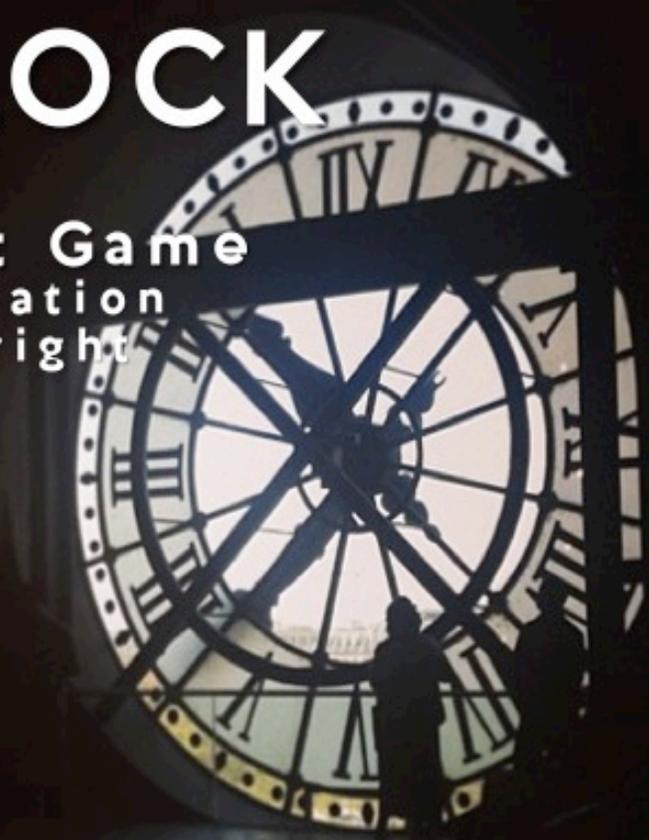


SHERLOCK

The Great Game
a novelization
by rk wright



Sherlock: The Great Game
a novelization
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I'm skipping the dedication this time
Because probably you've seen it.

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“It may have been a comedy, or it may have been a tragedy... There was certainly an element of comedy.

Well, you shall judge for yourselves.”

--Arthur Conan Doyle, “The Adventure of the Three Garridebs”

MINSK, BELARUS

The Minsk jail was cold. The guards had opened all the windows, and a steely blue winter sun filtered in through the enclosing wire mesh. Sherlock's breath fogged in between him and the man in the thin orange jumpsuit sitting on the other side of the table.

"Just tell me what happened from the beginning," said Sherlock.

"We'd been to a bar. Nice place," said the man, his Cockney accent thick on the ground. "And I got chatting with one of the waitresses and Karen weren't happy with that, so we get back to the hotel and end up having a bit of a ding dong, haven't we?"

Sherlock sighed. Open windows in midwinter in northern Europe was a bit grim even for former Communists. He shouldn't have let John talk him into coming here and talking to this dunderheaded tourist who'd gotten himself locked up a thousand miles from home.

"She was always getting at me, saying I weren't a real man—"

"Wasn't a real man."

"What?"

"It's not 'weren't,'" said Sherlock quietly. "It's 'wasn't'."

"Oh."

"Go on."

"Well...then I don't know how it happened, but suddenly there's a knife in my hands, and, you know, me old man was a butcher so I know how to handle knives. He learned us how to cut up a beast."

"Taught."

"What?"

"Taught you how to cut up a beast."

"Yeah, well, then I done it—"

"Did it."

"*Did it*. Stabbed her!" He hit the table in front of him with his fist. "*Over and over and over*, and I looked down, and she weren't—*wasn't*—moving no more. Anymore. God help me, I don't know how it happened, but it was an accident, I swear."

The scrape of the metal chair legs across the floor echoed off the concrete walls as Sherlock stood up and started to walk away.

"Hey! You've got to help me, Mr Holmes! Everyone says you're the best. Without you...I'll get hung for this."

