watson, there would be no Holmes," said Irene. She walked to the writing desk by the window, picked up a magazine which lay atop it, and thrust it at me accusingly. It was the latest issue of the Strand Magazine.

"I read your new stories," said she. "Is this what you have stooped to?"

"Holmes is quite pleased with them."

"I've never heard such nonsense! Holmes of London, indeed!" she said angrily, tossing the magazine into the fireplace. "You and Mary have succeeded in ruining the career of a very fine detective. I've never seen such teamwork, or a husband and wife so deranged! Holmes of London? I will never approve of such a travesty, never!"

Breathing heavily, she turned and looked outside the window. She seemed to have realized how ill-mannered her words had been, and in her profile I could see how helpless she felt. Through the window she must have been looking at Holmes's window, which now must appear to her a dark, hollow place. I glanced sadly at the fireplaces, where the pages of the Strand Magazine were crimping and curling up in the flames.

At last Irene Adler said quietly, "I have a secret to show you, Dr. Watson."

She showed me up to a small chamber on the third floor.

"Even Mary has not seen this place," she told me as she unlocked the door. "It is my private laboratory."

Swinging open the door she lit the gas lamp, and at her urging I warily stepped inside.

The first thing which I saw was a square rectangular table at the far wall, whose surface was littered with scribbled notes and journals. The wall itself was entirely covered in photographs and blueprints, and in pride of place above the table was a detailed map of Kyoto with various locations circled or marked with arrows in red ink. On the left wall was a window which faced the garden, and on the right was a fireplace; all the other space on the walls besides was taken up by shelves and shelves of reference books.

As I looked around, I quickly noticed that all of the material in the room was related to Sherlock Holmes.

Each of the locations marked on the map corresponded to the locations of one of his cases, and framed newspaper cuttings adorned the walls. The shelves were crammed full with my chronicles of Holmes's cases, as well as old issues of the Strand Magazine, and scrapbooks filled with newspaper and magazine clippings. On the mantelpiece were dolls modelled on

Holmes and I which had all the rage at Christmas time some years earlier, as well as one of Holmes's favourite pipes and even a Persian slipper in which Holmes had once kept his tobacco.

It was as if I had stumbled into a museum dedicated to Sherlock Holmes.

Irene Adler lowered herself into the chair at the table.

"I have been studying Mr. Holmes's technique since I was still an actress on the stage. Not only did I read your chronicles, I went to examine the location of each case myself, so that I could trace for myself the chain of logical sequences which led Mr. Holmes to his solutions. And in doing so I have learned much."

She picked up a copy of a monograph. I had seen it before: "Upon the Distinction between the Ashes of the Various Tobaccos." Discovering clues in various cigar, cigarette, and pipe ashes left behind at crime scenes had been one of Holmes's particular specialties, and he was rather proud of the treatise he had written upon the subject. Aside from tobacco he had also contributed to the literature on codebreaking, tattoos, and footprints, and even had written a piece on the effects which various kinds of labour would elicit in the shape of one's hand. Each of the copies which Irene Adler had in her possession had the traces of being thoroughly read and re-read.

"It has been twelve years," remarked Irene Adler, "Twelve years since Mr. Holmes caught me at Hurlstone Manor. Not long afterward your first case study was published, and I have been following in Mr. Holmes's footsteps ever since. I have always sought to become a detective who could contend with him on equal footing."

"Why didn't you tell us any of this?"

"How could I? How mortifying it would have been," she laughed. "Why, I never even told Mary."

All of the adventures which Holmes and I had shared were contained in that room. Yet now that Holmes was retired those memoirs seemed less tokens of triumph than a few hoary and waterlogged relics saved from a sinking ship. I felt Miss Adler's solitude and anxiety as if it were my own.

"Mr. Holmes was my bedrock," said she. "Even in his slump."

I was suddenly transported back to that night in Hurlstone. After our terrifying session in the Chamber of the East of the East, she and I had headed into the dark forest, looking for

Holmes. *Yet what use is all that experience? None, absolutely none at all!* Her cry of despair rang in my ears, despair at her powerlessness in the face of the impenetrable mystery of the Musgraves.

It was then, I believe, that she felt the solitude of the great detective.

The denizens of Kyoto had once streamed from near and far to knock on the door of 221B Teramachi Street, bringing problems which they could not solve on their own. Holmes had unravelled those mysteries and restored order to the world. His presence was like an immovable fortress sheltering us from disorder and confusion. But now that he had cast aside the detective's mantle, the responsibility now rested on Irene Adler alone.

"What does Mr. Holmes intend to do now?"

"He says he will travel to islands of the south Pacific."

"But what about the Musgrave mystery?" interjected Irene Adler. "I have been able to think of nothing else since Mr. Holmes announced his retirement. You remember what Madame Richborough said, when we visited her mansion in the fall: 'There can be no escape from the mystery of the Musgraves.'"

"And you take that charlatan at her word?" I said, agog. "Why, you were the one who exposed her!"

Madame Richborough's trial was due to conclude and her sentence handed down tomorrow.

"She was every bit a fraud," admitted Irene. "But the Chamber of the East of the East is not. My mind still struggles to comprehend what we saw that night. No, the Musgrave mystery remains alive and well."

I was silent.

"I have been thinking," she continued. "Twelve years ago, Rachel Musgrave disappeared inside that room. Mr. Holmes was unable to solve it. Hence, Robert Musgrave sealed the room, and the mystery was forgotten. Afterwards Mr. Holmes became acquainted with you and embarked upon his remarkable career. Two autumns ago he became tangled in that deep slump from which he never emerged. Don't you think it odd, Doctor? If I am not mistaken, Reginald Musgrave also broke the seal on the Chamber of the East of the East that same autumn."

"A mere coincidence. You think too deeply."

But hardly had the words left my lips than I made an alarming realization—Professor Moriarty had also been stricken by *his* slump around that same time!

Irene Adler let herself slump down into a chair, hunched over and staring listlessly into space. I had seen a similar look on Miss Rachel's face during her visit to Holmes some days ago.

"Every time I think about the Chamber of the East of the East I can hardly maintain my composure," she sighed, burying her face in her hands. "What vexes me the most is that Holmes realized the truth behind that room, and yet he did nothing. His lesser cases he has all yielded to me, but the Musgrave mystery alone he will not relinquish. By all appearances, then, he intends to exit the stage, and take the secret with him."

Unsure of what to say, I glanced at the wall, where there hung a framed photograph of a Sherlock Holmes wearing a black coat and top hat, gazing at the camera with a self-assured grin. That was Holmes at the height of his powers, and beside him was a younger John H. Watson, looking every bit as dauntless as his illustrious partner.

I noticed that Irene Adler had lifted her head to look at the same photograph. Through the veil of her dishevelled hair I saw the guileless look of the young schoolgirl.

"Are you simply going to let Mr. Holmes depart for the tropics?" she asked in a hoarse voice. "Is that really what you want, Dr. Watson?"



After leaving Miss Adler's residence an anxious vortex of thoughts swirled through my mind. I glanced up at the window on the other side of the street, which remained dark.

"Where has he wandered off to now?" I muttered to myself with a scowl.

I wasn't ready to return to Shimogamo yet, so I hailed a passing cab and directed the driver to take me to the club by the Kōjin Bridge.

The wide, high-ceilinged parlour was mostly empty; few warmed themselves before the large fireplace tonight. Three members of our doctors' society sat in armchairs by the window, imbibing leisurely. "Watson!" they cried in surprise when they saw my approach. Returning their greeting I settled myself in a chair. With all the hubbub of the new year I had not visited the club in some time. Through the broad window the sparse streetlights glowed on frozen trees by the slowly flowing Kamo.

"Why the long face?" asked one of my companions. "I hear 'Holmes of London' is a smashing success. I suppose you've been too busy writing to drop by the club."

"My own patients have all been abuzz about it," chimed in another.

"Mary must be quite pleased."

"A toast, gentlemen! To the triumphant return of John Watson!"

And yet even the warm welcome I had received did not lift my spirits. Seeing that I was in a reticent mood my companions' conversation soon tapered off.

As I looked out the window at the Kamo River, I could not help but think of Professor Moriarty. Even now he was trapped somewhere deep inside Hurlstone, in the belly of the Chamber of the East of the East. Holmes had dropped the matter, as if he sought to bury it, and I could not condemn Irene Adler for her censure of him. Yet I felt that there must be some reason for his silence. *The Chamber of the East of the East is an enigma, beyond the ken of man*, he had said, but that only made me more determined to know what it was.

After a while, a shadowy figure stood up from a chair in the corner of the parlour. It had succeeded in concealing itself so well that until that moment I had not realized there was a person there at all. The man crossed the room into the light, and his waistcoat and stiff bristles gleamed like obsidian in the feeble firelight.

"Fancy seeing you here, Watson. You're just the man I wanted to see," said the voice of Stamford, and immediately the other doctors' expressions stiffened. In the uneasy silence that followed, one of them asked, "What do you want, Stamford?"

"Nothing, from you. My business is solely with Watson."

Exchanging glances, the other doctors stood up. "Be on your guard," one of them whispered in my ear, before they left the room.

With a rueful grin Stamford sat down in the chair opposing mine. "I've become something of a black sheep," he said with a self-deprecating tone, running his hand back and forth on the armrest.

"I can see that," I replied. Since he had taken to styling himself a spiritualist physician, the rest of the profession had given him a wide berth.

"I'm quite busy these days," said Stamford. "I'll be at the courtroom tomorrow, for the verdict. I expect they'll toss the madame into prison. Lord St. Simon is looking for a new

personal medium, and he's been quite unsparing in having me help with his search. But he's done so much for me that I suppose I can't complain."

"Do you truly believe in spiritualism, Stamford?" I interjected.

He looked up at me with a questioning glance. "Do I believe in it? That's an excellent question. Maybe it's real, maybe it isn't. It's not like one of the cases in your detective novels which have incontrovertible solutions. But to be frank, it really doesn't matter, as long as it is of profit to me."

"You astound me. Where are your principles?"

"Now, Watson, what use do principles serve, in the end?" he grinned, leaning forward. "But enough of that. I've read your new stories. London! That's a twist I never saw coming. The assistant to the great Sherlock Holmes, converting to the spiritualists!"

"What are you talking about?" I said in bewilderment. "I don't recall doing anything of the sort!"

"Come now, Doctor! Ever since the ghost of Professor Moriarty appeared at Lord St. Simon's seance, everyone has been whispering the word 'London!'"

Seance? The ghost of Professor Moriarty?

Seeing my confusion, Stamford laid out the facts of the matter. It seemed that in the aftermath of Madame Richborough's detention, Lord St. Simon had held a series of seances at his home, seeking to find a new spirit medium. Early in the new year, the ghost of Professor Moriarty had appeared at one such seance, and via spirit possession of the medium claimed that it had crossed into this world, via the Chamber of the East of the East, from a vast city on the other side called London. The name became synonymous with the other side across the spiritualist community straight away, and shortly afterward were published my stories of Holmes of London.

"I don't see how you could have written those stories and yet be ignorant of the whole affair. You can't imagine how overjoyed the spiritualists were to have such a celebrated author write of London!"

"Wait a moment. I can hardly make sense of it all."

"Lord St. Simon says that he would like nothing more than to sit down for a talk with you," Stamford blathered on. "He is burning to know what your aim was in writing these stories. The man is a charlatan, of course, doesn't believe in spiritualism a whit. But so many

curious things have happened lately that one cannot fault for him being a little anxious. I hear that Madame Richborough got her hands on a copy of your stories in her cell and was greatly moved."

"This is ridiculous, Stamford," I snapped, standing up. "They're only stories."

"Don't be so coy," he laughed. "Mere detective stories could never sell so prodigiously. You're a resourceful one, Watson, I'll give you that. No sooner has the great detective announced his retirement than you've moved on to your next, tales of spiritualism!"

He and I were alone now in the parlour.

"I'll get to the point, Watson. Why don't we join forces, you and I?"

I felt as though I was standing on a desolate moor. A crack had opened up in the orderly world I had believed in, and something was peering through.

I know little of what happened after that. I must have fled the club in a delirium, for the next thing I knew I was wandering down Kawaramachi Street, the soot-stained houses closing in on either side like the walls of a tunnel. Spiritualists, seances, Professor Moriarty, London, spiritualist tales, the Chamber of the East of the East... those words rushed through my head like leaves scattered by the wind. *You're a resourceful one, Watson.*

The elation I had felt at the success of my new stories had gone completely.

I stopped when I reached the banks of the Kamo, my breath crystallizing in the cold. In the darkness I heard the river flowing, and in the distance I saw the looming silhouette of Mt. Hiei. Something white fluttered before my eyes, and as I began to cross the Aoi Bridge I looked absentmindedly around.

Above the shadowed roofs and chimneys, snow was falling over Kyoto.



It snowed throughout the night, and in the morning the city found itself transformed.

Wan light fell from the cloudy sky over the snow-capped rooftops. When I glanced out my front door that morning, Shimogamo Boulevard was swaddled in white as far as the eye could see, and children shrieked as they hurled icy missiles at one another. From the Tadasu Forest across the road I heard the *thump* of snow falling from the branches.

Madame Richborough's sentence was due to be handed out that afternoon. By the time Mary and I left our home later on, snow was swirling down from the sky again. We hailed a

carriage and set off for the law courts on Marutamachi Street. The embankments of the Kamo were covered in snow, and Higashiyama looked as though it were dusted with powdered sugar. Beneath the clouded sky it appeared as though the colour had been sapped from the world.

The hansom crossed the Aoi Bridge and pulled down Kawaramachi Street.

"Is everything alright?" Mary murmured to me with a look of concern on her face. "You've been absentminded all day."

"I could not sleep. The conversation last night at the club kept me up all night."

I was turning over in my mind what Stamford had said to me. Holmes of London, a spiritualist fable! He must have been playing a cruel joke on me, envious of my success. What worth was there in taking seriously the babblings of such a man? Yet there was a sense of foreboding that would not leave my mind, like a splinter of bone lodged in the throat.

When the cab turned right at the Kawaramachi Marutamachi intersection, I noticed immediately the strange atmosphere about the law courts. A dark throng was gathered before the doors, overflowing into the street.

"What's going on there?" wondered Mary.

As our cab got closer, I noted the presence of uniformed patrolmen. The scene was eerily calm despite the size of the huddled crowd, which was as meek as a flock of sheep.

"Inspector McFarlane!" I called out to a nearby policeman, after descending from the carriage. "What's this all about?"

"Ah, Dr. Watson," said McFarlane, tipping his cap. "These people are all spiritualists; they've been waiting all the morning and since for the madame's verdict. They're not allowed into the courtroom, of course, but they also refuse to leave. "

"That is their prerogative, I suppose, but then how are we to enter the courts ourselves?"

Our conversation had not gone unnoticed, and whispers rippled through the assembled spiritualists. "It's Dr. Watson! "Dr. Watson is here!"

The crowd parted, leaving an orderly path for us to pass through. Mary and I exchanged astonished glances.

"This way, Dr. Watson," urged a young man. The entire crowd was staring at us, every one with a curious expectation in their eyes.

Our confusion notwithstanding, we thanked them and proceeded into the court. As we passed through the crowd, I noticed a well-dressed man with a moustache and a top hat whom I vaguely remembered having seen before. I realized that it was the man from the bookstore, who had called my stories a masterpiece.

The courtroom was filled with a feverish excitement; winter it may have been, but the room was almost sultry. The gallery was so full that some were forced to stand. Lestrade beckoned us to the front, where he had reserved just enough room on a bench for Mary and I to squeeze into.

"What an incredible turnout!" I whispered into Lestrade's air. "The crowd outside has already spilled onto the street."

"They have their right to be there," replied Lestrade crossly, "only I hope that it doesn't turn into a riot. The patrolmen have been warned to be on their guard."

I craned my neck to look around the gallery. Reginald Musgrave was not there, but sheerly by chance my gaze met that of Irene Adler. Her pale visage stood out among the crowd, and she gave me a curt nod.

"Irene is here," I whispered to Mary.

"Is she?" said my wife with a frigid smile.

After a while, I noticed someone pushing his way toward us. It was Lord St. Simon. His dress was as impeccable as ever, but his expression was sour and his eyes bloodshot. He seemed greatly aged from the last time I had seen him in this courtroom.

"Dr. Watson, I presume?" he said warmly, though it was as though his face was a steel plate that he had to wrench into place, so forced and unnatural was his smile. I stood, and he thrust his hand at me to shake. "I read your Holmes of London stories."

"I am honoured, Lord St. Simon."

"And you have my utmost admiration! Such wonderful stories as those I have seldom read."

He suddenly squeezed my hand hard and pulled me towards him—nearly causing me to lose my balance—and hissed in my ear, "What's your game? Why did you write those things?" There was a very definite note of venom in his voice, and with all the noise in the

room neither Mary nor Lestrade seemed to hear him. I stared at him in astonishment, but the smile was back on his face as though it had never left.

"I hope we will have another chance to chat over things," he said, before vanishing back into the crowd.

I sat down again, dumbfounded. Had Stamford been telling the truth?

"What's the matter, my dear? You look pale," said Mary.

"Last night I heard an interesting rumour from Stamford," I admitted. "Apparently the spiritualists believe that London is actually the spiritual realm."

"But you made London up!" she insisted with a frown. "Your stories are crime fiction. What connection do they have with the spiritualist realm?"

"They say that the ghost of Professor Moriarty appeared at a seance in Lord St. Simon's mansion, and that he claimed that he was in London."

"But Moriarty is—" Mary began, before looking around and continuing in a hushed tone.

"He is trapped in the Chamber of the East of the East, isn't he?"

"Only a few people know about that. In any case the spiritualists have made up their mind about London."

"Does that mean that the sales of Holmes of London—"

"Are not coming from readers of detective fiction. The magazines are being bought up by the spiritualists."

Now that I knew about the connections between my stories and the spiritualists, the actions of Lord St. Simon were easier to understand. He had not expected the appearance of a series of stories about London to rile up the spiritualists, and now his control over them was slipping.

There had been something strange in the reverence of the crowd assembled before the courts. Could it be that their eyes perceived not John Watson, the author of the Holmes stories, but John Watson, the author of the spiritualist texts?

"What can it mean?" Mary pondered.

"I know as much as you do," I told her. "All I can say is that something very strange is going on."

The bailiff announced that court was in session. The lawyers and jurors filed into the room, and shortly afterward Madame Richborough appeared in the dock, flanked on both sides by court officers. Once again I was astonished by her appearance, which, in contrast to the listless shell who had stood there during her first appearance in court, had regained much of her former vigour. Her poise was erect and calm as she surveyed the gallery, and many of the observers fell silent, as if cowed by her dignified gaze.

I, on the other hand, shivered, for to me she directed a beatific smile.



"Members of the jury," said the judge, "Over the preceding weeks you have heard the arguments and evidence presented by the prosecution and the defence. Before you enter deliberations, I will summarize the charges against the defendant."

The judge proceeded to plainly and methodically explain the claims of both the prosecution and defence in regards to the crimes of which Madame Richborough was accused. All the members of the jury as well as those the observers in the gallery listened solemnly. I had followed the trial in the papers, but the judge's explanation was clear and succinct, and though there was much which weighed against the madame, the judge treated all the facts in an even-handed manner.

"It falls to you now to decide the verdict. If you are not satisfied beyond any reasonable doubt that the prosecution has proven the defendant guilty, you must declare her not guilty. No matter your opinion of the defendant, she must not be declared guilty by speculation or without sufficient evidence. I must remind you that this court deals with facts, not superstitions. The defendant is well-known around Kyoto for her involvement in spiritualist affairs. But it is not the existence of the spiritual which is on trial today. The defendant is part of a human society, and she must abide by human laws as do we all. Keep that fact in mind as you sit in deliberation."

As the jurors filed out, a stir broke out in the courtroom; as before, it was the supporters and detractors of spiritualism at each other's throats.

"Not to worry," said Lestrade, "Madame Richborough won't escape this time. The jurors won't dare let considerations of spiritualism taint their verdict. If they do, I will turn in my resignation on the spot and start a new career as a clairvoyant tomorrow!"

"I doubt the madame will be acquitted," I agreed. "And yet..."

Lestrade frowned at me. "What do you mean?"

"I can say nothing for certain, only I have a strange foreboding," I replied, glancing at the front of the gallery. Lord St. Simon was standing there with his chest puffed out haughtily, staring with annoyance at the dock. In his fair profile I saw both apprehension and anger. His was the outraged face of a man whose dog has turned and bitten his hand. Madame Richborough, on the other hand, appeared unperturbed, and as she turned to leave I saw a presentiment of victory in her stately poise.

She does not care about the result of this trial, I realized, and I thought of the assembled supporters in front of the courtroom, huddled out there in the cold even now beneath the falling snow. It seemed to me that they were waiting for something else, something greater than the verdict of this case.

The jurors returned to the courtroom about half an hour later.

"Please read the verdict," said the clerk, and the courtroom went still.

The foreman cleared his throat nervously.

"On the charges brought by the prosecution, we find the defendant, by majority verdict, guilty."

The reaction spread gradually across the gallery. While the clerk recorded the verdict, the uproar grew louder and louder, until it was abruptly silenced by a shout of, "Your Honour!"

It was Madame Richborough, who came to her feet and turned to the judge as the echo reverberated through the room. "May I make a statement?"

"You may not."

"I wish to declare that this trial is meaningless."

"Silence!" the judge rebuked her. "The defendant will take her seat and remain silent!"

But the madame was in no mood to obey, and neither the lawyers nor the bailiffs who stood beside her were able to suppress her; they seemed strangely paralyzed by her authoritative demeanour.

"The end of the world is nigh!" Madame Richborough intoned. "The world we walk is but a dream, a flitting shadow of our true home. Soon the door to the other side will open, and we will return at last to London!"

Madame Richborough turned and looked squarely at me.

"Is this not so, Dr. Watson?"

I felt every gaze in the courtroom fixed upon me.

"Bailiffs!" bellowed the judge, attempting to end her monologue. But the bailiffs merely looked around in fear, for the courtroom had been seized by an otherworldly aura.

I felt the hairs on my body stand on end, as if I was standing on a plain watching storm clouds brooding on the horizon. The crowd murmured uneasily, and the judge shrank back on his dais, his face contorted with fear. Lord St. Simon and Irene Adler looked around anxiously, while Mary silently squeezed my hand.

A rumble like a giant's sigh reverberated throughout the room, and we were enveloped by a blinding light.

It was like being in the Chamber of the East of the East again: the light was exactly like that which had issued forth from the full moon floating ominously in front of the mysterious staircase. Shrieks rose up all around me.

When I could see once more, I heard people shouting, "Who's that!?" I sat up and looked in the middle of the courtroom, where there stood a person who had not been there before. It was a figure unlike any I had seen in a courtroom before, with dark bedraggled hair, and wearing a grey gown over its nightclothes.

It was Sherlock Holmes. His hands were hidden in the pockets of his nightgown, and he stared into nothingness with an intense glare which reminded me of a wild tiger readying itself to spring, as if he were face to face with his mortal enemy.

"I can spare you five minutes if you have anything to say, Professor Moriarty," he said impatiently.

Immediately cries of astonishment rang throughout the courtroom, for Holmes had begun to deform like a melting candle. In the twinkling of an eye his figure had transformed into that of another person entirely: Professor Moriarty. He was swathed in a black cloak, and his pale face swayed through the air like a snake.

"You must stand clear, Holmes, or be trodden underfoot."

The exchange between Holmes and Moriarty had taken place before the stunned eyes of the packed courtroom, and now before those same eyes the phantasm vanished just as quickly as it had arrived.

A great panic broke out. Many rushed for the exit, while a few of the more intrepid crept up to the location where the phantom had appeared, and the rest made a confused noise. There was no one there who could master the situation: the judge had swooned on his dais, and the lawyers and bailiffs were petrified with terror, as was the white-faced Lord St. Simon.

In the midst of the fearful din, Madame Richborough stood there with a smile on her face. It was almost as though she had predicted that this would occur.

A shout came from Irene Adler, bringing me back to my senses.

“Dr. Watson! Mary! We must leave at once!”

In the midst of the heaving crowd she was pointing at the exit.

I nodded at her and led Mary by the hand towards safety.



We cleared the courtroom and ran towards the vestibule of the law courts. By now it was already heaving with adherents of spiritualism, their heads covered in snow. They had learned what had transpired in the courtroom from those who had fled the chaos inside, overwhelmed the cordon of patrolmen, and were now surging toward Madame Richborough.

“Dr. Watson!” they yelled, their hands reaching for me. “What’s going on?”

“Nothing, I tell you, nothing! You must calm yourselves!” I shouted, but my entreaties fell on deaf ears.

If what Stamford and Madame Richborough had stated were correct, then these people had interpreted Holmes of London as some sort of spiritualist parable; they believed that London belonged to the spiritual realm. I was horrified to see a beseeching entreaty in their eyes. Entirely unawares I had unwittingly become venerated as an evangelist of spiritualism.

As we struggled to pass through the hordes of spiritualist devotees which crowded the hall, Irene Adler caught up with us.

“Dr. Watson! Mary!” she shouted. “Look away!”

Without thinking I did as I was told, and heard what sounded like the whoosh of a firework followed by the cries of the spiritualists. I opened my eyes and saw that the crowd was cringing and clawing at their eyes, blinded by what I could only assume had been some sort of flare.

"Not to worry," Irene Adler told us, pushing us along, "They are only temporarily stupefied."

Using the situation to our advantage, we ran pell mell out of the hall. The snow was still falling, and we could just make out through the flurry the heavy-laden branches of the imperial forest.

It was only a short distance from the law courts to Holmes's abode. We went east along Marutamachi Street then turned south down Teramachi Street. The traffic was scant on such a day as today; the carriageways were blanketed in white, as were the tile roofs of the houses which we passed by. Everything was still, which made it feel like we were trapped in a strange dream indeed.

Mrs. Hudson answered our frantic pulls at the bell, and her eyes opened wide at the sight of the snow-dusted crowd which stood on her doorstep.

"What's all this, then?"

"Good day, Mrs. Hudson," said Irene Adler, brushing the snow from her coat. "Is Mr. Holmes in?"

"No," Mrs. Hudson shook her head, "He went out at noon yesterday, saying that he needed to buy some things for his journey. I haven't seen him since."

"Could he have already departed for his tropical island?"

"I'm sure that couldn't be the case. His valise is still sitting in his room where he left it."

We climbed the stairs and entered Holmes's room. The curtains were drawn, and the fireplace was cold. Mrs. Hudson pulled open the shades, and in the faint light which came in through the window we spotted the valise on his bed. Among the things packed inside was the old violin-case. At Holmes's request, Mrs. Hudson had taken custody of Watson the goldfish.

"What's this about? Is Mr. Holmes all right?" At the sight of our grave expressions Mrs. Hudson could not help but grow anxious.

I looked around the room. It was hard to believe this emptied chamber had once been the same place where Holmes and I had started so many adventures. The life was gone from it. It was then that I was certain that Sherlock Holmes was no longer in this world.

"Holmes has entered the Chamber of the East of the East," I declared.

Upon my pronouncement Irene Adler looked at me, biting her lip. She must have shared my epiphany, and yet when she spoke there was a note of defiance in her voice.

"Nothing is decided yet," she said. "Let us say that he has indeed gone into that room. How does that explain what happened in that courtroom? Nothing of the sort has happened before, neither with William Musgrave, nor Miss Rachel."

"It is a brand new phenomenon that we are dealing with," I replied.

"We must inquire with Reginald Musgrave," suggested Mary.

As we came down the stairs we heard the bell ringing, and the sound of someone desperately pounding on the door.

Mrs. Hudson had come down before us, and no sooner had she opened the door than a girl came bursting in, covered in snow. The blood was drained from her pallid face.

Irene Adler caught her in her arms.

"Miss Rachel! What are you doing here?"

"You must help me!" panted Rachel Musgrave. "Something is happening at Hurlston, something dreadful!"



The sun had nearly set by the time we arrived at Higashiyama Station. The snow fell from the grey clouds as incessantly as before, and all the souvenir shops in front of the station which were so bustling in the autumn were shuttered.

"I can hardly recognize the place," Mary murmured.

At the station gates a brougham with the Musgrave crest was waiting, lamplight glowing within its windows. Standing beside it was a man with a square lantern, who upon seeing our approach nimbly bounded through the snow towards us.

"William!" cried Miss Rachel, dashing towards him.

The groundskeeper's face was haggard and gaunt. He smiled at Miss Rachel, then turned to us.

"Thank you for coming," he said. "Master Reginald is unable to leave the estate at the moment. Things have taken a turn for the worse."

"Holmes has entered the chamber, hasn't he?" I asked. "What's happening there?"

"Master Reginald will tell you everything. We should depart immediately."

Ushering us inside the brougham he jumped up to the driver's seat. Immediately the carriage leapt away from the station and over the Togetsukyo Bridge. The surface of the river glinted a dull silver, silently swallowing up the snowflakes that fell upon it. In the darkness, snow-covered Higashiyama loomed over us like an enormous white whale. Everything was so quiet that it was as if all creation was holding its breath. We were in the calm before the storm.

Leaning against Mary I slumped into the seat. Irene Adler and Miss Rachel sat across from us. I mutely gazed out the windows. The carriage rolled over through the ancient roads toward Hurlstone, past glowing inns and farmhouses. The buildings gave way to vast fields buried in snow, and for a moment I saw someone standing in a meadow.

Holmes!

There could be no mistaking it—the ghostly figure was exactly that which had appeared in the courtroom, and there were no footsteps leading from the edge of the field. As it receded into the distance it transformed into the form of Professor Moriarty. I gasped.

"You saw it, didn't you, Dr. Watson?" whispered Miss Rachel. Her face was white as a sheet.

The walls between reality and fantasy were falling away.

Madame Richborough's ghastly voice resounded in my ears: *This world is but a shadow of London.*

The carriage rolled onward through the dark bamboo forest. As it approached the manor the bamboo stalks gave way to the pale light of the open sky. The lawn was a sheet of pale white, but an awning had been erected in the garden, underneath which we saw the glowing light of lamps and fires. It was as if people had fled the manor house and taken shelter there.

It was immediately apparent that something strange was happening in the mansion. Every window was luminous with what appeared to be pale moonlight, and I could hear the sound of the babbling of many tongues coming from inside its walls, every voice mingling until it sounded as if the building itself was groaning.

The carriage stopped by a bonfire, letting us out into the snow.

Reginald stood alone in front of the fire beneath the swirling snowflakes. Taking his sister's hand he nodded at us, with the hopeless look of a man adrift.



"Holmes came here yesterday afternoon," said Reginald Musgrave as he gazed into the fire. "His visit was a surprise, to be sure, but a welcome one. I had been worried for him ever since his retirement announcement early in the year. I insisted he stay the night, and after dinner we retired to my study to chat in front of the fire. He was in a much improved frame of mind, positively bursting with energy, compared to the last time I saw him. I could hardly believe that he had retired."

Holmes had talked of nothing but his impending departure for the South Pacific, but as the night wore on his expression became earnest. "There is one last case I must resolve before I go," he had said. All of his pending cases he had entrusted to Irene Adler, save one, for that case was one which could not be solved by even the most skilled detective.

It will come as no surprise to my readers that he spoke of the mystery of the Chamber of the East of the East.

"It is like a sunken rock, lurking in wait to shipwreck passing vessels," Holmes said, "I cannot allow Miss Adler to take on such a cursed thing. I will finish it once and for all."

"How do you intend to do that?"

"I will go into the Chamber of the East of the East myself," replied Holmes, leaning forward. "And I will bring Professor Moriarty back."

"Preposterous! How can you be sure that you will make it out again?" shouted Musgrave in astonishment.

"Too long I have averted my eyes; I can no longer, not when those close to me are threatened by it. The mystery of the Chamber of the East of the East cannot be solved from without: that was the crux of my failure twelve years ago. Therefore it must be solved from within."

Musgrave attempted to talk him down, but Holmes's resolve was firm. After he had left for the Chamber, Musgrave remained in the study to wait for him. Anxiety gathered within him. The seconds ticked by, yet Sherlock Holmes did not return. As night approached, Musgrave's eyelids fluttered closed. Some time later he awoke with a start. All was still. A sliver of white light shone between the curtains. He got up and pulled them aside to find the world covered in snow.

As he leaned down to stoke the smouldering fireplace, he sensed someone behind him. He turned to find Sherlock Holmes standing there in the study. Yet there was something strange about him. His hair was disheveled, and he was not wearing what he had when he left the study. Most disturbing of all was the hate which filled his glance, as if he looked upon a mortal enemy.

"I can spare you five minutes if you have anything to say, Professor Moriarty," he said, before transforming before Musgrave's dumbfounded gaze into Professor Moriarty and saying, "You must stand clear, Holmes, or be trodden underfoot."

It was then Musgrave realized that what he was seeing was an illusion. He ran out of the study, and in the foyer and on the landing and in the corridor which led to the old wing, he saw the phantoms, Holmes transforming into Moriarty and back again, repeating that same exchange of words he had heard in the study. The words echoed eerily throughout the house, and here and there he heard the yells and screams of the servants. Hurlstone was overrun by the spirits.

None of us could speak or hardly even breathe as we listened to Musgrave's unsettling tale. Nothing around us seemed real; not a star could be seen in the lightless sky as Hurlstone glowed like a cemetery lantern, moaning in the night. The servants huddled beneath the awning uncertainly, watching over the two Musgraves.

"Holmes entrusted a letter to me," said Reginald Musgrave, "It's for you, Dr. Watson."



MY DEAR WATSON:

I have given this letter to Musgrave in the event that the worst should happen.

Allow me first to apologize for keeping you in the dark about what I am about to do, but I could not drag you into such a reckless endeavour. Forgive me.

I can disclose now that I gave up my cases to Miss Adler and announced my own retirement so that I could finish things with the Chamber of the East of the East once and for all. Now that I have settled my personal affairs I can do so with my mind at ease. I must admit, as I prepare to enter the chamber, that a part of me still longs to sail far away to the tropics. But I cannot abandon Professor Moriarty to his fate, and another part of me is irresistibly drawn to the mystery of that chamber. I know that my expedition may be doomed, but nevertheless I must do what I can.

If I do not return, I leave 221B Teramachi Street and all that is in it to you. My belongings are few, but you will find in that tin dispatchbox the records of all the cases I handled prior to our acquaintance. I hope they will be of some use to you in your writing career. I am sorry that I will not be able to read any more of your Holmes of London stories. In my opinion they are a masterpiece.

Goodbye, old friend. Give my best to Mary, Miss Adler, and Mrs. Hudson.

Remember, in spirit I will always be by your side.

Your friend,

Sherlock Holmes



When I looked up, I found everyone staring at me in silence: Reginald and Rachel Musgrave, Irene Adler, and Mary. Firelight flickered on their faces. I looked at Hurlstone manor, which still glowed with that eerie moonlight; the moaning continued unabated. I had decided what I must do.

"I am going to rescue Holmes."

"You can't, Dr. Watson!" cried Irene Adler. "If that room takes you too..."

"These phenomena which we have witnessed are occurring because Holmes is even now battling to bring back Professor Moriarty. He needs a partner at his side."

A curious sense of conviction spread throughout my chest. Somewhere, beneath the surface of the water, it was all connected: the ancient mystery of the Chamber of the East of the East; Holmes's year and a half long slump; the world of London which Professor Moriarty had created; Madame Richborough's spiritualist revolution. These were not separate events, but all parts of a case unlike any in the annals of detective fiction. And we were now closing in on its nucleus.

Irene Adler put her hand on Mary's arm.

"What is your opinion, Mary? You must say something."

Mary stared at me. The crackling firelight sparkled in her limpid eyes. *Why must you go?* they asked. *You are his biographer, nothing more. Have you not suffered enough on his behalf? Why must you accompany him on another of his foolhardy adventures?*

But those words were not what she said.

"Come back, my dear. Promise me you'll come back," said she, embracing me tightly.

"I promise, Mary," I said, "I will come back to you."

Chapter 5

The Triumphant Return of Sherlock Holmes

I came to with a jolt.

—Where was I?

Gingerly I sat up and took stock of my surroundings.

The room reminded me of a ship's hold, though the low eaves sloped sharply upward like a garret. It was provisioned with a simple cot, which reminded me of my days as an army surgeon, as well as an armchair, a little table, and an unembellished fireplace. Light shone faintly through a window in front of me. But the view through the soot-stained window did little to lift my spirits. There was a stone-paved courtyard, hemmed in on all sides by brick houses which formed a sullen, four-story-high wall. The sky was smothered by a featureless haze of grey smoke. On the desk in front of the window were scattered carelessly a thick sheaf of papers, an inkpot, a quill, blotting paper, an ashtray.

I must have fallen asleep at my desk again.

I let out a wide yawn, then re-read the last page of the draft.

—

Mary stared at me. The crackling firelight sparkled in her limpid eyes. *Why must you go?* they asked. *You are his biographer, nothing more. Have you not suffered enough on his behalf? Why must you accompany him on another of his foolhardy adventures?*

But those words were not what she said.

"Come back, my dear. Promise me you'll come back." said she, embracing me tightly.

"I promise, Mary," I said, "I will come back to you."

—

Thus did the fourth chapter of *The Triumphant Return of Sherlock Holmes* draw to a close. For a week now I had found myself stymied as to how to proceed. Part of my hesitation

stemmed from my uncertainty as to how to develop the story, but another part of it was Mary. Every time I re-read it I felt a lump in my throat, for it reminded me of her warmth.

As I gazed at the words on the page, a knock on the door interrupted my thoughts.

"Dr. Watson?" came the gentle voice of the landlady. "Are you in there?"

I stood up and opened the door, and in peered Madame Richborough's pale, broad face.

"I hope I'm not disturbing you."

"No, not at all. Come in, Madame Richborough."

"You'll ruin your health if you keep working yourself so hard, Dr. Watson. Now, I don't mean to stick my nose in where it doesn't belong, but the last student who lived in these very quarters studied so much that he went a little funny in the head. You'd do well to take time for yourself now and again."

"I was just thinking of going out to clear my head," I replied. "Now what can I do for you?"

It turned out that Madame Richborough had come to invite me to a seance that would be held that night. The landlady was quite a serious believer in spiritualism. Now and again she would invite spirit mediums to hold court in her rooms on the first floor, which all of her tenants were also invited to join. I had heard rumours that she had turned to spiritualism after the untimely deaths of her husband and younger sister.

Other than her supernatural hobby she was a perfectly satisfactory landlady: gracious, meticulous, and quite reasonable on the matter of rent. I supposed by her invitations she only meant to spread a measure of solace to the wretched souls who lived in her rooms. There was no advantage in debating the matter, so I simply answered, "I will certainly attend."

"I am looking forward to seeing you there. It will be marvelous!" said the landlady, beaming as she bustled back down the stairs.

I shut the door behind her, then walked back to my desk at the window. My joints ached, and my belly stridently alerted me to its vacancy. The continuation to "The Triumphant Return of Sherlock Holmes" would have to wait. As Madame Richborough had just pointedly reminded me, perhaps it was time to clear my head.

I put on my things, then went down the staircase and out of the building.

The neighbourhood children were kicking pebbles on the pavement in the courtyard, the echoing rattles bouncing off the yellow-tiled walls. From far away came the plaintive melody of a barrel organ.



I arrived at my favourite haunt, a small tavern on a street corner near the British Museum.

The door swung shut on its hinges behind me, and immediately the noontime bustle was silenced. Aside from a few tradesmen discussing the state of the world in hushed tones in a corner booth, the dim interior was largely empty. I took my usual seat and ordered a coffee and mutton pie, and enjoyed my meal in peace and quiet.

It had been a long time since I had last stood under the limelight. Who would ever suspect that John H. Watson—lauded biographer, author of the world-famous *Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*, partner to the famous detective—would be lodged in a little garret in Bloomsbury, living on greasy mutton pie? Even the tavernmaster, who occasionally struck me up in conversation, took me for a third-rate hack down on his luck.

Yet even that was a generous title for me now. For six months now I had been scribbling away fruitlessly at *The Triumphant Return of Sherlock Holmes*. What admirer of Sherlock Holmes would want to read such drivel? What publisher would be willing to release such a fantastic tale into the world? And what was more, I had written myself into a corner.

Watson, citizen of Victorian Kyoto, plunges into the depths of the Chamber of the East of the East to save Sherlock Holmes! But I had no idea what the secret of the Chamber of the East of the East should be, nor the nature of the spiritual realm which lay beyond. I was stuck. I couldn't fathom what had possessed me to begin writing such a fable in the first place.

After finishing my meal I left the tavern and walked down the alley toward Tottenham Court Road. Above the sooty buildings, the sky was the same morose shade of grey. A gang of street urchins clung avariciously to the lighted window of a sweetshop; at my approach they shot me looks of fury and scattered.