“No, no, Mr Perry, not at all,” said Sherlock, turning to look at the prisoner. “Hanged, yes.” And he walked out.

LONDON, ENGLAND

John could hear the gunshots inside 221B from the street. He bolted up the stairs to the flat, only to find Sherlock, alone, draped languidly in a chair, firing a semiautomatic pistol at a smiley face he'd painted on the wall.

"What the *hell*," cried John, his fingers in his ears, "are you doing?"

"Bored," Sherlock muttered.

John stared. "What?"

"Bored!" Sherlock yelled. He stood up and fired at the wall again. "Bored!" Fired behind his back. "Bored!" John grabbed the gun from him and unloaded it. "I don't know what's got into the criminal classes. Good job I'm not one of them."

"So you took it out on the wall?"

"The wall had it coming," said Sherlock, examining the pock-marked smiley face before collapsing dramatically onto the couch.

"What about that Russian case?" asked John. Privately, he was becoming anxious for a case to grab Sherlock's attention. He'd barely left the flat for weeks, except for the two days he'd just spent away, and upon his return from Heathrow that morning he'd put on his pyjamas and a dressing gown and reverted to his restless haunting of 221B. John wasn't certain what would happen if Sherlock's boredom stretched past the breaking point—something had always come up to occupy him in the past, at least since John had moved into Baker Street—but he was fairly certain he didn't want to find out.

"Belarus. Open and shut domestic. Murder. Not worth my time."

"Shame." John put the gun down on the desk and went into the kitchen. As usual, the table was lost under Sherlock's lab equipment. He took a deep breath and reminded himself that, given the chemicals and poisons that Sherlock messed around with, he probably didn't want to eat off the table anyway. "Anything to eat? I'm starving." He opened the fridge, looked inside, then slammed it shut almost immediately. "There's a head," he said to himself. Then louder, so Sherlock could hear, "A severed head?"

"Just tea for me, thanks."

"No, there's a head in the fridge."

"Yes."

"A bloody head!"

"Well, where else was I supposed to put it? You don't mind, do you? I got it from Bart's morgue. I'm measuring the coagulation of saliva after death."

John almost asked why the human race needed that information, but let it go. He did not want to know.

“I see you’ve written up the taxi driver case,” said Sherlock.

“Yes.”

“‘A Study in Pink.’ Nice.”

“Well, y’know. Pink lady, pink case, pink phone. There was a lot of pink.” He hesitated for just a moment. “Did you like it?”

“Uhm...No.”

“Why not? I thought you’d be...flattered.”

“Flattered? ‘Sherlock sees through everything and everyone in seconds. What’s incredible, though, is how spectacularly ignorant he is about some things.’”

“Now hang on a minute, I didn’t mean that in a—“

“Oh, you meant ‘spectacularly ignorant’ in a nice way. Look, it doesn’t matter to me who’s Prime Minister or who’s sleeping with who—“

“—Or whether the Earth goes round the Sun—“

“Oh, not that again. It’s *not important*.”

The fact that they’d had this conversation already had not blunted John’s incredulity. “Not important? It’s *primary school* stuff. How can you not know that?”

“Well if I ever did I’ve deleted it.”

“Deleted it?”

“Listen,” said Sherlock, sitting up, his curly hair standing wildly on end, and pointed to his brain. “*This* is my hard drive, and it only makes sense to put things in there that are useful. Really useful. Ordinary people fill their heads with all kinds of rubbish and that makes it hard to get at the stuff that matters. Do you see?”

For the briefest of moments, John considered telling Sherlock human memory didn’t work that way, but he couldn’t get past the Sun. “But it’s the Solar System!”

“Hell, what does that matter? So we go around the Sun. If we went around the Moon, or round and round the garden like a teddy bear, it wouldn’t make any difference. All that matters to me is the work. Without that my brain rots. Put that in your blog. Or better still, stop inflicting your opinions on the world.” He curled up petulantly on the sofa with his face to the wall.