Where the alley meets the great boulevard there is an antique bookshop, which fills me with a sense of nostalgia whenever I pass by. I stopped in front of it and perused a crate filled with novels. One of my few distractions from the travails of medical studies had been digging through the crate of discounted books for a book in whose pages I could get lost. I had not read so voraciously before or since, sometimes forgoing lunch and using the money instead on another book. It would not be much of an exaggeration to say that the

little tidbits of knowledge without which I could not have written those chronicles of Sherlock Holmes, I owed entirely to that crate of books set in front of this bookstore.

As I glanced fondly at those novels, a voice hailed me.

"Pardon me; do I address by any chance Dr. John Watson?"

The voice belonged to a gentleman wrapped up in a black frock coat and top hat, his fair face adorned with a beard.

"Have we met before?" I asked him.

"At St. James's Hall in Westminster," replied the young man earnestly. "I had the privilege of meeting you at one of your public readings."

"I see. You are very kind to say so."

I tipped my head slightly, then walked promptly off towards Oxford Street.

But the youth followed me, his eyes sparkling with apparent joy.

"How honoured I am to meet you again! My entire family are admirers of your stories of Sherlock Holmes. We have read every tale that has been published in the Strand Magazine, have bought copies of 'A Study in Scarlet' and 'The Sign of Four.' May I be so bold as to ask when we may expect the next one to come out?"

"There will be no 'next one'. I am Sherlock Holmes's partner no more."

It pained me to treat him in such a cold fashion, but I was sick of the question. Already a year had passed since Holmes and I had fallen out of company, and I was in no mood to be brought back into the fold. I quickened my pace, yet the ardent young fellow would not be put off so easily.

"But Dr. Watson," he cried, speeding up to match me, "Have you not heard of the explosion yesterday?"

"Explosion?" I paused, and turned around. "What do you mean?"

Instead of answering my question the young man pointed towards Oxford Street, where a news-vendor stood on the corner, clanging his bell. His stand was plastered with news-sheets, all bearing the terrible headline:

MURDEROUS ATTACK ON SHERLOCK HOLMES

I ran over and bought one, then laid it out on the pavement.

"Baker Street has been the scene of an uproar since about two in the afternoon yesterday, for that was when an explosion ripped through the home of Mr. Sherlock Holmes, the famous consulting detective. Fortunately it is known that the landlady was spared, having been out at the time. Detective Lestrade of Scotland Yard informs us that the attack is believed to have been an attempt on the life of Mr. Holmes. The detective himself was not found at the site, either alive or dead, and his whereabouts remain unknown. All of London worries for his safety."

As I glared at the broadsheet, the young man said with great emotion, "I'm sorry...I thought you ought to know."



At first glance Baker Street did not seem much changed since the last time I had visited it. There were the old tobacconist and barber shop, the whitewashed houses, and farther to the north the greenery of Regent's Park. All seemed quiet.

But once I stood on the doorstep of 221 Baker Street, the fresh scars of the bomb blast were immediately apparent. The blinds behind which the silhouette of Sherlock Holmes could be seen had been ripped asunder, and shards of broken glass littered the pavement below. Mrs. Hudson answered the door when I rang the bell.

"I'm glad to see you again, Mrs. Hudson."

"Dr. Watson!" exclaimed the landlady, and for a moment she stared at me in stunned silence. Tears welled up in her eyes.

"I was heartbroken to hear about Mary," she said. "Why didn't you ever visit? Mr. Holmes was ever so worried about you."

"I didn't mean to worry you," I said, taking her hand. "I read the papers. What a horrible shock that must have been."

Holmes's room had been torn apart. Cold air whistled through the broken window. The mangled furniture had been hurled to the corners of the room, the portraits and photographs had been blown off the walls, and the chemical bench and its vessels were reduced to a pile of scrap. It was hard to believe that this was the same room from which so many of our remarkable adventures had begun.

"I was just on my way back from my errands," Mrs. Hudson told me. As she walked along Baker Street with groceries in hand, the afternoon had been rent by a tremendous boom, accompanied by a thick smoke pouring from the upper window of 221 Baker. Stunned pedestrians stopped in their tracks, yelling in terror. Poor Mrs. Hudson was stunned, but then she remembered Holmes, and began to stumble towards the scene of the crime. Bits of the ceiling were still falling when she threw open the front door, and upstairs the second floor was obscured by a thick cloud of white smoke.

"Mr. Holmes!" she shouted, beginning to run up the stairs, but she was restrained by the patrolmen who had been attracted by the sound of the explosion.

"It's a lucky thing that Mr. Holmes wasn't home at the time," she said to me as I picked up Holmes's much-loved Stradivarius from the charred carpet.

It was evident that the threat to Holmes was much greater than any that had previously threatened him. Behind this act I sensed a malevolent mind which would not rest until it had put Holmes's existence to an end.

"I'm afraid Holmes has drawn the attention of a very dangerous enemy this time," I murmured.

"I admit I have never been so terrified."

"Do you know where he is?"

"He hasn't come home for some time, I'm afraid," said Mrs. Hudson with some apprehension. "I do hope that he is all right."

This was hardly the place to have a cup of tea, so we instead retired to the landlady's own private room on the first floor. Her tastes were simple and unembellished, and through the gauzy lace curtains we could see the traffic on Baker Street rushing by.

I sat on a flower-patterned armchair and accepted tea and scones.

"Surely you can't stay here," I remarked, suggesting that she leave Baker Street until the case was through, but Mrs. Hudson wouldn't hear of it. She seemed to feel that it was her sacred duty to keep watch over 221 Baker until Holmes had returned safe and sound.

Mrs. Hudson always had been a strange sort of landlady. Few lodgers were as exasperating as Sherlock Holmes. He was a man of irregular habits, and his mood was prone to wild swings between elation and despair, and above all incorrigibly lazy. His visitors were constantly coming and going, among them ruffians and street urchins of the most dubious

character. Most landladies would long ago have ripped up the lease and sent him packing, and if Mrs. Hudson had not been possessed of an uncommonly deep well of patience, the life and career of Sherlock Holmes would have languished in obscurity. Mrs. Hudson swelled with pride when I said this, but her expression remained clouded.

"Mr. Holmes is obsessed with the case," she said.

"Case? What case?"

"I don't know. But I can see that it is giving him a terrific time."

Mrs. Hudson testified that in the past six months he had taken on fewer and fewer cases, and that for the last three he had turned virtually away all clients who knocked upon his door. Yet he seemed to work even harder than he had before. He hardly slept at all, and spent all his time deep in thought in his room, smoking enormous amounts of tobacco, before abruptly flinging the door open and departing for days on end. When he did return it was usually in a state of fatigue, dragging himself up the stairs and locking himself in his room once more to think. It was obvious even to Mrs. Hudson that whatever he was wrestling with was stretching his nerves to their very limit.

Sherlock Holmes was the kind of man who would forsake the normal requirements of sleep and sustenance for the sake of an interesting case. His extraordinary powers of concentration, and his abnormal fascination with solving mysteries, had elevated him to his present status of the pre-eminent detective in the world. But this was the first time to Mrs. Hudson's knowledge that he had persisted in such an anxious state for so many months. His extremely paucity of nourishment were apparent upon his emaciated features, and eventually Mrs. Hudson could hold back her comments no longer.

"I confronted him about two weeks ago," she said.

She was awoken in the night by a thump, and came out of her room with lamp in hand to find Holmes on his hands and knees about midway up the stairs. He had only just come back, and his strength had given out before he could reach his room. Mrs. Hudson went up to assist him, but when she saw his face in the lamplight she was aghast. His bloodless, sunken cheeks made him look like he was on death's door.

"Mrs. Hudson," he whispered in a faint voice, "If you would provide me with bread and water I shall be infinitely obliged to you."

Mrs. Hudson turned and ran downstairs, bringing up a cup brimming with water and a platter of cold meat and bread. A wave of pity came over Mrs. Hudson as she looked at him

sitting on the stairs, gulping down the water and devouring the food like a starving beast. What would drive the well-known detective Sherlock Holmes to such a state? What could possibly be the subject of this dreadful case?

"You can't continue on like this, Mr. Holmes," said Mrs. Hudson firmly. "You need rest!"

"I'm afraid there isn't time for rest," said the detective in a weary voice. "Even as we speak the enemy is plotting his next move. Delay even a single day, and all of the efforts I have expended will go up in smoke. Listen to me, Mrs. Hudson. The enemy with whom I am engaged in this desperate struggle is the base and origin of many evils. If I were assured that at the end of my labours he would be destroyed, I tell you that my own life would be a price I would cheerfully pay."

It took some exertion on the part of Mrs. Hudson to quell his protests and put him into bed, but no sooner had she arisen and gone up to check on him the next morning than she found his bed empty once more. Her fears were naturally heightened, and her suspicion that something dreadful was afoot was confirmed by the explosion of yesterday afternoon.

"I cannot help but feel that that was the last I will ever see of Mr. Holmes."

"Don't say that, Mrs. Hudson. This is not the first time Holmes has confronted danger, and it will not be the last."

"I am afraid things are different this time," she said sadly, as if she was privy to some secret that I did not possess. But she said nothing more, and rather than badger her for answers I finished my cold tea and glanced out the window at Baker Street. The placid scene was one that I had seen a thousand times before. But I knew that somewhere behind the humdrum monotony lay a labyrinth into which Holmes had plunged in pursuit of a deadly foe. All the while I had lain safe and sound in my hidden garret, Holmes had fought on alone.

"Why have you not come until now?" Mrs. Hudson suddenly spoke up accusingly. "I don't know how many times I thought to myself, *if only Dr. Watson were here!*"

I stared measuredly down into the bottom of my teacup.

"I'm afraid that won't do, Mrs. Hudson. To Holmes, the case is everything. All he requires is a mystery to solve. But I am different. I must have my own life to live. I will never get mixed up with his affairs again."

"Then why did you come today?"

I had no answer for her question. If I did not want to become involved in Holmes's affairs, all I had to do was stay away. Yet the instant I read about the bombing in the paper I had been overcome with an irresistible urge to rush to Baker Street.

Secretly, I was afraid—that I would lose not only Mary, but Holmes too.

"Mr. Holmes needs you," said Mrs. Hudson. "Without Watson, there is no Holmes."



"You really will not leave Baker Street, then," I inquired of Mrs. Hudson one last time as I was leaving. With a smile she shook her head.

"Someone must be here to greet Mr. Holmes when he returns", she said. "Goodbye, Dr. Watson."

"Goodbye, Mrs. Hudson. Take care of yourself."

Even after I had begun to walk away Mrs. Hudson stood motionless on the stone pavement in front of 221 Baker Street, watching me go. I suppose she hoped, like a mother hopes when her children are engaged in a quarrel, that Holmes and I would bury the hatchet and resume our old partnership once more, and then everything would work itself out.

As for me, I strolled around and around in Hyde Park until the sun went down. Lush copses of elms and chestnuts stood like weird islands in a sea of green. All around me people enjoyed the last few minutes of dusk.

After taking Mary as my wife and opening my practice in Kensington, I would still receive the odd telegram from Holmes, and whenever I was in a hurry to get to Baker Street to help Holmes with some new case I would pass through this park. What an ebullient figure I must have cut. Just the mere thought of embarking on another adventure with Holmes set my heart thrilling within me, for in those days I believed that I had found my life's purpose.

I did not tell Mrs. Hudson, but just once, Holmes had asked me to return to live at Baker Street.

That had been about half a year ago, on the occasion of Mary's funeral.

After my poor wife was laid to her final rest in the earth and the few mourners dispersed, Holmes and I took a walk around the graveyard. I had not visited Baker Street since the diagnosis of the Harley Street specialist, and thus he and I had not spoken for six months. I

recall that it was an extraordinarily chilly day late in autumn. A misty rain fogged our surroundings, and the bare trees lurked around the cemetery like shadow puppets.

"I don't expect a decision right away," he said by way of preamble, before launching into his proposal.

But with the loss of Mary my life had taken on a new aspect, and at the center of this aspect was a gaping hole. Moving back to 221B Baker Street would do nothing to fill it. It was anathema to me to even consider the notion.

In the first place, it was my enthusiastic career as biographer of Sherlock Holmes which silently aggravated the malady that had taken root in Mary's heart. All that I had once found so fascinating was now loathsome to me: deduction, adventure, crime fiction, and above all, Sherlock Holmes himself.

"I am your partner no longer, Holmes," I told him there in the graveyard, before turning and making my way through the rain back to the church.

"Forgive me, Watson!" Holmes's lament followed me. "I only wish I knew how to save you."

Since that day our paths had not crossed.

Without Watson, there is no Holmes—surely only Mrs. Hudson could believe such a thing.

Even after our parting of ways Holmes's career continued to flourish. I had heard that he had traveled to the Continent late last year on behalf of the French government. He may have lost his partner in John Watson, but that did not seem to have had much effect on his work as a detective. It was true enough that he now contended with a powerful enemy, and yet it was precisely these kinds of situations in which he found his life's meaning.

In his battle against mental stagnation Sherlock Holmes was always seeking out cases which required his full array of skills as a detective to solve against foes worthy of his time, involving mysteries beautiful and intricate. Long and impatiently had he waited to meet a rival who was his intellectual equal. The ordinary man could never hope to understand Holmes's passion, but that passion was what set him above the common herd.

"Holmes will get through it. He does not need my help," I told myself, watching the shadows grow long in the park. I made a circuit around the Serpentine, and by the time I returned to Oxford Street the sun was sinking over the horizon in the west. The lawns, the trees, the tall apartments on Park Lane were stained a bloody red by the setting sun.

Oxford Street was choked with pedestrians and carriages alike, heading home after a long day of labour. I trudged through the throng with a dark cloud lingering over my thoughts. In my distraction I bumped into more than a few people, and once as I walked north across a street I heard a yelled collection of oaths as a cab only just avoided running me down. I tottered to a halt on the pavement and stared at random at the other side of the street, when a figure caught my eye. It stood motionless in front of Bradley's, looking straight at me. The evening sun cut its face cleanly in two halves of light and dark. It was the young man who had called out to me in front of the bookshop.

At that moment a carriage passed between us, and when it had gone so had the young man.

What had I just seen? I seriously doubted I had witnessed a ghost, and yet it was too queer to put from my mind.

I turned off the main street into a narrow alley. The noise of the thoroughfare was quickly swallowed up by the buildings, and the light was a moody indigo.



The gas lamps were lit in the hallway when I returned to my lodgings. Madame Richborough's seance was scheduled to begin that evening at nine. Intending to rest during the interim, I climbed the dimly lit steps. As I passed the third-floor landing, the door to Cartwright's room flew open.

"Good evening, doctor."

"Cartwright! I thought you'd still be in Hampstead."

"I had to come back for the seance," replied Cartwright, looking a little piously at me.

He was a young painter of about twenty years in age, and one would not have known it to look at him that he was considered one of the greatest new hopes of the London painting scene. He taught painting, as had his late father, and on the weekends he would travel to see his mother and younger sister in the suburbs of London. I found him an agreeable young man when Madame Richborough had introduced us on the occasion of his moving in, and we hit it off almost immediately. It was my favourite pastime to sit the night with him, sipping weak tea and listening to him propound his theories on painting.

"You'll be there, won't you, Dr. Watson?"

"I have to attend once in a while to placate Madame Richborough. Though I'm afraid I can't quite summon your same enthusiasm towards the subject of spiritualism," I replied, upon which Cartwright cleared his throat somewhat awkwardly.

I was still unsure of Cartwright's motives in regards to spiritualism. At first, he like me had approached the subject with a considerable amount of skepticism. But his attitude had transformed completely once a young spirit medium named Rachel began to show up at the madame's seances, and now not a session went by but he was present. Whenever I so much as brushed on the subject he would hem and haw.

"Would you like to come inside, doctor?"

"Gladly."

"I've just finished up a new portrait," he said happily, holding open the door for me.

Painting paraphernalia lay cluttered in between the simple furniture, and the smell of paint clung to everything. The pale blue light of evening shone through the window. From the corner Cartwright brought a portrait and stood it on an easel in the center of the room.

"Do you be so kind as to give me your opinion," he said.

The portrait was of an older man. He wore a dark frock coat, and his hands which he held behind him clutched a top hat. His glowering expression was directed slightly off to the right, his thin lips pulled into a cruel sneer. His frame was slight and his back was rounded severely, but his eyes held a formidable gleam. There was something of the unpredictable air of the wild beast about him, and yet his white, prominent forehead spoke of the acute intellect which lay within.

"Professor Moriarty?" I asked.

"One of my better likenesses, I think," he replied.

Professor Moriarty was an occasional visitor of Madame Richborough on account of having been indebted to her late husband, though to the details of that relationship I am not privy. He had the disturbing habit of oscillating his pale, reptilian face from side to side when he looked at you, like a snake regarding its prey. When Madame Richborough had first dragged me over to make his acquaintance, he had leaned in and whispered in my ear, as if divulging a secret of great import, "I am a great admirer of detective fiction," and declared that he had read all of the stories I had written down about Holmes. But this did nothing to

dispel my uneasy impression of him, and I found it impossible to feel much affection towards him.

"I think it will find favour with the public," said Cartwright, gazing upon his work with pride. "Professor Moriarty is well-known in many circles. This will be my ticket to fame and fortune, I am sure of it."

"You mean that you will turn down the Yorkshire job?"

As I have mentioned Cartwright had taken on some pupils, and the father of one of those students happened to know a wealthy landowner in Yorkshire who sought an in-residence teacher to instruct his two daughters in watercolours, as well as to make an inventory of their art collection. In return he would be granted a room in the mansion, and a salary far exceeding what any young man could expect to earn at that age, to say nothing of the invaluable education to the burgeoning artist that may only be gained from the works of the old masters.

Yet despite my urging, Cartwright had yet to forward any note of recommendation to the landowner.

"It's a generous offer, but if I were to leave for Yorkshire, I would no longer be able to avail myself of Professor Moriarty's influence."

"What of his influence? You will go far, with or without Professor Moriarty. You ought to put more stock in your own possibility."

"Did you make your own career without any help?"

"Well, I would not go as far as to say that..."

"You see?" Cartwright laughed aloud. "I will do what I must to seek my fortune."

Feeling a little unsettled, I returned my gaze to the portrait. There was something about this man which bothered me. On every occasion that I had met him I had had the impression that I was talking with an empty husk. I did not understand myself, then, why I had given him the important role of Holmes's fellow-lodger in *The Triumphant Return of Sherlock Holmes*.

"I will admit the professor is a little strange. He is positively rolling in money, and seems to wield a great deal of clandestine influence in many circles. Why then is he so eager to avoid the spotlight? Each time I've visited his home the lights are out, and he never seems to have any visitors."

“There must be more to the professor than meets the eye.”

“He is simply too far above the likes of us,” declared Cartwright. “The doings of us mere mortals must seem child’s play to him. There is nothing which is beyond his ken, from the outer reaches of the universe to the innermost secrets of the human heart. He sees and calculates all. He may be the greatest person in London, a modern Aristotle!”

In Cartwright’s words I heard something close to veneration of the professor.



When I came down from my garret around nine that evening, I found Cartwright chatting with Rachel in the foyer. Her pale, dainty face peeked out from her wide bonnet beneath the light of the gas lamps, and she glanced upward a little when she looked my way.

“Good evening,” she said in a small voice.

I had the little clairvoyant some times before. She was the daughter of a merchant whose shop was set up on Great Ormond Street. Though she had only become prominent as a spirit medium in the last past six months, around that neighbourhood her reputation apparently dated back much further than that. Her devout, conservative father had at first deplored those rumours, but the influx of spiritualist customers eventually brought him around.

It was the common folk of London, like Madame Richborough, who were the strongest champions of Rachel, inviting her to their sitting-rooms to hold seances. Rachel refused to accept any fee for her services, which perhaps only made her seem more trustworthy.

“Good evening,” I said in answer to her greeting, “I am looking forward to your seance tonight.”

She looked down demurely.

“Pray temper your expectations. I cannot promise anything will happen tonight.”

Her diffidence had become something of a trademark for her. Surely such an accomplished medium could afford to boast a little more confidence, and yet I always had the impression that Rachel was not confident that she could master her supernatural powers. A more discerning observer might suspect that her retiring demeanour was simply a ploy to win confidence in her psychic abilities.

Madame Richborough rapturously welcomed us into her living room, where a candelabra had been set on a large table.

"Dear Cartwright," she cooed as she poured tea for us, "May I presume that you have accepted the tutoring position?"

"Well, you see," said Cartwright with a little cough, "To be honest, I am still debating."

"Debating! But haven't you already visited Hampstead?" cried Madame Richborough, her eyes dramatically opened wide. "What is there to debate about? You could live on a lovely estate, rub shoulders with the cream of society, gain a master education in artwork...one could not dream of a better position. Such an opportunity will never come around again, you know!"

"You may be right, and yet I have finally found meaning in my work. The conditions may be favourable, but I cannot abandon my students now. And what would become of my mother and sister were I to go gallivanting off to Yorkshire?"

"What does your mother say?"

"She tells me to do what I think is right."

As Madame Richborough and Cartwright argued back and forth over the matter of his going to Yorkshire, Rachel hung her head, occasionally glancing up with worried eyes at Cartwright. For his part Cartwright was not ignorant of her attentions; the only who did not seem to have noticed this silent repartee between the two young people was Madame Richborough.

At last Cartwright stood up tall and cleared his throat.

"At any rate, I do not intend to leave London now," he declared, and I detected a quiet shiver of relief go through Rachel's expression.



In *The Triumphant Return of Sherlock Holmes*, Madame Richborough is a spirit medium and a swindler, with an uncanny personal magnetism. But in real life Madame Richborough was a simple landlady, meddlesome but kind-hearted.

It was my understanding that she had turned to spiritualism after the deaths of her husband and younger sister. One of her tenants had invited the grieving woman to a seance at which she had spoken to the spirits of the two deceased, from which she derived

peace and calm. Thus had her enthusiasm for inviting tenants to seances arisen, and though I myself did not much care for spiritualism neither would I gainsay others who found solace in it.

Madame Richborough drew the curtains and put out the gas lamp, putting the room into darkness, save for the candles which illuminated the faces of the participants around the table. At the madame's direction we put our arms on the table and joined hands with our neighbours; Cartwright was on my left, and Madame Richborough to my right.

"You may begin," said Madame Richborough gravely.

The young clairvoyant shut her eyes and bent her head, and began to chant an incantation. For a while we listened to her voice in silence. Madame Richborough's eyes were fixed upon her, full of longing and expectation; her look was matched by the earnest gaze in Cartwright's eyes. Rachel's head drooped ever further downward, and her voice nearly petered out into silence.

The last time I had attended one of these seances, the spirits had claimed themselves to be Madame Richborough's sister and Cartwright's grand-uncle. They spoke only through Rachel's mouth, and their assertions were so vapid that anyone could have made them, which I did not find very convincing. At the same time I did not believe that Rachel's intent was to deceive. I suspected that she was more susceptible to auto-suggestion than most.

After a while Rachel slowly looked up. In the flickering candlelight I saw in place of her previous apprehension a kind of sensuality. Her eyes remained shut as her head turned to face me.

"Dr. Watson," she whispered. "The spirits wish to commune with you."

Around the table every face turned to look at me.

My continued silence prompted Madame Richborough to speak up.

"Who is the spirit?"

"She is a young woman."

"And her name?"

"Mary...she says she is your wife."

The moment I heard that name leave her lips I was struck by a wave of revulsion. It was impossible that this young lady should have any knowledge of my past. Either Madame

Richborough or Cartwright must have whispered this information in her ear. I was so outraged at this sacrilege towards the dead that by sheer impulse I got to my feet. Cartwright's hand shot out and took a vise-like grasp upon my arm.

"Please, you must remain sitting where you are, Dr. Watson," I heard Madame Richborough say.

"You have suffered ever since you moved into this house. You are afraid to face Mary's spirit," said the clairvoyant from across the table, and her voice shifted. "Why are you afraid of me, John? Will you not hear what I have to say?"

I felt a chill race up my spine. It was as if the medium had turned into a completely different person. I heard the voice as though it was being thrown from beyond a vast, dark plain. There was a frozen chill in the air. Madame Richborough let her head fall with a serious expression, and Cartwright let go of my arm.

I lurched a few steps back, hardly able to breathe.

"Forgive me, Mary. I was a fool."

"What makes you say that?"

"I was a doctor, your own husband. And yet I could not save you."

No sooner had the Harley Street doctor stepped out from the bedroom after his examination then he rounded upon me sternly.

"How can you have let it progress so far?"

The diagnosis was galloping consumption. One of her lungs had already ceased to function, and the other was being ravaged. When I heard him say that she had three months to live I felt a hole opening up beneath my feet to swallow me.

Can't you let Holmes take care of his own business once in a while, my love? she had said to me shortly before that fateful visit. *You'll work yourself to death.*

I'm all right, Mary. My leg is feeling fine, had been my reply.

The career of Mr. Sherlock Holmes was reaching its zenith then. Requests of the most fascinating variety came flooding into 221 Baker Street not only from England, but from various polities and kingdoms in Europe as well. My stories in the Strand Magazine had built an avid readership. As Holmes's biographer, how could I possibly afford to sit around and rest when there were so many glamorous adventures to be had? Mary's pleas fell on

deaf ears. Every time a telegram came from Holmes, off I went to Baker Street to investigate the crime, often not coming home until the wee hours of the morning. My practice in Kensington lay all but abandoned.

I will not deny that a little whisper of doubt would come across my mind—*sooner or later something will go wrong*. But I never imagined that the fatal stroke would come in the form of my wife's illness.

I spent the final six months of Mary's life by her side, not once venturing out to Baker Street. My days, once frantic and exciting, became quiet and ordinary. Mary never blamed me for anything. In fact, now that we spent all of our time together she seemed happier than she had been. I cursed my past folly, but I could not undo it now.

Mary's spirit spoke to me again.

"I do not resent you. You found your calling in your work with Mr. Holmes. And it was through him that we were brought together. It was never my place to tear you two apart."

I whirled around and fled the room. "Dr. Watson!" Cartwright's voice followed me, but I did not so much as pause as I flew past the gas lamps in the foyer and up the darkened stairs. I slammed the door to my garret and leaned back against it, and only then did I find that I could breathe again.



The appearance of Mary's spirit at the seance revived memories which I had heretofore kept locked away. I had dismissed the veracity of spiritualism, and yet now I had been shaken to the core by the ghostly voice of my Mary which had issued from between Rachel's lips.

I closed my eyes and stood there in the darkness for a while, for the pain I found was almost too much to bear.

Suddenly there came a tapping, as of someone gently rapping at the windowpane. I cautiously approached my desk, found a match, and lit the lamp. The sound was coming from behind the drawn curtain, which I pulled aside to find my own face staring at me in the smudged glass. And superimposed upon the reflection I saw the face of Sherlock Holmes. I started backward, but Holmes gave another rap on the window and murmured, "The window, Watson, quick!" It appeared that my visitor was no phantom after all.

I hastily unlatched the window and swung it open, allowing Holmes to slide inside.

"Holmes! What are you doing here?" I gasped.

"I'm here to fetch you back to reality," he said, taking a little hop down from my desk and swiftly striding across the garret to press his ear against the door, listening intently for any sound from the corridor.

"What are you doing?" I whispered.

"I am a wanted man," he answered, "and I cannot be too cautious these days."

He took a cigar from his pocket and went back to the desk, bending down to light it from the lamp and puffing deeply on it. I sat on my bed, while Holmes lowered himself into a wooden chair. His face had grown thin, and it was apparent as Mrs. Hudson had feared that his battle with this insidious enemy was taking its toll. Yet his eyes retained the old sparkle.

"I don't think I've ever seen you so ill-used, Holmes."

"I don't get much sleep these days, and when I do I am tormented by the strangest dreams."

He would dream of a great waterfall in Switzerland, he said, thundering downward with a tremendous roar and veiling the air with its great spray. In the dream Holmes approached the edge of the fall as if in a trance, looking down at the boiling foam in the pit far below, as if the whole world was hurling itself into the chasm of oblivion. Then a black figure approached him from behind, and sent him hurtling into that same abyss.

"It's always the same dream. I'm quite sick of it, I tell you."

"That must speak to the pressure you feel."

"There's no helping that. I have spent years grappling with this case, and at last it is reaching its critical point," he said. "If you desire to spend the rest of your years secluded in this garret I have no right to stop you. As a friend I would be remiss not to respect your wishes. And yet circumstances compel me to do otherwise."

"What do you mean?"

At my confused words Holmes leaned forward.

"You have probably heard of Professor Moriarty?" said he.

"You mean Madame Richborough's visitor?" I replied. "He comes to the house from time to time."

"I have never told you who he is," said Holmes. "For years past I have continually been conscious of some power behind the malefactor, some deep organizing power which forever stands in the way of the law, and throws its shield over the wrong-doer. It is so cunning and careful that I could find no evidence to trace it back to its source. It was all I could do to deduce its action by putting together traces left behind in cases of the most varying sorts. That was why I have not spoken of it to you until now: I have often wondered whether I was not in fact dreaming the whole thing up. But I persisted, not out of any fidelity to the law but for my own intellectual curiosity, for I was desperate to know what manner of person could be behind such a curious criminal organization, and how they carried out their aims.

"But for all my facilities I found it almost impossible to break through the veil which shrouded this organization. There must be some power moving at the center, and yet all my investigations led me to were coincidences and happenstance. It was as if there was a black hole at the center of London, and no matter how carefully I followed each thread it inevitably was swallowed up into this yawning void. No matter how carefully I peered, no light could escape to reveal the figure hidden within. It was only last fall that I was able to seize my thread and follow it until it led to the heart of the mystery: Professor Moriarty."

"You mean to tell me that Professor Moriarty is the head of this criminal organization?"

"That is exactly what I mean."

"Impossible! He's just a retired mathematician."

"That is the common impression. In the first place few have ever heard of him, and that is what is most shocking of all. Until I spoke to Inspector Lestrade, he had never appeared on the desks of Scotland Yard, and if not for my unravelling of the web that would most certainly have continued to be the case. Dozens of unsolved cases would have languished in perpetuity.

"I still find it difficult to believe myself that half of the evil that is committed in this great city could be organized by one man. He sits motionless, like a spider in the centre of its web which radiates out into every corner of London. He does little himself, only plans in the study of his residence in Pall Mall, and sends forth his agents, which are numerous, to carry out his designs. Is there a crime to be done, a paper to be abstracted, a man to be

removed—whatever he concocts, his agents swiftly put into motion. But they are only pawns: the only one who understands and controls the totality is Professor Moriarty.

“You see, to the professor, humanity itself is calculable. He manipulates men as though they are factors in an equation. That is how he can so tightly control his organization. It moves like a well-oiled machine, or perhaps a sinuous creature, to carry out his crimes. He created it without assistance from any other. It fills me with a dread to behold it. There has never been a criminal like him, and I doubt there will be one after. He is the immovable constant: we are merely marionettes, and he is pulling the strings.”

Holmes’s words elicited a kind of horror in me. I remember what Mrs. Hudson had said, back in Baker Street: *Mr. Holmes is obsessed with the case.*

“It almost sounds as though you admire the man,” I remarked.

“I have at last found an opponent who deserves and requires every ounce of my attention,” chuckled Holmes. “He is the Napoleon of crime. It is only right that I give such an extraordinary antagonist his proper due.”

For the last six months Holmes had been straining to the utmost to bring Professor Moriarty into the arms of the law. He had secured the cooperation of Scotland Yard and was now drawing his toils around the mastermind.

“He is hot on my scent, now that he senses the net closing on him. You know of the bombing at Baker Street?”

“I visited just this afternoon. It was a horrible sight.”

“I feel terribly for Mrs. Hudson. I have gone to ground for the last two weeks, and you see Moriarty’s pique at his failure to unearth me. I had considered getting away to the Continent until the police were able to act, but that is out of the question now.”

“Why is that?”

“Because of you, my dear Watson,” said Sherlock Holmes. “Moriarty has set his sights on you.”



“They have been watching you day and night,” Holmes continued. “What other purpose could Professor Moriarty’s frequent visits serve? Madame Richborough, Cartwright, that

spirit medium Rachel: they are all of them lackeys of the professor. Madame Richborough invited you for a seance tonight, did she not?"

"How could you know that?"

"An elementary deduction," said he. "They belong to a gang which uses the facade of spiritualism to defraud and manipulate, with the yield offered up in tribute to Moriarty's operation. I have no doubt that everything that happened there tonight was the product of careful premeditation. Mary's spirit appeared, I presume?"

"You mean it was all a trick?"

"Did you seriously believe that the spirit of Mary had descended upon you?" said Holmes, taking me on the arm and shaking me. "Get yourself together, Watson. With a little preparation anyone could make a fraudulent imitation of her. You are tormented by guilt at her death, and so they staged a seance in order to seize your weakness. As for their purpose, it is of course because you were formerly my partner. Professor Moriarty understands only too well what led to our parting of the ways, and he seeks to use your grief and rage as a weapon against me. That is how he operates."

Holmes got up and tossed his cigar-end into the fireplace, then leaned back against the mantelpiece and bowed his head. He looked exhausted.

The lamp flickered in the slight breeze which came in through the window.

"I know of the grudge which you carry toward me," said Holmes quietly. "Why else would you write *The Triumphant Return of Sherlock Holmes*?"

At his words my eyes moved toward the desk by the window, atop which lay a thick sheaf of papers.

"You've read it?" I asked, to which Holmes nodded.

"I've stolen in a fair few times to read it," he replied, rousing himself from the mantelpiece. "It is a strange piece of crime writing which bears almost no resemblance to the crime records you have published before in the pages of the Strand Magazine. It is set in the curious world of Victorian Kyoto, and yet you, me, Mrs. Hudson, Mary, Irene Adler, and even Professor Moriarty play a part in its tale. I was quite keen to know why you would write such a thing, and the more I read the more apparent it became that this was something of another genre entirely wrapped up in the guise of a detective story. Your aim was not to write crime fiction: quite the opposite entirely."

Holmes returned to settle in his chair.

“You made up this world in order to strip Sherlock Holmes of his powers of detection. As to why he has fallen into his slump: the question is meaningless, for that is the very foundation on which this world is built. The author has decided it must be so, and therefore it is beyond the power of the inhabitants of his creation to alter it. Sherlock Holmes can never have his ‘triumphant return’. As long as Holmes is powerless in this fairy kingdom of Victorian Kyoto, you can live there forevermore with Mary at your side. What say you to this?”

I forgot to breathe as I listened to Holmes lay out his theory. Never before had he read and spoken of my stories before with such intensity. I felt at once vexation that I should be so accused, and yet at the same time the relief of a great burden being lifted from my shoulders. For the first time, it seemed to me that Holmes truly understood me.

“But your aim has not been accomplished,” he said, leaning toward me and resting his elbows on his knees. “No matter how vivid your depiction of Victorian Kyoto, it is merely a product of your inner desires, a way to escape harsh reality. Lay down your pen and raise your eyes from your papers, and you will find that you remain in London. You can breathe life into Mary on the page, but she will never return from the grave. I cannot imagine how painful it must feel. With every word you write the self-deception must become more unbearable. You cherish this fantasy world you have created, and yet you loathe it at the same time. All your hate is poured into the Musgraves’ Chamber of the East of the East, that irrational plot device, and it is driving your story surely toward wrack and ruin.”

In amazement I looked around my garret. The writing desk at the window, the worn old dresser, the round table and the simple tea set, the soot-stained fireplace—all the accoutrements which had seemed so dear to me, now seemed in the lamplight like waterlogged cargo washed ashore from a shipwreck. I was amazed I had never realized how suffocating the room was, from the low angled ceiling to the tiny garret window. But that was because for the past six months I had been living in another world. I had shut the window to London, and wandered into a labyrinth of my own devising.

Walking to the desk I picked *The Triumphant Return of Sherlock Holmes*. Six months of work was represented in this stack of papers. Within lay Victorian Kyoto, 221B Teramachi Street, the gallant flowing Kamo. I recalled an evening walk along the river, and along with it a vision of Mary came to me. My wife was clasping my hand, the warm glow of the setting sun on her laughing cheeks as we walked.

Anguish welled up in my breast, hot as tears. *So it's over*, I thought to myself. I would never be able to return to that city of Kyoto again.

"Come back to Baker Street, Watson," said Holmes. "Let us begin anew, you and I. This will be the triumphant return of John H. Watson."



It was then I realized that the boarding-house was unnaturally quiet. I wondered what Madame Richborough and Cartwright were up to. It was as if the entire house was holding its breath, eavesdropping on our conversation. I looked at Holmes and saw that his features were tense and alert.

There was a knock at the door.

"Dr. Watson?" called Madame Richborough's voice.

Holmes stood up and pressed a finger to his lips. Dousing the lamp flame, he got up on the desk and softly pushed open the window. All the while, Madame Richborough was insistently rapping on the door, and I heard a note of impatience and frustration growing in her tone.

"Dr. Watson? I know you are in there," she insisted. "You must open the door. There is an important matter I must discuss with you."

At the windowsill Holmes turned and extended a hand.

"You'll come with me, won't you, Watson?"

I clambered onto the desk and followed Holmes through the window. It was a cool night, and moonlight fell on the brick chimneys which thrust up from the gentle slope of the rooftop. Grasping the window frame I glanced back into the garret. It felt like I had taken a leap over the edge of the world. At that very moment the door was opened, and the instant Madame Richborough saw me outside the window she shrieked in astonishment, "What are you doing?"

Holmes began to climb the roof on hands and knees.

"Watch your step, Watson!"

As I followed him up the roof I heard thumping footsteps and the sound of chairs being kicked aside from the garret window.

"Where's he gone?"

"He's outside!"

I saw Cartwright lean out the window.

"Dr. Watson!" he shouted. "Come back! Professor Moriarty awaits you!"

When I showed no signs of heeding him the young artist cursed and blew a shrill note on a whistle. The courtyard came alive with glowing lanterns, and there were more shouts and running footsteps. It appeared that the Professor's henchmen had been lying in wait.

"There he is!"

With all the commotion it was as though a fire had broken out in the house. All around the neighbourhood curious faces appeared at the windows.

At the top of the roof, Holmes ran along the ridge and leaped to the adjacent building.

"It's almost like we are the criminals!" I panted. "Why haven't you arrested Moriarty yet?"

"It is part of the game," replied Holmes nonchalantly. "If we were to arrest the professor, his underlings would scatter like so many spiderlings in the wind, and the case against him would fall apart in court. No, we must scoop the whole gang up in one fell swoop."

"Well, the way things are, it may very well be us who are scooped up, Holmes."

The alleyways of London stretched out beneath us like a tightly woven lattice; here little windows burned with light, and there drying racks stood like masts in the vast sea of rooftops and chimneys beneath the silvery moon. In that vast silhouette I imagined hidden mysteries lurking around every corner.

Holmes pointed with his left hand.

"This way, Watson!"

We slid down the sloped roof and jumped to the next building. At the corner of the roof was a doorway which led to a stairwell, which we descended as quietly as we could. The residents appeared to be asleep, and when we reached the ground floor we found ourselves in a second-hand goods store, with dusty odds and ends piled high on the dirt floor. The light of the gas lamps which came in through the window in the door fell on cracked trifold mirrors, old-fashioned wardrobes and tables. We crouched down and

picked our way through the miscellanea. Holmes paused to take up a rusty sword which was propped up beside a suit of armour.

A group of our pursuers passed in front of the shop at that exact moment. One of them pressed his face to the window in the door, his eyes keenly roving around the interior of the shop. Holmes immediately pressed himself to the floor, still carrying the saber, while I hid myself in the shadow of a wardrobe and held my breath. Presently our adversary appeared to give up his search and move on. But suddenly our eyes were dazzled by a light from the back of the shop. There stood the old proprietor holding a lantern, croaking, "Who's there?"

Almost immediately the front door was smashed down, and four men sprang in.

With a shriek the proprietor dropped his lantern and fled whence he had come. Holmes leapt to his feet, and in the twinkling of an eye he had spent two of them sprawling with that rusty blade. I knocked aside the wardrobe and hurled myself at another with all my might, knocking him to the ground whereupon another pile of rubbish collapsed atop him.

The last man scuttled out of the shop, falling over himself in his haste.

"I've found them!" he shouted, and from down the alley we heard the threatening drumbeat of uncountable footsteps coming our way.

Holmes and I fled for our lives ever deeper into the labyrinth of streets.



It was only when we reached Oxford Street that we at last could catch our breath. Even at this hour the street was bustling with people going to and fro in the light of the street lamps and pubs.

With a blast on his whistle Holmes summoned a cab.

"To Scotland Yard!" he shouted, and in a moment we were off. As the carriage flew west down Oxford Street, reminiscences of the adventures Holmes and I had shared whirled through my head. After making my escape from Afghanistan in 1881 I drifted into London, and the despair I felt upon my arrival I will never forget. Cold rain drenched the dreary streets, and the multitudes who rushed in and out of the station all seemed weary and exhausted. Who among them would even notice that an ex-army surgeon rendered infirm by typhus and a Jezail bullet had joined their number? How I would make my way in this besmogged, grimy metropolis, I had no idea.