John sat still for a moment, then stood up and pulled on his jacket. Sherlock half rolled over. “Where are you going?”

“Out. I need some air.” He thumped down the stairs, almost knocking into Mrs Hudson who was on her way up. She tapped on the door, which John had left open. “Have you two had a little domestic?” she asked Sherlock’s inert form. Sherlock stood up and walked over the coffee table to the window. It was dark out. He could see John was walking up the street, and beyond him, all of London—at least, all that Sherlock could see from the window—lay open and glittering, the lights reflecting off the overcast sky. “It’s a bit nippy out there. John should have wrapped himself up a bit more,” said Mrs Hudson.

“Look at that, Mrs Hudson. Quiet, calm, peaceful. Isn’t it hateful?”

“Oh, I’m sure something will turn up, Sherlock. A nice murder. That’ll cheer you up.”

“Can’t come too soon.”

Mrs Hudson looked to her right and spotted the smiley face. “Hey! What’ve you done to my bloody wall? I’m putting this on you’re rent, young man.”

Sherlock trailed away from the window, smiling to himself at Mrs Hudson’s indignation, when there was a deafening crash and the windows behind him exploded, knocking him flat on his face.

Thanks to the lumpy sofa, John woke up far too early the next morning. He sat up, stretched out the cricks in his neck, and started to lace up his shoes.

“Morning,” said Sarah, coming out of her room in her robe and pyjamas.

“Morning,” said John.

She spotted him massaging his neck. “See? Told you you should’ve gone with the lilo.”

“No, no, it’s fine. I slept fine. It was very kind of you.” He shifted to his right as she dug in the sofa cushions behind him and pulled out the remote control and turned on the morning news. “Well, maybe next time I’ll let you kip at the end of my bed.”

“What about the time after that?” John muttered to himself.

She pretended not to hear. “Say, do you want some breakfast?” she asked, standing up.

“Love some.”

“Well, you better make it yourself, because I’m going to have a shower.” She smiled mischievously at him and left him with the telly remote.

John was buttoning his shirt when the news switched from talking about some lost Vermeer that had just been found to an explosion in central London. John didn’t need to see the caption that said Baker Street. He recognized the storefronts, many of them looking grey and shattered, and even some of the cars parked along the pavement. He was up and putting on his coat without even finishing his shirt buttons. “Sarah? Sarah!” he called. “I’m sorry. I’ve got to run.”

He took a taxi back to Baker Street, but even so, it didn't get him there quick enough by half. Even though he knew what to expect, having seen it on the telly, he slowed down in shock as he came around the corner. He'd seen sights like this in Afghanistan, but even that didn't prepare him to see it in stolid, stubborn London. It was different, he realized, a completely different species of horror, when it was scenery you knew, scattered across the street. The entire building across the street from 221 was blown apart. Chunks of masonry and wreckage littered the pavement. It had rained overnight, so the smell of dust and the haze of masonry particles had given way to the clean smell of rain and the sharp tang of freshly sawn plywood that was already going up over shattered windows in other buildings. The street was crowded with fire engines, police, and crowds of onlookers. John pushed his way through the crowd. The constable that was part of the human cordon holding the spectators back recognized John from cases with Sherlock and let him through. He had to tell another cop that he lived in 221, but in the end, they let him into the flat.

The broken windows in 221B had already been boarded over, and the glass swept up. The house didn't seem to have fallen victim to more than its usual share of chaos, so John was not entirely surprised, but still immensely relieved, to find Sherlock sitting in his usual armchair.

"Sherlock?"

"John."

"I saw it on the telly, you okay?" John now saw, and this surprised him considerably, Sherlock's brother Mycroft sitting in the chair opposite Sherlock, swivelling his umbrella between his long fingers.

"What? Oh. Yes. Fine. Gas leak, apparently." He idly plucked at his violin, which was propped, upside down, on his knee. "I can't," he said to Mycroft.