It was my chance meeting with Sherlock Holmes that transformed everything. After taking up residence at Baker Street it was as though London was a completely different city. Before our acquaintance it had been a cold, aloof, inhuman place; afterwards it was a place of wonder and intrigue where adventure might lurk around any corner.

Grubby dockyards and piers on the banks of the Thames—tangled, labyrinthine streets under the glow of gas lamps in the night—plazas packed with theatre-goers on their way back from a play—under Sherlock Holmes's magic spell, all of these scenes were transformed into potential gateways to thrilling adventures. Grey old London became glittering Baghdad from the Arabian Nights, and I Caliph Harun al-Rashid, roaming its bewitching streets.

The hansom turned south at Charing Cross.

"The jig is up for the professor," explained Holmes. "On Monday next the net will close on him and all the principal members of his gang. Then will come the greatest criminal trial of the century, the clearing up of dozens of mysteries, and the rope for all of them."

"I congratulate you, Holmes. It is a splendid accomplishment."

"I cannot feel easy until it is all over, of course. Professor Moriarty is desperate to silence me, as you are well aware; I have already been the target of countless assaults. But one must be prepared for retribution if one is to take on such a foe. Even were something to befall me it will be no great hindrance; the evidence has been placed in front of the highest echelons of Scotland Yard, and I have every confidence that Lestrade will carry out his instructions to the letter."

Inspector Lestrade was another with whom I had a long history. We had first met at Lauriston Gardens, during the investigation which I have chronicled in the brochure entitled *A Study in Scarlet*, and he had been a fixture in many cases since. While Holmes was not very complimentary of his proficiency in deduction, he considered Lestrade to be as reliable and tenacious as a bulldog. That Holmes had turned to him as a partner in this investigation spoke to the trust that the detective held in the inspector.

"I know that Professor Moriarty is out for your blood," said I, turning things over in my mind. "But what does he want with me? Even as his ally I doubt I would not be of much use. In fact, I still find it hard to believe that Madame Richborough and Cartwright are in league with him."

"It took me quite some time to unmask his crimes," said Holmes, watching the street ahead with gimlet eye. "You know my methods when I am pursuing an investigation. I put myself

in the place of the perpetrator, and think as he does. I considered what Professor Moriarty would do in this position, though I am well aware that he must also be placing himself in my shoes and predicting my course of action. He knows my mind as well as I know his, and thus he understands as no one else does how dear to me is John H. Watson."

A well of emotion sprang up in my breast at his words.

"Without Watson, there is no Holmes..."

"Yes, Mrs. Hudson was right: without my Watson, there is no Holmes," grinned Holmes cheerfully. "How arrogant I have been! I thought that if our world was a book, I would be the protagonist, and Watson in the role of my faithful biographer. But now I realize that that was a grave error. You have your own life, your own loved ones; it is not right that you be forced to sacrifice yourself on my account. I cannot express the depth of my regret for what happened with Mary. I have spent this year locked in combat with Professor Moriarty, and I tell you that it has been a solitary, grueling year. Many times I have thought to myself that it would all be bearable if you were by my side. I am not Sherlock Holmes without you. I suppose I ought to be grateful to the professor for bringing me to that realization."

A brisk night breeze whispered across our faces. The hansom rushed through the night, through the uncountable people and carriages which thronged Trafalgar Square, past the stately ministries and magnificent offices of Whitehall. On the right I saw the Naval Department and the Ministry of Finance flash by. The closer we came to Scotland Yard, the more pronounced the tension became in Holmes's expression. I am sure that the impending operation weighed heavily on his mind, and each time we passed a street-lamp I saw a youthful glimmer of uncertainty in his eyes.



We lit from the cab before the door of Scotland Yard. Here the damp night air was close; the banks of the Thames were shrouded in fog, in which the lights of the street-lamps floated like pale hazy orbs. Over by the Westminster Bridge loomed the shadow of the clock tower.

Quickly we made our way through the hushed stillness toward the wide, brilliantly lit brick facade. But abruptly Holmes stopped in his tracks.

"That's strange."

"What's wrong?"

"It's too quiet, don't you think? It's like the place is deserted."

Holmes was right. Even this late at night, Scotland Yard was never this quiet. Inside we found the lobby and reception desk empty; not a single officer was on duty.

"Anyone there?" called Holmes, approaching the desk, but his voice only echoed hollowly back from the high ceiling. He frowned and knocked on the counter.

"Let's try the investigation headquarters," said he. We entered the hallway on the right side of the lobby and took the stairs up to the second floor. But it was eerily still there as it had been downstairs. There was an interminable row of grey doors set into the cold plaster walls; I opened one of them to peer into the room beyond. Every corner was crammed with weathered cabinets and desks, and at the far end of the room was an office with the placard of some detective. The lights were burning brightly, and yet the room was deserted. It was as though something had caused the entire department to flee in terror.

Holmes stopped in front of one of the doors.

"Here it is," he said, and opened the door.

The moment I stepped inside I was seized with astonishment.

The headquarters was dark and desolate as a midnight moor. In its center was a desk atop which burned a single green-shaded lamp, and behind it sat a man. Though he faced us, his head buried in his hands, and it was clear that he was nearly insensate. Outside the window, the mist gathered and undulated over the Thames. It was a scene out of a nightmare.

"What's happened here?" I murmured in amazement.

Upon hearing my voice a start went through the man's frame, and he looked up. In the light of the lamp I saw that it was Inspector Lestrade looking back at me. His gaunt, unshaven face was as pale as a cadaver, and in his expression I saw utter despair.

"Dr. Watson," he whispered in a disappearing voice. "What can I do for you?"

I rushed up to him.

"Get a hold of yourself, man. Where is the headquarters for the investigation?"

"Dissolved."

"What?"

"I tell you it is dissolved. The investigation has been terminated," he said in a hopeless voice, getting to his feet. Slowly he walked out of the lamplight and melted into the darkness. I approached him once more, but he flapped his arms at me and continued to back away, as though he wished to hide himself from view.

"But what of Moriarty's crimes?"

"Moriarty's crimes? There are no such things," he replied, his voice quivering and low. "The Commissioner of Police, the Home Secretary—they are merely puppets controlled by the professor. He is Britannia itself. And you would demand we arrest such a man? No, the investigation has been terminated, and the evidence destroyed."

"You have gone mad, Lestrade!" I said sharply.

"It is the world that has gone mad. We are all putty in the hands of Professor Moriarty. His agents are everywhere. They are always watching. I can trust none of my colleagues. I would reach out to Holmes for aid, but he is nowhere to be found. I am alone now, alone against the world. Will you tell me now to struggle on alone?"

"Nowhere to be found? Why, he is right here!" I turned around and was met with yet another shock.

The room behind me was empty.

I felt as though I had been tossed into a bottomless chasm.

"Holmes? Where have you gone?"

"Have you just woken from a nap, Doctor? Holmes went missing two weeks ago. Either he has already fled the country, or he is at the bottom of the Thames."

"Don't be absurd."

"I am sure you find it difficult to accept. But you are being self-indulgent. Where were you when Holmes was laying his life on the line? Do not come out of your burrow now and presume to lecture *me* on what is absurd."

In anger I rushed at him, and he at once fell on his rear end, quivering in fear. His face retained that doleful expression, and he made no attempt to get up, as if he were a marionette whose strings had been cut.

If the investigation had been halted, then that meant Professor Moriarty's gang were free men, and Holmes's plan was all for naught. The tables had turned. I backed away, and yelled again for Holmes. But there was no reply.

Leaving Lestrade there I fled the room. I did not find Holmes in the empty corridor either. It was as though he had never been there at all.

I wandered the entire building, calling out his name, and when I returned to the lobby it was to find I had fallen into the clutches of the enemy. The entire room was filled with inspectors and uniformed officers, silently waiting for me. In their midst of the assembly stood a slender, well-dressed young man.

"Good evening, Dr. Watson," said he, reaching up to doff his hat. One glance at his fair features and I immediately recognized him as the young man in front of the book shop who had eagerly told me that he had attended my reading, and who had been watching me from beneath the eaves of the tobacconist on Oxford Street. No doubt he had been spying on me all along at the behest of Professor Moriarty. A gesture from him, and the waiting policeman surrounded me.

I could only stand there in helpless bewilderment as he walked up to me.

"I come bearing an invitation from Professor Moriarty.," he said, handing me a card. The paper was strong and stiff, and embossed in white on backing the colour of darkest night were the words: **THE BLACK GALA**. I turned it over to find it continued on the back: *The Criterion Theatre—Piccadilly Circus*. This then, would mark the inaugural gathering of all the members of Professor's Moriarty organization.

"Why—?"

"You are Sherlock Holmes's biographer, are you not?" smiled the young man. "You must be there to witness his end."



The mysterious youth directed me out the way I had come in. The mist had thickened, and the opposing bank of the Thames was so shrouded that I could not help but imagine what ghosts and spirits must teem within. A four-wheeled brougham awaited us outside the gates of Scotland Yard, pulled by a pair of beauties; lamplight glowed within its windows.

"To the Criterion," called the young man to the driver, beckoning me to enter the carriage.

The bells of Big Ben echoed out over London as we set off for Piccadilly Circus. I had heard those chimes uncountable times before, but tonight they reverberated with a strange, hollow chord, one which seemed to me altogether not of this world.

I'm here to fetch you back to reality, Sherlock Holmes had said in my garret. But was this reality? Scotland Yard in the clutches of Professor Moriarty, and Sherlock Holmes vanished like smoke, and me in a carriage on my way to a "Black Gala"—was this truly reality? I had awakened from the dream of *The Triumphant Return of Sherlock Holmes*, and yet I felt like I had blundered into a nightmare.

In his seat across from me the young man took off his top hat. He was clean-shaven, and when he removed his barrette his flaxen hair flowed down his back. It was only then that I realized with whom I had been dealing with all along.

"Irene Adler!"

"I am honoured that I have a place in your memory."

How could I forget the name of Irene Adler? She had been the only woman to ever get the best of Holmes, such that ever after he would only refer to her by the honourable title of the woman. It was only fitting that I gave her pride of place in *The Triumphant Return of Sherlock Holmes* as his rival in detection. Yet I had only met her once, during the case I have recorded under the title *A Scandal in Bohemia*. I suppose I could not be blamed for failing to recognize her in that practised male costume.

She sank down lazily into the opposing seat. Under the lamplight I observed that her pale beauty had not faded, though there was something in that beauty which brought to mind a fragile porcelain doll; why, if I were to grab her by the shoulders and shake her I would hardly be surprised if she fell to pieces in front of me.

"How long it has been, Dr. Watson."

"The last I heard of you, you were living a quiet, peaceful life somewhere on the Continent."

"That was what I wished you all to think," she grinned. "And I see you were completely taken in. Think of it: nothing had been resolved, and yet both his Majesty the King and Mr. Sherlock Holmes considered the matter finished. They thought that I had found true love and gone off to a fairy-tale ending, never to trouble them again. Godfrey was a useful tool, but a dull companion; neither of us loved nor was loved by the other. What person of sound mind would wish for such a thing? 'Love' is a mere sophism, useful only to distract

one from one's own defects, and nothing more. I wished to become strong enough that no one could ever again tell me what to do."

"And so you joined forces with Professor Moriarty."

"Precisely," she replied with an air of indifference, looking out the window.

The brougham passed through Trafalgar Square and onto Regent Street. I noticed that every window in every building on both sides of the street was draped in black.

"To commemorate the Professor's victory," said Irene Adler in response to my unspoken query. It was like that unsettling, unbroken parade of ebony banners was shepherding us toward the Black Gala which lay at the end of our drive.

"Professor Moriarty is the greatest man on earth," said Irene Adler with a tinge of boastfulness in her voice as she looked up at the flags. "He can calculate all there is to know, and bend anyone to his will. The sole exception being Sherlock Holmes. He alone stood in the way of the Professor's ultimate plan. For too long he put up a futile resistance, but now his defeat is all but assured."

"That remains to be seen."

"And what do you propose he can do?" Irene Adler's voice rose to a shrill shriek of laughter. "The adventures of Sherlock Holmes are over. Didn't you yourself wish it to be so? You hated him. Not once during the six months that we have been watching you did you move to help him. That was a prudent decision, Dr. Watson, for his time is over, and the age of Moriarty is nigh. The Professor is the sole power in the land; he is the British government itself. Yet that is only the first step. During tonight's Last Lecture we anticipate that he will reveal the full majesty of his great master plan."

Eventually the brougham entered Piccadilly Circus. Despite the lateness of the hour the spacious plaza was flushed with a festival-like exuberance. The air was filled with curses and shouts as carriages streamed in from every direction, discharging their cargoes of shirtfronted men and beshawled, bediamonded women, all of them dressed in black.

The crowd was such that our carriage was forced to circle round, until at last it was forced to come to a halt.

"Never mind. We'll walk," said Irene Adler peevishly, calling to the driver to let us out. The carriage was stopped in front of the fire office, and we had to weave our way between the stalled hansoms in order to reach the Criterion Theatre. Every window in that famous

facade was blazing with light, and the whole edifice reminded me of a fairy-tale castle. A stream of shadows passed in front of those windows, briefly blotting out the glowing squares like ants swarming over a heap of sugar cubes. Beneath that bright incandescence a stream of black figures streamed forth, laughing and conversing as they passed between those ominous banners to be swallowed up into the doorway.

Irene Adler beckoned me to step forth.

"Welcome to the Black Gala," she said.



The lobby of the theatre was carpeted in red velvet, and overhead glittering chandeliers threw resplendent light down upon us. On the right a grand staircase gracefully traced an arc upward to the balcony seating, while the high-ceilinged bar on the left was packed with revelers in evening dress. Peals of laughter pierced the veil of smoke which shrouded the room like a fog bank, as people raised their glasses in anticipation of Professor Moriarty's Last Lecture.

I surveyed the crowd.

"Are all of these people employees of the professor?"

"That's right. See, there is Madame Richborough," she replied, pointing.

I glanced up to see the portly woman ascending the staircase, accompanied by a man wearing a top hat. When she finally reached the top of the stairs she rested against the banister, and looked back down at the crowd below. It was indeed Madame Richborough, and yet hers was not the demeanour of the kind landlady that I had known. Her haughty bearing was more befitting of a celebrated clairvoyant. When she noticed me standing there her fleshy, powdered face split into a triumphant grin. *You see, dear Doctor?* her expression seemed to say, *You might have saved us all the trouble.*

Her companion was a thin, fussy-looking man, about Holmes's age. His upturned nose gave him an air of inveterate nobility, which made the pair seem all the more mismatched.

"That is Reginald Musgrave," said a voice from behind me as I attempted to place the man, "Master of Hurlstone Manor in Sussex, and head of one of the most distinguished families in all England."

I turned around to see Cartwright and Rachel standing there.

"What are you both doing here?" I cried.

"How could we not come?" beamed Cartwright.

"Tonight is a historic night," chimed in Rachel, her smile matching his.

The pair was dressed up for the occasion, like two mannequins in a high street shop window. If they felt any remorse about their previous deception I was unable to detect it.

"That was quite a daring maneuvering, leaping out of your garret window," said Cartwright with a wink. "I was on pins and needles, having forgotten that you are formerly of the service. But what was the need for all that, if you were going to come over to this side anyhow?"

"Dr. Watson has been perturbed," said Rachel soothingly. "He was Holmes's former partner, after all."

"I suppose that is true," nodded Cartwright. "In any case you have made the right choice. Holmes never did seem to comprehend the greatness of Professor Moriarty. They say that if it were not for his meddling, the Professor's master plan would have been realized long ago. There's no reason that you should chain your fate to his."

"Don't slander Holmes in that way in front of me, Cartwright," I cried hotly. "I will never be one of your criminal fraternity!"

"Oh, come now!" said he in astonishment, "Surely it is too late for you to be saying such things! A crime is defined as an act against the old order of things. Now that Professor Moriarty has swept in with a new order, there's not a one among us that you could call a criminal. Yesterday's criminals are today's heroes!"

"Once you hear the Professor's Last Lecture you will understand," said Rachel. "The Professor shall rule England, and England shall rule the world. It is all part of his beautiful mathematical equation for peace. And all of us here at the Black Gala—you included, Doctor—shall reign by his side."

"That's right. We are the chosen people," Cartwright pronounced, smiling at Rachel.

In despair I looked on at the young couple. They had fallen for this megalomaniacal delusion of grandeur lock, stock, and barrel. So beyond reach did they seem that I was almost convinced that they were imposters wearing the originals' skin. Where was that lovelorn, bright young artist who had dithered about whether to take up that post in

Yorkshire? It had been only a few hours, and yet it felt as though that conversation had taken place an eternity ago.

"I suppose you will not be going to Yorkshire, then," I said. Cartwright stared at me in surprise for a moment, and then burst into laughter.

"Ha, ha! You mean that tutor's post! And why should I take myself all the way to Yorkshire and play professor for some country squire's girls, when all I could ever wish for will soon be in my grasp? We who have gathered at this theatre will be the aristocracy of the coming age. But that's enough of that; let me introduce you to our friends. They have all been waiting to meet you."

Cartwright clapped me familiarly on the shoulder and steered me towards the bar. But as he did, I noticed that Irene Adler had vanished; she was nowhere to be seen in the lobby.

At the doorway to the bar, Cartwright stopped and loudly announced, "May I introduce: Dr. John Watson!"

The echoing conversations died away and were replaced by a warm round of applause. With Cartwright all but shoving me forward, I walked between the tables where I was warmly greeted by black-clad men and women with smiles, proffered handshakes, and hearty whistles; one or two of the gentlemen even came up to slap me on the back. The rolling wave of applause went on and on, not diminishing but rather growing louder every second. It was as if I was meeting a room full of old friends.

Among that buffeting crowd, I noticed a portly man with a head of flaming red hair. It was Mr. Jabez Wilson, Holmes's one-time client in the case of the Red-headed League. Once I had seen him I realized that I was acquainted with many of those laughing, smiling faces. There was Colonel Ross, the owner of Silver Blaze, chuckling as he smoked a cigar, and at the same table Dr. Trevelyan, from the case of the Resident Patient. At a neighbouring table I spotted Miss Violet Smith, from the Adventures of the Solitary Cyclist, and Mr. and Mrs. St. Clair who had been at the epicenter of the Man with the Twisted Lip; elsewhere I saw Lord Bellinger, twice Premier of Britain, and Mr. and Mrs. Trelawny Hope of the Adventure of the Second Stain.

That sense of familiarity was, then, not without cause: it was like attending a reunion with all of Holmes's old clients.

"I heard all about your little escapade, Dr. Watson!" said a gentleman to me. He was dressed ostentatiously to the verge of foppishness, with a snow-white waistcoat and shining patent-leather shoes. It was Lord St. Simon, and immediately my depiction of him in

The Triumphant Return of Sherlock Holmes sprang to mind. At a distance his gaudy clothes made him look like a young man, but upon closer inspection I spotted strands of white mixed in his hair, and his complexion wore every one of his over two-score years.

"But don't think I don't know how you feel," he continued smoothly. "One cannot help but sympathize with the plight of Sherlock Holmes."



During all of this Sherlock Holmes was of course never far from my mind.

Why had he vanished into the mist at Scotland Yard? Had the dissolution of the investigation and his realization that Professor Moriarty had beaten him sent him into flight? Or was he only biding his time in a safe place, looking for his chance to reverse his fortune?

But if the latter was the case, why had he not said anything to me? Right until we had opened that fateful door at Scotland Yard he had given no indication that he might do anything of the sort. His actions were utterly baffling, and I could not help but wonder whether the Holmes I had met tonight might actually have been a figment of my own imagination.

As my mind wandered, my feet brought me to the end of the bar counter. The man in the last seat was resting his chin on his palms, grinning at me in a repulsively intimate fashion. When I realized who it was I let out a little cry.

"Stamford!"

"You remember me at last, Watson," said my old schoolmate, raising his glass. "How strange life can be. It was right here, at the Criterion bar, where I met you after your return from Afghanistan. You were so overjoyed when I tapped you on the shoulder that I can only imagine how lonely you must have been. And it was me who took you to the laboratories at Bart's to make the acquaintance of Sherlock Holmes. It has been smooth sailing for you ever since, and yet since *A Study in Scarlet* not a mention of your old school chum who made it all possible has appeared in any of your writings!"

I sighed and took the seat beside him.

"So you were another of Moriarty's followers all along."

"It was not a straight path which brought me here," said he. "An unlucky wager here, a little misappropriation there, and soon enough the hospital had turned me out. It was Professor

Moriarty who picked me up when I was at my lowest. Nearly all of us here have the same story. Mr. Wilson there is an old hand at fencing stolen goods; Colonel Ross fixes horse races; Miss Smith is a professional swindler. We all went to work for the Professor. Sherlock Holmes's snooping put fear into us, but I guess we have no reason to be afraid of him anymore."

Leaned closer to me he whispered, "I hear that Professor Moriarty holds a particular interest in you."

"Don't talk nonsense!"

"Whatever do you mean? Isn't that why you are here tonight?" he grinned. "What a wicked fellow you are, suckling greedily from Holmes's teat only to turn on him at the eleventh hour. How you toadied up to the Professor I do not know, but what a performance it must have been!"

I slumped forward onto the counter and drained my glass in despair. Everything Stamford had said was nonsense, but I was too dispirited to rebuke him.

"Why the long face?" he laughed, slapping me heartily on the back. "You may have taken the long way round, but now you can make a fresh start. It's Professor Moriarty's time now. He's an extraordinary man. I'm no believer in the supernatural, but he can do things which no mere mortal could. It's as if the whole world is at his beck and call. And I'll tell you something else: I have often suspected that our meeting that day at the Criterion, and your subsequent acquaintance with Sherlock Holmes at that chemical laboratory, were all somehow arranged by the Professor himself."

"You make it sound as if he is God Himself."

"I make no claim of the sort," said Stamford, with another grin. "But if it were so I would not be surprised."

I drained the rest of my glass and looked behind me at the black-clad crowd. Their attentions had dispersed from me; Cartwright and Rachel had struck up an animated conversation with flaming-headed Jabez Wilson. The drifting haze of tobacco smoke; the popping of champagne corks; the omnipresent babbling of the crowd: deeper and deeper I plunged into the nightmare.

What if Stamford was right? What if that chance meeting here at the Criterion bar had been more than mere chance? The thought nearly sent me reeling with fright—that this dolorous endgame had been preordained from the very start.

On the other side of that madding crowd, I suddenly spotted a face which I knew very well. She was wearing a simple black dress, sitting alone at a table in the dimly lit far corner of the room.

I got up from the counter and started walking.

"Where are you going?" called Stamford. I heeded him not, weaving between the tables and causing a small commotion as I brushed off well-wishers and curtly pushed away hands proffered for me to shake. But my eyes never left Mrs. Hudson, who looked up and met my gaze unflinchingly as I approached.



How can I describe the despair of seeing the landlady of 221B Baker Street at the Black Gala? That place held a symbolic significance to me: the place where all of those adventures had begun, and also where they ended. To me it was the very center of the world. Without Mrs. Hudson's constant presence there, the life and career of Sherlock Holmes would surely never have reached the heights which it did, and it was for this reason that I believed that she would be the last person in the world to betray him.

"What are you doing in this place?" I demanded to know. "Didn't you tell me you would be waiting at Baker Street for Holmes's return?"

"There's no use in waiting," she replied listlessly. "Mr. Holmes will never set foot on Baker Street again."

Her expression was blank, as if she had utterly given up hope.

You, of all people! I almost blurted out, but I bit my tongue. While Holmes had been locked in his struggle with Professor Moriarty, I had done nothing. How could I remonstrate with her, when I myself had failed to live up to those words?

Feeling myself deflate, I lowered myself into the seat beside her. From that table I had an excellent view of the entire bar; Stamford was deep in conversation with Violet Smith, seemingly having forgotten all about me. Cartwright's group was raising a glass with the neighbouring table: Pycroft, the stock-broker's clerk; Holder, the bank president; Breickinridge, the goose salesman; Hatherly, the hydraulic engineer. All of them I knew from one of Holmes's cases or another, and it would have seemed a glad affair had I not known them one and all to be followers of Professor Moriarty.

Mrs. Hudson did not seem much inclined to join in the festivities, secluded as she was here in the corner. She sat stiff and erect as a statue, and in her unmoving eyes I perceived a deep resignation. I could not imagine this gentle woman could ever be involved in crime. With what iniquity had she tainted her soul—with what crime had she had cast her lot in with Moriarty, and so earned her invitation to this Black Gala?

“He was always talking about you, you know,” said she. “He worried for you.”

“I know that, just as I know that I used him cruelly.”

“In the end, he needed as much help as the rest of us did,” she said, casting her gaze downward at the table. “He would never admit it, but I could tell. Without Watson, there is no Holmes. How I begged him over and over again to go see you. But he could not bring himself to do it. Mary’s death was a great shock to him as well; *He’ll never forgive me*, he would always sigh, *I have never loved as he did, and so I do not know how to save him.*”

The anguish in her voice made me recall Holmes’s tall, thin figure standing in the rain. Every detail of that day is imprinted deeply on my mind—the day that Mary was buried. The hazy mist which obscured the graveyard, the patter of the dirt as it fell upon the coffin, the solemn uttering of the homily, the somber procession of black umbrellas.

Yet I could never recall the expression which he had worn as we went our separate ways. Search my memory as I might, I could only ever picture that blurred silhouette standing alone in the rain. I could not bring myself to look him in the eye, such was my animosity toward him. All he had brought into my life, it seemed to me then, was death and decay, like the fallen leaves which clung to the gravestones.

But I realized too late how wrong I had been. It had not been Holmes I could not forgive, but myself, and my powerlessness to save Mary. I had sought to blame him for my own failings, and when we offered his hand in friendship I had cruelly slapped it away.

“Holmes came to see me, Mrs. Hudson,” I told her. I heard her breath catch, and she looked up at me.

“He was with me just before I was brought here. He helped me flee out my garret window, and told me that we would make a brand new start. I was wrong all along, and you were right. I should have come back to Baker Street long ago.”

“So you met Holmes, in the end,” she sighed. “I’m glad to hear it.”

"But he vanished into thin air," I continued. "I don't understand how it happened. Why did he vanish and leave me all alone?"

The clamour which surrounded us only grew louder by the minute. The conversations which echoed from the mosaicked ceiling rang discordantly like music from a far-off land; not one word could I discern. Every new pop of a champagne bottle was accompanied by screams of laughter. Each sound in this cacophony, this cloud of pestilent noise which surrounded me was like a shout of exultation for Professor Moriarty's victory.

I reflected on Holmes's solitariness. The partner who should have been at his side every step of the way had deserted him at the graveyard, and ever since he had fought alone against the world.

Mrs. Hudson placed a gentle hand on my arm.

"Dr. Watson," she whispered softly but insistently, "Come what may, you must not forsake Holmes."

I looked at her, startled. The resignation which had reigned over her features only a minute ago had been replaced by a penetrating stare. For a moment I was not in the Criterion Theatre, but 221B Baker Street again.

Seeing me nod, Mrs. Hudson began her tale.



"As a simple landlady I knew little about the substance of Mr. Holmes's work. But from the volume of his visitors and his positively Bohemian habits I knew it must be quite extraordinary. Far too many times I have seen the firemen pay us a visit on account of one of his strange experiments, and witnessed the fruits of his indoor pistol practice habit. So I thought little of it at first when he began to set out late at night without so much as a word to me. It did not seem much out of the way of his usual conduct.

"It was only when I noticed that he would always leave by the back door that I began to suspect something was amiss. Late at night I would be awoken by the sound of footsteps descending the stairs and proceeding down the hallway to the back of the house.

After many nights of this I determined one particular night to follow the footsteps out the back door. I arose from my bed and came out to the hallway just in time to see a black silhouette slipping out the door, and when I pursued it into the back garden I found an old man standing there beneath the moonlight."

"An old man?"

"Yes, wearing a black overcoat."

Mrs. Hudson glanced around furtively before continuing her tale.

"He turned around when I called out to him. I've never seen such a terrible face in my life! It bobbed in the air as it stared at me, as if it belonged to a venomous serpent. I was so frightened by that pale demonic visage that I fell on my backside. Without a word the old man turned on his heel, crossed the garden, scaled the wall and vanished.

"Even after he had gone I couldn't move. That horrible face was burned into my mind. Who was that old man, and what was he doing in my house? I had to tell Mr. Holmes. But when I ran up to his room, I found his room empty and his bed untouched."

I sucked in my breath; my mouth felt as dry as a bone. As Mrs. Hudson's story drew closer to its horrible secret, the sounds of the triumphal bacchanalia which surrounded us faded away.

"When did this begin?" I asked.

"Last autumn, around the time that Mary passed away," replied Mrs. Hudson. "At the beginning of the year, Mr. Holmes told me that he had taken on an important case. He seemed extremely busy, and often he would spend the night elsewhere. But whenever he did come home to 221B Baker Street, I would without fail hear those midnight footsteps creeping down the staircase and padding into the back garden, and afterward find his bed unslept in. Yet come morning, there he would be in his room. Mr. Holmes would never speak of the matter, and I could not summon the courage to ask. For whenever I thought of that ghoulish old man I had seen in the garden, I was convinced that he was part of a horrible secret which I must never disturb."

So those unsettling events repeated themselves, culminating finally in the recent blast at Baker Street. When Inspector Lestrade came to examine the scene of the crime, he urged Mrs. Hudson to move elsewhere, but she steadfastly refused any suggestion of flight, for she regarded it as her sacred obligation to protect 221B. Yet an ominous portent continued to loom, and Sherlock Holmes never came home.

"It came to a head at last, after you visited me today," she said.

After supper she had been reading a book in the sitting-room, when she was interrupted just past seven by the sound of the back door opening. She sat there petrified in the partial

darkness, not daring to make a sound as she heard the floorboards squeaking in the hallway. The intruder slowly made his way up the stairs to Holmes's room, and then there was silence. After a while she got up and took a lamp in hand. She glimpsed her reflection on a wall mirror; her face was white as death.

Raising her lamp up as if it were a protective talisman, she climbed the stairs to the second floor.

"Mr. Holmes?" she called, but there was only silence. Never in her life had 221B Baker Street felt so foreign to her. Even wrapped in her shawl she felt a shiver go through her.

The door to Holmes's room was open. As she stood petrified outside it, someone called her name. It was the hoary voice of an old man.

"Come here. You needn't be alarmed."

"Who's there?"

"My name is Professor James Moriarty. I am a friend of Holmes."

Raising her lamp high, Mrs. Hudson entered the room.

It was as though she had stepped into a windswept wilderness. The cold night wind whistled through the shattered window, and moonlight fell onto the broken furniture. At the far end of the ruined chamber, an old man stood leaning against the mantel above the cold fireplace.

"I apologize for coming up without your permission. I wanted to see the place where Holmes has lived for myself."

"There is not much to see. There was an explosion here."

"I am aware of that," he said with a dry laugh. "It was I who arranged it."

Mrs. Hudson gasped.

"So it is you whom he is fighting against!"

"Fought. I believe the past tense is appropriate," said he with a lurid smile. "The adventures of Sherlock Holmes are over. He has fought a valiant battle, and I assure you his methods have been most intellectually stimulating to observe. But the world holds mysteries which are beyond even his powers to solve."

The old man picked up his cane and stepped forward into the moonlight, and at that moment Mrs. Hudson realized his horrible secret. A wave of despair swept over her, as cold and remote as the dark side of the moon.

Professor Moriarty was none other than Sherlock Holmes himself: the two men were one and the same. Holmes himself had never realized the fact that he was engaged in a battle with himself.

In a desperate state Mrs. Hudson rushed forward and grabbed him.

"Mr. Holmes!" she hissed desperately. "Wake up! You are not Moriarty, you are Mr. Sherlock Holmes!"

But Professor Moriarty only stared back at her uncomprehendingly, and when she saw the hollow look in his eyes she recoiled. It seemed to her that she was looking not into the eyes of a human being, but rather into the cold void of space.

"I thank you, Mrs. Hudson. You have my everlasting gratitude," said Moriarty in a voice which seemed to come out of another dimension. "It is not God, or love, or material things which we can place our faith in. The only thing we can be sure of in this world is that everything must return one day to the infinite dark. That is the exquisite truth of the universe. And I have come to fulfill it."



All the while that Mrs. Hudson was speaking, I barely registered the raucous din which surrounded us. It was as though I had been transported from the Criterion Theatre to Holmes's lodgings at 221B Baker Street. I could picture the destroyed room in my mind's eye as though I was really there. Here lay the ruins of the furniture beneath the moonlight, and there was the blasted window which admitted the cold air, and at the end of the room stood the figure of Professor Moriarty, wrapped in his black cloak. I peered into his hollow eyes, just as Mrs. Hudson had done, and saw in them the lightless void which comprises the vast gulf between the stars.

"After he had said that, he strode from the room," said Mrs. Hudson. "But before he did, he gave me this."

And she placed an invitation to the Black Gala on the table.

"I see," I muttered. "Now it is all clear to me."

Sherlock Holmes was the greatest detective in all the long history of man. Not an opponent on earth could fight him, and win—unless that opponent were himself. His battle with Professor Moriarty was in fact a battle with his alter ego for his very own body and soul.

Yet I must have caught on to that fact long ago. I had introduced Professor Moriarty in *The Triumphant Return of Sherlock Holmes*, to live alongside Holmes and share his suffering, almost as if he were the detective's own shadow. And the two of them were swallowed up by the Chamber of the East of the East. Perhaps I had, without being conscious of the fact, had realized that the two men were one and the same.

The explosion at Baker Street had deprived Holmes of the place which he could call home. Mrs. Hudson's frantic efforts had succeeded in shaking him awake, but only for a time. The last stand of Sherlock Holmes—his sudden appearance at my garret window—must have required him to summon every last ounce of energy which remained in him. And once he was forced at Scotland Yard to acknowledge that he had been beaten by Professor Moriarty, he had lost the battle for his soul once and for all.

"Things are quite dire now," murmured Mrs. Hudson. "We must find a way to stop Mr. Holmes!"

I nodded my assent, whereupon her eyes fluttered closed in relief. The noise hit me all at once then, the sound of hundreds of people getting to their feet, chattering in excitement. It seemed that Professor Moriarty's Last Lecture was about to begin. Across the room I saw Stamford waving and calling my name.

Irene Adler skated toward me, clad now in a black evening gown. "Allow me to show you to your seat," she said, placing a hand on my arm, though I suspected that hand was less a gesture of hospitality than a measure to ensure that I wouldn't try to run.

She led me to a reserved seat directly in front of the stage, which besides the black banners which served as a backdrop was bereft of even a podium or a chair. A bare spotlight shone down on that dusty space. The lonely sight filled me with dread, though it was clear that not another soul in the room shared my unease.

Every seat in the house, from the theatre floor to the highest balconies, was occupied by black-clad adherents of Professor Moriarty. The air buzzed with their chirping; every eye was fixed upon that vacant stage. At last, the prince of darkness, the shadowy ruler of London, was about to reveal himself. I saw in the faces all around me pride at having been selected personally to rule at Moriarty's side.

Cartwright and Rachel were seated cosily by each other on the balcony. In a box on the right I saw Reginald Musgrave, and beside him the haughty figure of Madame Richborough, peering through a pair of opera glasses. When she spotted me she acknowledged me with a lazy wave of her hand.

Irene Adler seated herself next to me. In her dark gown her pale figure appeared even more aloof from the excited proceedings which surrounded us.

"What were you speaking with Mrs. Hudson about?"

"Nothing of great importance."

"And yet your conversation lasted for quite a while," said she, never once removing her gaze from the stage. "If you hold even the smallest inkling of hope for Holmes I suggest you abandon it. There is no chance that he can defeat Professor Moriarty now."

The theatre lights began to dim, and as the velvet darkness fell the theatregoers all modestly fell silent. In the ensuing hush Irene Adler softly cleared her throat.



A single beam of light shone on the black curtain, round as the full moon. Presently the curtain began to ripple, and from within a hunchbacked old man appeared in the center of that radiant circle. He wore a black top hat and was wrapped in a black cloak, so that his bloodless, stern face seemed to float out of the darkness. Above his protruding forehead his sparse hair was flecked with white strands, and his lips were compressed severely.

With bated breath the audience awaited the first words of their exalted leader.

"I see many faces here tonight," said he at last, after a long moment of suspense. "You do not know me. But I know each and every one of you as if you were my own flesh and blood. Merchants, sportsmen, public servants, private tutors, hailing from Covent Garden, Dartmoor, and beyond. In every corner of the earth you have laboured in order that my plan might be realized. You have my gratitude. London—England—the entire world is ripe for the taking. And tonight I have summoned you all here to announce the fulfillment of our great ambition."

A tidal wave of applause filled the theatre as Professor Moriarty paused momentarily in his speech.

"I have been asked to reveal the facts of my master plan in their entirety: who I am, and what I intend to do, and where I intend to lead you. But in order to do that, I must first pay

tribute to an extraordinary man. He was a detective of great repute, who strove fiercely to stop us. He dedicated his life to solving mysteries, and it was this which put us into eternal opposition.”

In the storm of whispers which swept through the arena I heard over and over the name: *Holmes*.

“My battle with Mr. Holmes was an intellectual delight,” continued Professor Moriarty. “And yet, as accomplished a detective as he was, the power of our organization far surpassed anything he could have imagined. The very moment that Holmes became conscious of my presence in the veil of darkness—he had already lost. With every avenue closed to him, he fled to Switzerland. And there, unable to swallow his crushing defeat, he chose instead to hurl himself from the ledge of the Reichenbach Fall. Never again will he dog our footsteps. The adventures of Sherlock Holmes are finished!”

There was a distinct note of triumph in the Professor’s voice, and his words were met with another swell of furious applause.

In my mind I saw Sherlock Holmes awakening abruptly in the dead of night, staring into the mirror and smearing paint on his face, before donning that black cloak, making his way down the stairs, and slipping through the back door into the darkness of London, there to direct his agents in the commission of unspeakable crimes.

Sherlock Holmes had always been obsessed with solving mysteries. It was his escape from dull routine, his *raison d’etre*. Nothing was as repugnant to him as the monotony of daily existence. That was why he was always seeking out difficult problems, and cleverly hatched schemes, and adventures which sent his nerves thrilling with excitement—and every one of these desires could be found in the person of Professor Moriarty. He was Holmes’s own creation, his unconsciously created devil twin.

No matter how many cases he solved, Holmes could never unveil the secret of Professor Moriarty’s existence, for it lay within himself. And it was his fascination with that impenetrability which drew him ever deeper into the hunt. Each time he came to the verge of uncovering the Professor’s identity, the Professor would introduce another contrivance to throw him off the trail. Over the course of their protracted cat-and-mouse game the criminal organization, whose original purpose was to spawn mysteries for Holmes to solve, had grown ever larger and more intricate, until eventually it swallowed up Scotland Yard and Whitehall. Thus did the imaginary twin Professor Moriarty usurp the place of Sherlock Holmes, and hurl him down to a fictional end in the abyss of Reichenbach.

"You lie!" I cried, getting to my feet. "Sherlock Holmes has not lost!"

Irene Adler yanked on my arm with a frosty glare. The applause died down, replaced by angry whispers and mutters of disapprovals. I felt a thousand hostile gazes directed at me.

"Mr. Watson," drawled Moriarty from the stage, "would you care to enlighten us?"

"Sherlock Holmes is alive," I insisted. "For he is none other than you!"

You could have heard a pin drop in the silence that ensued.

"Wake up, Holmes. 'Professor Moriarty' does not and has never existed!"

But Moriarty simply stood there looking at me without the slightest change in his expression, like a wax mannequin. Staring into his hollow eyes was like tossing a rock into a bottomless pit. It was impossible to fathom whether anything I said was reaching Holmes.

"Is that all?" said Professor Moriarty with a smirk, as if he was humouring a particularly dull pupil. "I think it is you who are fettered by illusions."

A ripple of laughter went through the room. I turned and surveyed the audience. It appeared to me that every one of them—male and female, young and old—was wearing the same pale mask. Whether it was fear or genuine adoration of Professor Moriarty which had brought them here tonight, not one of them comprehended that they were part of a grand production, written, directed, and starred in by Sherlock Holmes. The only one in that sea of snickering faces who was not laughing was Mrs. Hudson. She sat in the very first row of the balcony, looking directly at me with her hands clasped as in prayer.

"My friends, it really is no laughing matter," said Professor Moriarty after a while. Immediately the laughter died away.

"Mr. Watson," began Professor Moriarty again, "I understand precisely what it is you are feeling. You once shared the rooms at 221B Baker Street with Sherlock Holmes. It is only natural that his loyal biographer would have some difficulty in accepting the present situation. But is there not a part of you which secretly longed for this to come about? You despised Sherlock Holmes. Is that not why you wrote this book?"

He held out his hands, and in his outstretched hands I saw *The Triumphant Return of Sherlock Holmes*.