"Can't?" repeated Mycroft.

"Stuff I've got on's just too big. I can't spare the time."

"Never mind your usual trivia, this is of national importance."

Sherlock gave a final, impatient strum on his violin. "How's the diet?"

"Fine," said Mycroft. He turned to John. "Perhaps you can get through to him, John."

"What?"

"I'm afraid my brother can be very intransigent."

Thank you, Captain Obvious, thought John.

"If you're so keen, why don't you investigate it?" asked Sherlock.

“No, no, no, I can’t possibly be away from the office for any length of time, not with the Korean elections—“ Mycroft trailed off abruptly. “Well, you don’t need to know about that, do you? Besides, a case like this requires...legwork.” He uttered the last word with a certain dramatic distaste.

“So, John, how was the lilo?” asked Sherlock abruptly.

“Sofa, Sherlock. It was the sofa,” corrected Mycroft.

Sherlock’s eyes passed swiftly over John. “Oh, yes, of course.”

“How...?” John said, then stopped. “Never mind.”

“Sherlock’s business seems to be booming since you and he became...pals. What’s he like to live with? Hellish, I imagine?”

“I’m never bored,” said John, equivocally.

“Good. That’s good, isn’t it?” He stood up and tried to hand Sherlock a file with a government seal on it. Sherlock, picking up his violin bow, declined to take it. The two brothers regarded each other for a moment.

Instead, Mycroft crossed the room and handed the folder to John, who took it, slightly bewildered. “Andrew West, known as Westie to his friends. Civil servant, found dead on the tracks at Battersea Station this morning with his head smashed in.”

“Jumped in front of a train?” suggested John, knowing that it couldn’t be as simple as that.

“Seems a logical assumption,” conceded Mycroft.

“But?”

“But?”

“Well, you wouldn’t be here if it was just an accident,” said John. He thought he saw Sherlock smirk into his violin, but couldn’t tell if it was pride or amusement.

“The M.O.D. is working on a new missile defence system. The Bruce Partington Program, it’s called. The plans for it were on a memory stick.”

Even John had to give an incredulous laugh at that. “That wasn’t very clever.”

Mycroft smiled indulgently at him. “It’s not the only copy. But it is secret, and missing.”

“Top secret?”

“Very. We think West must have taken the memory stick. We can’t possibly risk it falling into the wrong hands. You’ve got to find those plans, Sherlock. Don’t make me order you.”

Sherlock tucked his violin under his chin and pulled in a long breath. “I’d like to see you try.”

Mycroft smiled without amusement. “Think it over.” He turned to go, shaking John’s hand.

“Goodbye, John. See you very soon.”

Sherlock did not say goodbye, but started playing nonsense chords on his violin to chase Mycroft out of the room.

John waited until he heard the front door close. “Why’d you lie? You’ve got nothing on. Not a single case. That’s why the wall took a pounding. Why did you tell your brother you were busy?”

Sherlock shrugged, scratching his head with his bow, leaving behind a stripe of resin. “Why shouldn’t I?”

John nodded. “Oh. I see. Sibling rivalry. Now we’re getting somewhere.”

Sherlock would not have responded to this anyway, but his cell phone rang, so all he had time for was an exasperated look towards John as he pulled his phone out of his pocket. “Sherlock Holmes.” He listened for a moment, and then his expression cleared. “Of course. How could I refuse?” He stood and grabbed his jacket, hanging up his phone. “Lestrade. I’ve been summoned. Are you coming?”

“Yeah, if you want me to.”

“Of course.” Sherlock paused in the doorway and looked at him. “I’d be lost without my blogger.”

FIVE PIPS

“You like the funny cases, don’t you? The surprising ones?” said Lestrade, meeting them as they came out of the elevator at Scotland Yard, and leading them back to his office.

“Obviously.”

“Well, this...the explosion.”

“Gas leak, yes?”

“No.”

“No?”