"I have kept a constant watch on you these last six months. For though the death of your wife had brought you to a parting of the ways, your mutual history with Holmes remained,

and I could not rule out that you might serve as a useful pawn. But you could not forgive him. During those months of perilous struggle, you never once so much as offered a helping hand. We are connected by our hatred of Sherlock Holmes—we are partners in crime!”

“I will never be a partner of yours!” I spat. “Whatever animosity I held is in the past.”

For a brief moment I saw Professor Moriarty’s expression twitch as though he was suppressing a spasm of agony. But whatever fit had come upon him soon passed, and his face became that impassive mask once again. With a twirl of his cloak he tossed *The Triumphant Return of Sherlock Holmes* into the crowd, who snatched the whirling papers from the air, hooting and cheering, and soon tore it to shreds which littered the floor like confetti.

I tried to spring forward, but Irene Adler held fast to my arm.

“What are you trying to do?”

“I’m going to save Holmes.”

“And then what?” she pressed me with a mocking smile. “His identity is moot now. The only thing of his which interests us is his power. If he tells us that Holmes is dead—”

But she interrupted herself mid-sentence and frowned.

“What’s that?” she muttered.

A strange rumbling could be felt in the floor of the Criterion Theatre. It was like the demolition of some distant edifice was being transmitted through the ground; I had not felt anything like it before. An uneasy murmuring spread throughout the theatre; the audience exchanged uneasy glances, and on the balcony some leaned over the railings to get a better look downward.

Dust showered down from the ceiling, and the black curtains billowed like waves upon the sea. Yet amidst the commotion Professor Moriarty stood unmoved. In fact, his face bore a satisfied grin.

“I cannot thank you all enough,” he said languidly to the crowd. “It is thanks to your loyal dedication that I have accomplished my mission. I have to come to end the world. I suppose you all believe that you are real people, living real lives. But I tell you that you are mere puppets, brought into existence by an author—supernumeraries, created to populate the world in order for the great Sherlock Holmes to go on his adventures. And now that

Sherlock Holmes's adventures have come to an end, so too has your reason to exist. This world itself is a simulacrum, created solely for the benefit of Mr. Holmes.

"This world is but a shadow of London," concluded the Professor, and there was a weird note of sympathy in his voice.



The rumbling in the ground only grew more pronounced as the Professor addressed the crowd. From outside the theatre came a constant thunder like cannonfire, as if London was falling to an invading army. Screams rang out, and there was a small rush to the exits. Yet Professor Moriarty heeded them not, and continued to speak with exultation in his voice, though between the rumbling and shrieking much of what he said was hard to discern.

"It is not God, or love, or material things which we can place our faith in. The only thing we can be sure of in this world is that everything must return one day to the infinite dark. That is the exquisite truth of the universe. And I have come to fulfill it."

"What is he babbling about?" Irene Adler cried, grabbing my arm. Her face was a rictus of terror.

Just at that moment, a tremendous heave rocked the theatre, hurling people into the air. The entire building was shaken side to side as if it were no more than a dollhouse, and to my right all of the seats crashed to the ground. I was sure that the high-pitched shriek which rent the air came from Madame Richborough, though with the swirling wall of dust I could see nothing. But that was the signal which set off a full panic. The audience leaped over chairs and stampeded into the hallways, trying to escape the theatre. Surely none of them regarded the man standing on the podium as their leader any longer.

I shook off Irene Adler's hand and bolted for the stage.

"Holmes!" I shouted, but my voice was lost in the din.

Pulling myself onto the stage I ran towards Professor Moriarty. Once I was near him I saw that his bloodless reptilian features and his senescent network of wrinkles were in fact a cleverly done sham. With what great vigour he fought to throw me off! This was no retired academician. After a brief scuffle he sent me spinning away with tremendous force, but not before I had got one of my hands on his nest of white hair first, and from beneath the wig a scruffled mane of dark hair emerged.

The man before me was, without question, Sherlock Holmes.

But the detective was not the man I remembered.

"I am the author's surrogate!" he hissed at me, with a baleful gleam in his eye. "Sherlock Holmes was only ever a fictional detective, and yet he became so popular that his own creator came to despise him. What had begun as a mere trifle of the pen had grown so far beyond its rightful bounds that the author could never escape its oppressive shadow. Sherlock Holmes stole the spotlight, and he became relegated to a mere biographer. The cart had outstripped the horse. It was an inexplicable act of defiance, and so the author decided that the time had come to free himself from the fetters of this loathsome upstart detective. Thus he dispatched me into this world."

"For God's sake, open your eyes, Holmes!" I shouted. "You are blinded by delusion!"

"Delusion? Then how do you explain all this?" he asked, spreading his arms wide. "Or do you suppose that I possess some sort of superpower?"

As I attempted to get to my feet the ground tilted beneath me, sending me staggering. The giant was shaking the dollhouse again. All around me the people in chalky evening wear pushed and shoved one another in terror, unable to escape. Everything was chaos. I had lost sight of them all: Cartwright, Rachel, Mrs. Hudson, Irene Adler. They had been swallowed up into the dust and the crowd.

"Holmes was a proud man," said Professor Moriarty, "and his pride came from the many cases which his power allowed him to solve. He did not know that his world was but a detective story, with every piece set in place by the author. The moment that his own creator came to despise him, his fate was sealed."

And with a theatrical flap of his cloak, he exited stage right into the shadows.



I followed him into the wing, and as the heavy curtain fell to behind me the din of the theatre became muffled and distant.

"Holmes! Where have you gone?" I called, fumbling my way through the gloom. In addition to the incessant rumbling there was a creaking, scraping sound, which reminded me of being in a ship's cabin buffeted by a storm. I was a little disquieted to see a city street looming around me, before I realized that it was only the stage scenery. The props included armchairs, tables, stoves, window shutters, doors, carriage seats, brick walls crafted from papier-mâché, and each time the theatre tilted to one side all of the objects tumbled to

follow, as if I was stumbling through a maze whose walls were eternally shifting to impede me.

This world is but a shadow of London: the idea was clearly absurd. How was one to take the claim that we were all characters in a detective novel seriously? If Professor Moriarty was a delusion which had taken hold of Sherlock Holmes, how much more dangerous must be the delusions which in turn possessed Moriarty.

Yet if that were the case, how then could I explain the omens of doom which seemed almost to have been summoned by the Black Gala? If this world really had been created solely for Sherlock Holmes, then what was I doing here? My adventures with Holmes, the loss of my Mary—was my whole life a lie?

At last I came out of the stage wing and into a narrow plastered corridor, the walls and ceiling cracked and flaking. The electric lights flickered as if they might go out at any second. A little further down I came to a doorway on the left which led to a stairwell, in front of which lay something which appeared like a grey flower on the ground. I picked it up and realized that it was a crumpled up manuscript. Unfurling it beneath the sputtering my eyes raced across the page.

—

The sky was a deep imperial blue, like the finest imported china, and the riverbank was submerged in a deep aquatic hue. I was alone there; on my left the bare bushes on the embankment stretched along into the distance, and on my right the lights on Shimogamo Boulevard glittered over the dark surface of the water. It had been a long time since the world had seemed so beautiful to me, and I whistled a tune as I strolled north along the river.

After a few minutes, a voice called out to me.

"John Watson!"

I turned around to find Mary standing there.

"Mary! But how long have you been following me?"

"Quite some time, actually."

Laughing with delight she skipped up to me.

—

It was a passage from *The Triumphant Return of Sherlock Holmes*. I saw the twilit Kamo River flowing before my very eyes, felt Mary's warmth as if she really was at my side, as if it was a real memory. Another violent jolt rocked the building, and the lights died with a sigh, plunging me into darkness.

Yet I was not afraid, because I held *The Triumphant Return of Sherlock Holmes* in my hand. A mere fragment it may have been, and yet the scene was as vivid as a firework bursting before my eyes. I felt something stir within me, like a buried memory struggling to surface.

I reached out for the wall, and made my way up the stairs as the theatre crumbled around me.



The stairs took me to the roof of the towering theatre. I flung the door open and staggered outside. The floor was heaving like the deck of a ship in a rough sea, and the wind whistled menacingly. I ran to the parapet, where I was greeted with an extraordinary sight.

London was being eaten away. Between the scattered patches of puffy fog, I saw that the streets were punctured with gaping holes, like holes being chewed into a leaf. The mist had cleared around Trafalgar Square; where St. James's Park had been there was only a void, leaving the row of government offices along Whitehall standing on the edge of a precipice.

As I looked in astonishment, another groaning shudder went through the earth; one after another, church steeples, Scotland Yard, and the whole of Big Ben and Westminster went toppling like so many children's building blocks. The whole bank of the Thames was bare now, so that it was impossible to tell where the starless sky ended and the void below began.

I sagged down against the railing, staring down into that void.

Infinite dark.

A foul wind rose from the abyss.

Professor Moriarty stood atop the rampart, gazing upon Piccadilly Circus below. His cloak flapped in the wind, making him resemble nothing so much as an enormous bird of prey.

"Now do you see?" he said. "I have come to end the world."

"And what of all of us?"

"What does it matter?" he cackled. "You never existed in the first place!"

Without another moment's pause he tossed himself from the rooftop. I dashed over, but my hand grasped only empty air.

Leaning over the railing I saw London transformed. Baker Street, where I had shared so many adventures with Holmes; Kensington, where Mary and I had settled down in matrimony; and Bloomsbury, where I had spent the latest period of my life: all these places were gone now. Black fissures divided pockets of London into lonely islands floating amidst the nothingness, and now the ghastly waves of this empty sea were lapping on the shore of Piccadilly Circus, so that I could look straight down into the void.

Professor Moriarty's cloak flapped as he plummeted through the air. *It's over*, I thought to myself, and just as I did I unexpectedly felt a warmth, as though I was being embraced.

"Come back, my dear," I heard Mary's voice say, "Promise me you'll come back."

A vision of her face swam before me, glowing in the light of a bonfire, as if it had been summoned by those words. We were in Rakusei, at the Musgrave estate. Reginald and Miss Rachel were watching us anxiously. The manor house moaned, every one of its windows flashing with a cold light. I said my farewells to Mary, and then set off to rescue Holmes and Professor Moriarty from the Chamber of the East of the East—

It dawned on me in a flash: I finally understood why I had written *The Triumphant Return of Sherlock Holmes*. That book contained the truth of this world: we were all even now trapped in the Chamber of the East of the East. London itself was no more than a nightmare realm created by that room. We all of us—Sherlock Holmes and Professor Moriarty included—had simply forgotten how we had arrived here.

I had thought, when Holmes had whisked me from my garret, that the story was over. But it was still going on. I had written *The Triumphant Return of Sherlock Holmes* so that I would not forget how to return to our original world.

I mounted the parapet, and threw myself after Professor Moriarty.



Once I passed through the crack in Piccadilly Circus my eyes were met with a dizzying sight.

Fragments of London fell through the void like snow. The lights still glowed miraculously in shattered segments of the city, as if they were pieces of an electrified model village. I no longer heard the rumbling, and the world itself seemed frozen; if not for the wind moaning in my ears, I would have thought that time was standing still.

As I hurtled downward like a bullet, searching for Professor Moriarty, I passed several pieces of London in my downward journey. I came close enough to those planetoids of brick and mortar that I could even distinguish the faces of the people trapped therein. Here was a drunkard blacked out in the pubs; there was an old woman glancing out longingly from a garret window. I saw waifs covered in ragged shawls roaming the alleys, and drivers nodding drowsily atop their cabs. But not one of them seemed to notice me, or that their world had fallen apart. As I looked on, those tiny worlds floated away into the darkness.

Before me was only the yawning void.

Have I passed the Professor? I fretted, but there was no way to turn back now. The pieces of London twinkled far above me like the stars in the sky.

Presently I felt what seemed to be a light mist or spray of water, and gradually a gigantic waterfall emerged. It was the Thames, frothing and seething as it roared downward like the *axis mundi* of the ancients. The cataract did not terminate in a pool: there was only the ceaseless darkness of the void, into which the pieces of the world would plummet forever.

As I was beginning to despair, I at last spotted Professor Moriarty, his flapping black cloak skirting the waterfall's edge. With a desperate effort I got close enough to grab the hem, sending us both whirling like leaves in a gale. The distant pieces of London smeared into blurs as I spun round and round. But I refused to let go.

I pulled him closer until I could wrap him in a protective embrace. The Professor had lost consciousness; his eyes were shut and his mouth was slightly agape, and his complexion had the pallor of a corpse. The spray of the waterfall had partially removed some of his makeup, and the features of Sherlock Holmes were peeking through.

"Holmes!" I shouted. But there was no response. Grasping on tightly, I pleaded with him to open his eyes.

The darkness thickened, until I could hardly see either the waterfall or Holmes. All I could do was hold on to Holmes for dear life as we fell helplessly. I wanted to go home. Familiar scenes sprang to my mind: the crowds on Shijō Bridge; the crimson silhouette of Daimonji at sunset; the woods of Shimogamo in the early morning mist.

"Let's go home to Kyoto, Holmes," I gasped. "We can start again, you and I."

Suddenly I felt Holmes stirring. There was a tiny light now, far below in the sphere of darkness, growing brighter and larger with each second that we fell toward it. I knew what

it was, of course. Beyond it was Kyoto, and Mrs. Hudson, and Inspector Lestrade, and Cartwright, and my Mary.

All the people at whose side we belonged were waiting for us.

This is the triumphant return of Sherlock Holmes, I thought to myself.

We were enveloped in the blinding light of morning.



“Good morning, Watson,” said the voice of Sherlock Holmes, “Isn’t it time you got up? The weather is far too glorious to be lying around all day.”

Epilogue

“Good morning, Watson,” said the voice of Sherlock Holmes, “Isn’t it time you got up? The weather is far too glorious to be lying around all day.”

Opening my eyes I was met with the sight of a coffered ceiling painted with scenes from the Tale of the Bamboo Cutter. I raised myself up on my elbows. Light streamed in from the small windows, pooling into puddles on the drab wooden floorboards. Looking around I saw a large fireplace and the table which had been used in the seance. I was back in the Chamber of the East of the East.

Holmes was kneeling at my side, looking at me with eyes of wonder.

“How did you do it, Watson? How did you bring us back?”

“Do you remember London?”

“London?” he muttered, his brow drawn. “No. I only remember your voice calling out to me.”

With his assistance I got to my feet. Every one of my joints ached. It was terribly cold there in the Chamber of the East of the East, and Holmes’s breath came out in white puffs of steam.

Professor Moriarty lay curled up on the floor before the fireplace, clad in his black cloak. I bent down and shook his shoulder, whereupon a shudder traveled through his frame.

“Professor Moriarty!” called Holmes, and this time the old man sat up with a jerk and blinked at us.

“Holmes? Dr. Watson?”

“How do you feel?” asked Holmes.

“Not as poorly as might be expected. But my word, how cold it is in here!”

After helping him to his feet we looked around at our surroundings. All was still. Uncountable motes of dust floated in the rays from the windows.

If I had not been able to wake Holmes, would I have been trapped, falling through that pitch-black waterfall for the rest of time? I was reminded of Moriarty’s claim at the Black

Gala, that that world was only a detective story, and that he was an agent dispatched by the author to bring it to an end.

This world is but a shadow of London.

Beyond that crumbling city, I saw the figure of an author hunched over his desk, writing the final chapter which would bring his detective novel series to a close, and burying the famous detective and the city which had been brought to life by his own pen forever. It was like looking at my own distorted reflection in a cracked mirror .

"Do you remember what happened?" I asked.

"No," replied the Professor, shaking his head. "Yet I recall hearing your voice calling to me."

"We were in London, Professor, in a living nightmare."

Had we really come back from that place? And if we had, how long had we been on the other side? Based on the appearance of our surroundings it had not been so long, certainly not centuries. But the mystical aura of the Chamber of the East of the East was no more, and now it seemed just like any other empty old room.

At that moment there came the sound of footsteps rushing down the hallway.

"We have a guest," remarked Holmes, turning his eyes toward the doorway just as it burst open, and in through the portal flew none other than Irene Adler.

I was later to learn that, following my departure for the Chamber of the East of the East, she and the rest of the Musgrave household had kept vigil outside Hurlstone through the night. As the first rays of dawn crested the horizon, the ghostly apparitions of Holmes and Professor Moriarty which had till that moment occupied the grounds had suddenly vanished, and a dead hush fell over the estate. It was Irene Adler whose quick intuition alerted her that this must herald our return, and without hesitation she ran into the manor.

"I knew it!" she yelled when she saw us.

"Ah, Miss Adler. Good morning to you," said Holmes.

For a second she stood there agog, but she soon regained her usual ferocious deportment.

"How could you be so reckless?" she demanded, striding forward.

"Well," stammered Holmes, "Being that I was in a slump, I supposed I had nothing to lose."

"Nothing to lose? *Nothing to lose?*" snarled Irene. "Do you know how utterly despondent I have felt tonight?"

But I hardly heard another accusing word of hers once I saw Mary standing in the doorway. Her pale face betrayed the night of fear and dread she had passed through, and yet she strode directly across the room with dignified composure, her hair glistening in the golden sunlight like the morning dew.

"You really did come back."

"Of course I did. I promised, didn't I?"

As I drew her into my arms I saw those London memories whirling around us like a merry-go-round. Scenes from another life flew past my eyes, fading in the morning light: Mary's funeral, my parting with Holmes, the lonely garret, the Black Gala. The dream was taking its last bow.

Only then was I certain that I had come back. With a smile at me, Mary turned toward Holmes, who was hanging his head a little apologetically, and walked briskly up to him to give him a hug. We were all of us surprised, but none of us more than Holmes. At first he stiffened in shock, before he placed an awkward hand on her back.

"I am sorry, Mary. For all of it."

"Never mind, Mr. Holmes. It is all past," she said in a gentle tone. "All is forgiven."



Those are the facts of the case of the Chamber of the East of the East.

But that of course was not the end. Upon our return from Hurlstone we were swept up in the aftermath of the Richborough trial. I could scarce remember any spectacle to rival it; a number of spiritualists had been arrested, and in the confusion of the riot Madame Richborough had made her escape. People claimed to have spotted her lurking at the depot in Shijō-Ōmiya, or boarding a launch at the Gojō pier, but her whereabouts remain a mystery to this day.

Another rumour had it that Lord St. Simon had effected her escape, a rumour which he steadfastly denied. By all accounts he had been struck dumb with astonishment by the apparitions and lay insensible in the gallery while the riot was going on. It was a remarkably pathetic display for the self-styled patron of spiritualism, though I suppose not an entirely unexpected one. In any case, Lord St. Simon could not afford to stand idle after such a

commotion, and issued a notice that he would have no further dealings with spiritualism, before retiring to the countryside. No doubt the heightened scrutiny of the police had played a very considerable role in his decision.

Neither did we escape suspicion. A full courtroom gallery had witnessed the ghostly figures of Holmes and Moriarty, and it was well known that *Holmes of London* was something akin to scripture amongst the spiritualists. And there was the inconvenient fact that Madame Richborough had addressed me directly preceding her escape.

"You'll just have to bluff them," shrugged Holmes.

We were summoned to Shinchō Yard for questioning, but the inspectors could not explain the trick behind the phantoms, nor any link besides coincidence between the author and the spiritualist interest in *The Triumphant Return of Sherlock Holmes*, nor any evidence that we had assisted Madame Richborough's flight, and soon enough the investigation was quietly dropped.

Afterwards the winds began to change, thanks in large part due to the efforts of Irene Adler, Inspector Lestrade, and the Musgraves. Without the protective aegis of Lord St. Simon, and with its most prominent practitioner on the run, the spiritualist movement which had roiled Kyoto withered away. As spring approached, that once oppressive atmosphere which had smothered the city began to lift, and by the time that the plum blossoms had opened in Kitano Tenmangu the trial of Madame Richborough was only a distant memory.

And in the later half of March, the following notice appeared in all the newspapers of Kyoto:

The RETIREMENT of Sherlock Holmes is hereby RETRACTED

Will solve all cases, great and small, for the benefit of the citizens of Kyoto.

Apply Sherlock Holmes, private consulting detective, 221B, Teramachi Street

The general reaction to that advertisement was derision. Scarcely two months had passed since his retirement announcement, and one could hardly expect anyone to take it seriously. At first he had hardly any clients, and those who did seek his aid came bearing only the most trifling matters. But Holmes took each case as earnestly as if it were his last, and as he steadily built up a list of successes, little reports of his doings would begin to appear in the pages of the broadsheets. It was his solution to the curious death of a professor of philosophy at Tanukidanisan Fudōin which announced to the world that Sherlock Holmes was well and truly back.