“No. Made to look like one.”

“What?” asked John, blankly.

“Hardly anything left of the place, except a strongbox. A *very* strong box, and inside of it is this.” He pointed to a packet wrapped in brown paper on his desk. It had Sherlock’s name on.

“You haven’t opened it?” asked Sherlock, looking at Lestrade.

“It’s addressed to you, isn’t it? We’ve x-rayed it, it’s not booby-trapped.”

“How reassuring,” said Sherlock dryly. He picked up the packet and held it under Lestrade’s desk lamp, turning it over in his hands, examining it minutely. “Nice stationary,” he remarked. “Bohemian.”

“What?”

“From the Czech Republic. No fingerprints?”

“No.”

“She used a fountain pen. Parker Duofold. Iridium nib.”

“She?”

“Obviously.”

John tried to not roll his eyes. “Obviously.”

Sherlock picked up Lestrade’s letter opener and carefully slid the blade under the seal and along the crease in the envelope. Little motes of paper danced under the desk lamplight. Slowly and deliberately, he reached into the envelope and pulled out an iPhone, in an alarming pink case.

“That’s...that’s the phone, the pink phone,” said John.

“What, from ‘A Study in Pink’?” asked Lestrade.

“Obviously it’s not the same phone, but it’s supposed to look like—“ What Lestrade had just said penetrated, and Sherlock wheeled around. “A study in pink? You read his blog?”

“Course I read his blog,” said Lestrade. “We all do. Do you *really* not know that the Earth goes ‘round the Sun?” Donovan, who had come into the office to give Lestrade a file, smirked.

Sherlock turned his back on them and turned the phone over in his hands. “It isn’t the same phone. This one’s brand new. Someone’s gone to a lot of trouble to make it look like the same phone. Which means your *blog*—“ he hurled the word at John, dripping with condescension, “—has a far wider readership.” He turned the phone on and accessed the voicemail on speakerphone. “You have one new message,” said the robotic woman. Five electronic tones sounded.

“Is that it?” Lestrade asked, when nothing else came out of the speaker.

“No. That’s not it,” said Sherlock. He opened a picture message and turned the phone sideways. John and Lestrade leaned over his shoulder and looked at the picture—an old, plain stone fireplace in a bare room. The wallpaper was half off the walls and there was a broken mirror hanging above the fireplace.

“What in the hell are we supposed to make of that?” asked Lestrade. “An estate agent’s photo and the bloody Greenwich pips?”

“It’s a warning,” said Sherlock. His eyes had that faraway stare.

“A warning?” asked John.

“Some secret societies used to send dried melon seeds, orange pips, things like that. *Five pips*. They’re warning us it’s going to happen again. I’ve seen this place,” meaning the room in the picture, “before.” He left Lestrade’s office.

John hurried after him. “Hang on—what’s going to happen again?”

Sherlock half turned, throwing his arms in the air. “*BOOM!*”

To John’s surprise, the taxi took them back to Baker Street. But instead of going upstairs to Flat B, Sherlock led them down to the cellar, to 221C, calling Mrs Hudson for the key.

221C was padlocked shut. “You had a look, didn’t you, Sherlock, when you first came to see about your flat?” said Mrs Hudson as she handed him the key.

Sherlock’s eyes travelled across the padlock on the door and the doorknob. “The door’s been opened. Recently.”

“No, can’t be. That’s the only key. I can’t get anyone interested in this flat,” she said as she turned the key in the lock. “It’s the damp, I expect, that’s the curse of basements. I had a place once when I was first married, black mould all up the wall—“ Sherlock, John, and Lestrade all went downstairs, Sherlock without looking at her, John giving an apologetic smile. Lestrade closed the door after them, and Mrs Hudson went back to her kitchen.

Down the stairs and into the flat, which looked exactly like the picture on the phone, except for a pair of trainers sitting precisely in the middle of the floor. Sherlock circled the shoes appraisingly.