It was only natural that people wondered—how had Sherlock Holmes made his triumphant return?

But no matter how insistently the press badgered him for an answer, Holmes would never speak of the details of how he had unknotted his slump, and instead would airily say that he had prayed every day to Benzaiten, or wished upon a daruma. In truth there was no logical way to explain the facts of the case of the Chamber of the East of the East. Far simpler to chalk it up to deities and daruma.

Nor would Sherlock Holmes speak of that room. It was as if to him the mystery had passed out of the world for good.

The same attitude could be observed in Professor Moriarty. One day I visited Teramachi Street to find him standing in the back garden, feeding the voluminous notes he had kept during his slump, as well as the miniature model of London, into a bonfire.

I stood beside him and watched London turn to ash.

“You are sure this is for the best, then?”

“I am. I need it no longer,” said he, squinting his eyes in the smoke.



The gently swaying carriage bore me towards 221B Teramachi.

May had come in with blossoming trees. It was an unbelievably gorgeous morning, the kind of picnic weather which only comes around so many times in a lifetime. There was a faint scent of flowers on the cold wind which brushed past my cheeks, and the pedestrians who walked along the street examining the shop windows were dressed in springtime finery.

When I arrived at Teramachi Street I found Mrs. Hudson knee-deep in preparations for the picnic; baskets were stacked high in the foyer.

“You don’t seriously mean to bring all of this, Mrs. Hudson?”

“Have you never hosted a picnic, dear Doctor? Why, this is only the minimum. And besides, consider the guests. Besides you and Mr. Holmes, there are Mary, Miss Adler, Professor Moriarty, and Inspector Lestrade to think of. No, as long as there is breath in my lungs, no one will say that I put on an unsatisfactory picnic!”

“And you expect me to haul all of this up Mt. Daimonji?”

"Never you fret, we will all share the burden," she said happily. "How wonderful that the weather is so fine."

In Holmes's room sunshine was streaming through the blinds. Professor Moriarty was sitting in the armchair before the fireplace, and on the side table Watson the goldfish was floating contentedly in his glittering fishbowl. He had come out of the punishing Kyoto winter none the worse for wear and in fact had an increased kind of stateliness to show for his ordeal; I predicted that the doughty specimen would go on to live a long, fulfilled life.

"Good morning, Watson," said Professor Moriarty, sprinkling some fish food into the bowl, "What lovely weather it is for a picnic."

"Good morning."

"Did you see the baskets? Mrs. Hudson is in fine form today."

The Professor himself seemed to be in high spirits himself; he wore breezy white linen and a fastidiously fastened pair of gaiters, and a glossy straw hat rested on his lap. He still kept his rooms on the third floor, but of late he often stayed at the Musgrave estate for business. I had not seen him since his knighting in April, and it was apparent that the intervening weeks had changed him greatly. His face was rosy and his expression was mild, and his eyes were no longer narrow and piercing, but filled with a generous wisdom.

"Holmes is still sleeping," said he, indicating the bedroom door. "I suppose his recent exertions have quite worn him out."

A month had passed since Holmes retracted his retirement. It must be noted that at about the same time, someone else had experienced quite a comeback. Reginald Musgrave had extended an offer to the Professor to take up again some work, which had laid dormant since the death of his predecessor, and presently Moriarty was making ready to revive the Moon Rocket project. It was for this reason that he made frequent trips back and forth from Hurlstone.

I sat on the settee and remarked, "How is your work proceeding?"

"I've only just begun. Cartwright is helping me review the data from Robert Musgrave's era. For now our means are limited, but I have a few ideas floating around in my head, and in time I intend to rebuild a smaller version of the launchpad. Ah, and I am repurposing the Chamber of the East of the East into the Moon Rocket project office."

"You astonish me," I said. "That's quite brave of you."

"It was Miss Rachel's idea. No one has seen or heard the slightest hint of anything supernatural in that room since we came out alive. I can't fathom now what it was that drew us to that room. Now that the mystical powers it once possessed are gone, let us not abandon it to the shadows, but rather chase them out with light."

"I believe you are right. That will be for the best."

His words were filled with a tranquil certainty, and as I listened to him speak I felt his sense of joy wash over me as well. His pupil Cartwright had recovered from that temporary mania of spiritualism and was now back to his old assiduous habits in the lab.

"I have my work again, what more could I possibly need?," smiled Moriarty.

"Sir Musgrave and Miss Rachel are quite enthusiastic about the project. I am under no illusions that I will live to see mankind travel into the heavens, of course. But I have no doubt that by the time that their children are grown, humanity will have set foot on the surface of the moon.

"Now," said he, slapping his hands on his knees, "I think it is past time that we wake Holmes."

He got to his feet and knocked on the door of Holmes's bedroom. A groan of protest came from the other side, but Moriarty gave no sign that he had heard it and blithely continued his assault on the door.

"I assume Mary will be joining us for the picnic?" he asked me. "I wondered that she was not with you."

"She is with Miss Adler," I replied, stepping to the window and pulling up the blinds. "I suppose they are not finished yet."

On the other side of the street I could see the office of Irene Adler. Mary was pacing back and forth in front of the window, speaking with great animation. At length she glanced my way, and upon seeing me in the window smiled and waved her hand.



Sherlock Holmes was cross as a crab when we finally roused him from his bed. His hair was disheveled, and he wore a grey nightgown over his flannel pajamas.

"Ah, Watson," he muttered sulkily, heaving himself down into his armchair, where his eyes promptly rolled into the back of his head.

"Come on, Holmes, there's no time to lose. We've got to get ready for the picnic."

"Picnic?" he groaned. "Leave me here. I bid you the most pleasant of afternoons."

"That simply will not do. We agreed upon the date," said Professor Moriarty reprovingly.

"Imagine how crestfallen Mrs. Hudson would be."

"I am as shriveled up as a worn out washcloth," responded Holmes. "Do you realize how many cases I have solved this week alone? They have all been of the greatest interest, and I have hardly had a wink of sleep!"

"Perhaps you should turn some of them down then."

"What! And let them be snatched up by Irene Adler?"

"This is your own fault," I said wearily. "You are always griping and groaning. You complained when you were in the depths of the slump, and now that you have regained your former self you are complaining still. Why can't you simply be grateful that you are back to solving cases again?"

"That is easy to say for you."

"What do you mean by that?"

"You only stop by when you please, and help when the case interests you," he snapped, getting up and striding over to the mantelpiece to claim his favourite pipe, never mind that he was supposed to be getting ready for the picnic.

"So, Watson," he said as he packed tobacco into the bowl, "When do you plan to resume writing in the Strand? I'm sure your loyal readers must be impatient for your return."

"I met with the editors just yesterday. The series will return next month."

"My congratulations," he snorted.

"As if you have ever had the smallest interest in my writings."

"That's not true. After all, without Watson there is no Holmes." He inhaled from his pipe with a cocksure grin.

The bell rang downstairs. We heard the door open, and Mrs. Hudson exchanging a few delighted words, before Irene Adler and Mary appeared at Holmes's doorway. They were both dressed for a light day of hiking, wearing boots on their feet and wide straw hats

adorned with flowers. But when they saw Holmes standing there smoking a pipe in his pajamas, their eyes opened wide with astonishment.

"Why aren't you dressed yet, Mr. Holmes?"

"I have only just woken up, you see."

"Then perhaps you should have gotten up on time," said Irene Adler.

"I have been overworked, my dear Miss Adler," replied Holmes with a scowl. "I have been away from detecting for a year. One can hardly expect me to regain my old form after so short a time. No, I had meant to take things easy. But scarcely had I been knighted than the clients came stampeding. Really, had I known what a nuisance this would be I would have much preferred Her Majesty refrained."

"How can you say such things?" frowned Irene Adler. "Don't you understand what an honour you have received?"

"I did not become a detective in order to become a knight," Holmes said loftily, throwing out his chest. "The work is its own reward."

I glanced at his desk and saw, carelessly scattered among Holmes's checkbook and crumpled pieces of blotting paper, the medal he had received from Her Majesty.

"That's the old Holmes we know," whispered Mary in my ear.

"He's beside himself with satisfaction, I can tell," I whispered back. "He's only thrown it there so he doesn't seem too pleased with himself. Sometimes I wish that he would be more honest about it."

"So do I, so do I!"

"What are you two whispering about there?" cried Holmes with a glare, while we feigned looks of innocence.

Mrs. Hudson came to the doorway, obviously irate.

"Now you get dressed this instant, Mr. Holmes. The day's wasting!"

Mrs. Hudson had been planning this picnic on Mr. Daimonji for weeks now, and she would not allow anyone, not even the most celebrated detective on earth, to ruin her plans. She plucked the pipe right out of Holmes's mouth and marched him straight into his bedroom. While he was getting dressed, Professor Moriarty went to fetch two broughams from a

nearby carriage house, onto which we loaded that mountain of picnic baskets, blankets, and parasols.

"With all this, we could picnic up there for a week!" laughed Irene Adler, half in amazement.

By and by Sherlock Holmes came slouching down the stairs, wearing a felt hat and a surly glower. The ladies rode in the first carriage, and we men took the second.

"Not so fast, Holmes! What about Inspector Lestrade?"

"That is too bad, for him. To Mt. Daimonji!"

But just as the horses began to trot forward, we heard a voice shout desperately, "Wait for me!" We put our heads out the windows to see Inspector Lestrade running after us.

"You didn't really mean to leave me behind, were you?" he said in an injured tone once he had boarded the carriage, wiping the sweat away with a handkerchief.

"That will teach you to be on time!" said Holmes with a chuckle.

The carriages rumbled up north past Marutamachi Street and along the long wall of the imperial palace. I looked out the window. A pleasant spring breeze was blowing, rustling the new leaves on the trees which looked over the palace wall, and as we passed the well-guarded gate I thought I saw, for the briefest of moments, the figure of Queen Victoria standing in the garden.



Not long after he came out of retirement, Sherlock Holmes was visited by an envoy of the Queen, who with an air of great deference handed him a letter and informed him that he, Irene Adler, and Professor Moriarty were to be admitted to orders of chivalry for their extraordinary accomplishments. Apparently the sudden and extraordinary decision had come directly from none other than Her Majesty.

The ceremony took place early in April, at the peak of the cherry blossoms. How clearly I remember the sight of the white petals spiraling through the air as the carriage bore us in our finest clothes towards the palace. Mary and I were on pins and needles. Though it was not we who were being honoured, we had never set foot in the palace before.

We were received by Her Majesty in an audience chamber, where on a carpet of reddest velvet she conferred the accolades upon Sherlock Holmes, Irene Adler, and James Moriarty. Sunlight fell sparkling through the windows upon the three and upon the audience which

included such distinguished members of the government that even Holmes was obliged to look a little intimidated. Afterwards there was a garden party to which Inspector Lestrade and Shinchō Yard, the Musgraves, and Mrs. Hudson had been invited.

At long last it was all over, and the celebrants began to drift their separate ways. As Mary and I left the audience chamber, the Lord Chamberlain hurried towards us.

"Dr. Watson!" he called, "Might you spare a moment?"

"Yes, my lord?"

"It is a matter of great importance," he said quietly. "Pray come with me."

His words were courteous, but his grave tone was such that it brooked no discussion. Mary and I looked at each other. For a detective such as Sherlock Holmes such unexpected occurrences were a daily occurrence, but I could not fathom what he could want with a simple doctor and biographer. But the chamberlain only looked at us without further explanation, awaiting our reply.

"I will be mingling in the garden," said Mary to me, with her usual tact.

I nodded to her then said to the chamberlain, "I am at your disposal, my lord."

The chamberlain led me deeper into the palace. On and on the corridor continued, and soon merry voices of the party were far behind us. At first we passed gentlemen and ladies in waiting, but each of them upon seeing us bowed and quickly withdrew. There came the sounds of doors closing one after the next, and soon we were alone: at least, I could not tell if they were truly gone, or simply taking pains to mask their presence. It was an unnatural silence, so thick that I heard only my own footfalls upon the carpet.

"Might I inquire as to the nature of this matter?" I said at last, unable to bear the stillness any longer.

"I'm afraid that is not for me to say," replied the chamberlain in a faint voice, not even turning to look at me. Past walls lined with portraits and landscapes we walked, until we reached a dome-ceilinged hall, through which we passed into another corridor, at the end of which lay a set of immense double doors.

"If you please, Dr. Watson," said the chamberlain, swinging the doors open wide and closing them after me.

I found myself in the palace library. The walls to my front and right consisted entirely of massive bookcases which reached all the way up to the ceiling, fitted with sliding ladders; and to my left was a large window through which I could see a single cherry tree blossoming on the lawn of a lovely garden.

A long table stood in the middle of the room, and there sat a small woman, perhaps the age of my own mother, facing away from me. So engrossed in her research was she that my entry seemed to have gone unnoticed.

"Pardon me," I ventured, whereupon she paused and turned around. It was Queen Victoria.

"Your Majesty," I said, my posture stiffening, "I am John Watson."

"We thank you for coming," said she, nodding graciously. "Come here. We wish to show you something."

I bowed and approached her. On the table were handwritten papers sorted into several stacks. They were all in quite poor condition, and some of them seemed to have been ripped apart and then meticulously pasted together again. Her Majesty picked one of them up and handed it to me.

For several years, I have, with his permission, presented accounts of the several cases of Sherlock Holmes in The Strand Magazine. These accounts of his many adventures have gained an ardent readership from all around Kyoto; it is no exaggeration to say that the name "Sherlock Holmes" is celebrated across the land.

Yes, to observe Sherlock Holmes is to observe genius at work. Yet it was not the efforts of Mr. Holmes alone which have won his current renown.

For a moment I was frozen in astonishment.

It was the manuscript of *The Triumphant Return of Sherlock Holmes*: the same which I had spent those months locked up in that London garret writing, and the same which had been tossed into the air and torn to shreds by Professor Moriarty and the crowd at the Black Gala.

"How did Your Majesty—?" I gasped hoarsely. "I thought London was just an illusion!"

"It is no illusion. It became material while you were trapped in the Chamber of the East of the East—in some ways more material than this world we inhabit. And if you had not returned from it in one piece, it all might have vanished like the wisps of a dream."

"Vanished?"

"The Chamber of the East of the East is something that should not be," she continued softly, "But we do not have the power to remove it, and so we required that of you and your friends Sherlock Holmes and Professor Moriarty. We regret what we had to do to you. It may be no consolation, but we were able to salvage your manuscript. We hope that you will accept it."

I stared at her for a long moment of dumbfounded silence. It felt as if time had stopped here in this library deep within the palace.

Her Majesty rose slowly from her chair and approached the window, looking with a bright, tender gaze at the blossoming cherry tree. She looked much smaller and frailer now than she had at the ceremony.

I joined her at the window, and now looking at the garden noticed that there was a single statue on the lawn. It depicted a small girl looking up at the boughs of the tree, her arms outstretched like a bird taking flight. Strangely, her face reminded me of Miss Rachel and Irene Adler and Mary all at once. The tree branches swayed in the wind, scattering white petals in the air.

For some strange reason I felt like I had witnessed this very scene before, perhaps in a dream.

"If we had not returned, what would you have done?" I asked.

"Our fate would have been the same as yours," she answered with no hesitation. "Our role is but to observe, nothing more."



We laboured up the trail behind Ginkakuji towards the summit of Mt. Daimonji. Within the dense forest the air was cool, but before long sweat was pouring down my face. It was the oldest among us, Mrs. Hudson and Professor Moriarty, whose legs carried them the quickest. I suppose that Mrs. Hudson did pull herself up and down the seventeen steps at Baker Street all day, and during his slump Professor Moriarty had spent his nights strolling

all round Kyoto. Even Holmes, who had been so reluctant to come, was having a lively debate with Irene Adler as they rapidly strode along.

Hearing Inspector Lestrade and I labouring behind them, Mary turned around.

"Are you all right, John? Shall we stop for a break?"

"No, you go on ahead," I gasped, waving her on. "We shall take our time."

Lestrade set down his load at his feet and wiped away his sweat with a handkerchief. Everyone was carrying their share, but each basket was quite a burden by itself.

"You seem to be keeping yourself busy, Lestrade. Hardly a day goes by that I don't see your name mentioned in the papers."

"Busy doesn't begin to describe it!" he began, with an exaggeratedly exasperated tone, but his face was positively glowing. "My hands were full enough dealing with Miss Adler before Mr. Holmes resumed his career. Between the two of them they have solved so many cases that the perpetrators are practically queueing up in front of Shinchō Yard. With all the work that's piled up I'm not even sure I should be here today having a hike up Mt. Daimonji."

"Couldn't you just let some of the other inspectors share the glory?"

"Never!" said he with a smile.

A strong breeze shivered the treetops, and the rustling leaves made a sound like a distant waterfall. Despite the hard exertion of the climb, I felt refreshed when we finally arrived at the fire pits.

"Now that's what you call a view!" said Lestrade approvingly. A cool breeze whistled across the sheer slope, sending undulating ripples through the green grass which surrounded the stone fireplaces. Every year at Obon, the fireplaces would be kindled, emblazoning a giant *dai* character across the summer nightscape.

From the slope we had a clear view of the entire mist-shrouded city. In the foothills of Mt. Daimonji was the fortress-like college town, surrounded by a little belt of forest groves. Across the lazily flowing Kamo River were the dense woods of the royal palace; the rest of the valley floor was covered by an endless carpet of stone and brick, like the model city which Professor Moriarty had constructed.

"Watson! Over here!" called Sherlock Holmes, waving his arms.

The weather was glorious, and Mrs. Hudson's picnic did not disappoint. We sat on blankets enjoying sandwiches and scones with tea. Mrs. Hudson looked upon her handiwork with satisfaction while Holmes and Irene Adler held a passionate debate. Miss Adler had brought up a counterfeiting case which Holmes had recently solved and was poking holes in his reasoning, which Holmes of course did not take kindly to. In the heat of their discussion neither of them seemed to notice what a beautiful day it was.

"I am not saying you do not have a point, my dear," said Holmes, waving around a half-eaten sandwich. "But from my point of view..."

It was at that very moment that a shadow descended like a bolt from the blue, and before Holmes knew what was happening it had snatched the sandwich out of his hand. As it soared away I saw that it was a black kite.

"Thief!" cried Sherlock Holmes. "Villain!"

"Even you can't catch them all, Mr. Holmes," said Irene Adler, with a merry laugh.



I walked a short distance from the others along the face of Mt. Daimonji and sat down in a meadow. Not long afterward Mary wandered by.

"Isn't the view grand?"

"Just lovely!" she said, plopping herself down beside me.

"I've been talking to Mary," she began. And she told me that next month that their stories would resume serialization next month. *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*, and *The Case Book of Irene Adler*: both had been placed on indefinite hiatus, and now they would be resumed at the same time. The editors at the Strand Magazine must surely be overjoyed.

"Without Mary there is no Adler," I quipped, drawing a little smile from my wife.

We sat there in silence enjoying the breeze.

After a moment my wife whispered to me, "Thank God that you are back with me."

"I would not be here now but for you," I replied.

Come back, my dear. Promise me you'll come back.

I knew that it had been her voice that had rescued me: without it, we would all have been consumed by that bottomless void.

"I have been thinking," I said, "We have been convinced all this time that the Chamber of the East of the East held a kind of magic. But what if we have it the wrong way round?"

"What do you mean, the wrong way round?"

"What if our world itself was created by magic?" I said, feeling a strange certainty spread through me. "What if that chamber was a place that magic did not reach, like a rip in the fabric of our world? Then someone would have to mend it. And that is why we—"

I stopped, feeling her warm hand wrap around mine.

"Why don't we lay that aside? It's just like Mr. Holmes said: some mysteries ought not to be touched."

After a moment's thought, I nodded.

"Yes, you are right."

"I just hope that the 'magic' will never come undone again," said Mary, leaning against my shoulder and closing her eyes blissfully. On the wind I heard the gay banter of Holmes and the rest.

I had continued to work on the manuscript which the queen had entrusted to me. Scarcely could I imagine another book possessing as strange a history as this one did. The first four chapters had been written in that garret in London, and the remainder was now being written in my study in Kyoto. From one world to the next, through the Chamber of the East and back again: thus was born *The Triumphant Return of Sherlock Holmes*. I had resolved that when it was finished I would present it to Her Majesty.

I heard her voice whisper in my head again: *Our role is but to observe, nothing more.*

The fog had dispersed, revealing the city below, which seemed to shine with a mysterious radiance.

There would be no shortage of cases for Sherlock Holmes to solve. And John Watson would be at his side to write them down.

For the triumphant return of Sherlock Holmes was also my own.