“He’s a bomber, remember,” said John, as Sherlock took a step toward them. Sherlock paused for a moment and then, deciding that there was nothing else for it, got down on his hands and knees in front of the shoes.

The pink phone chose that moment to shatter the silence. All three men startled, and then pretended they hadn’t. Sherlock pulled the phone out of his pocket. It was ringing from a blocked number. He answered on speakerphone. “Hello?”

Uneven breathing filled the room. “H-hello…” came a hesitant voice. A woman’s voice. “…Sexy.”

Sherlock’s brows knitted but his voice remained calm. “Who’s this?”

“I’ve…sent you a little puzzle. Just to say hi. There.” Her voice came out slowly, unevenly, garbled by tears and fear.

“Who’s talking? Why are you crying?”

“I’m not crying. I’m typing. And this stupid bitch is reading it out.”

“The curtain rises,” said Sherlock softly.

“What?” asked John.

“Nothing,” said Sherlock, coming back to himself.

“No, what did you mean?” pressed John.

“I’ve been expecting this for some time,” said Sherlock.

“Twelve hours to solve my puzzle, Sherlock. Or I’m going to be so naughty.” The woman’s voice dissolved into sobs, and then she hung up the phone. Sherlock, Lestrade, and John all looked at each other.

FIVE PIPS

TWELVE HOURS LEFT

Sherlock took the shoes to the lab at St. Bart's, where he could examine them under a microscope and take samples. His phone chimed with text messages, which he ignored, bringing trace evidence from the soles into focus under the microscope.

"So, who do you suppose it was?" asked John, pacing.

"Hmm?"

"The woman on the phone. The crying woman."

"Oh, she doesn't matter. She's just a hostage. No lead there."

"For god's sake, I wasn't thinking about *leads*—"

"Then you're not going to be much use to her," Sherlock cast a sidelong glance at the computer database that some overachieving graduate student in botany had made, cataloguing British plants by region and identifying aspects of seeds or pollen.

"Are they trying to trace it? Trace the call?"

"Bomber's too smart for that." Sherlock's phone continued to chime. "Pass me my phone?"

"Where is it?"

"Jacket."

John came round the lab table and reached into Sherlock's suit jacket, which he was still wearing. "Careful!" chided Sherlock, trying to keep his eyes over the eyepieces of the microscope.

John looked at the phone. "Text from your brother."

"Delete it."

"Delete it?"

"Missile plans are out of the country now, nothing we can do about it."

John looked at the text anyway.

Re: Bruce Partington Plans. Any progress on Andrew West's death? Mycroft.

"Well, Mycroft thinks there is, he's texted you...eight times? Must be important."

"Then why didn't he cancel his dental appointment?"

"His what?"

"Mycroft never texts if he can talk. Look. Andrew West stole the missile plans, tried to sell them, got his head smashed in for his pains. End of story. The only mystery is this: Why is my brother so determined to bore me when somebody else is being so delightfully interesting?"

John shifted his weight. "Try and remember there's a woman here might die."

“What for?” Sherlock looked away from the microscope, and up at John. “This hospital’s full of people dying, *Doctor*. Why don’t you go and cry by their bedside, see what good it does them?” John looked away, but before he could reply, the computer terminal started making an obnoxious noise and flashing a “search complete” notification, just as Molly also let herself into the lab. “Any luck?” she asked cheerfully.

“Oh, yes,” said Sherlock, then stopped as the door swung open again and a pale, tense-looking man stepped in. He stopped on the threshold, hesitant and awkward about interrupting. “Oh, sorry,” said the man. “I didn’t—“

“Jim? Hi!” said Molly. “Come in, come in. Jim, this is Sherlock Holmes.”

“Ahh!” said Jim in recognition.

“And, uh...” Molly turned to John, an apologetic grimace on her face. “Sorry—“

“John Watson. Hi.”

“Hi,” said Jim. “So you’re Sherlock Holmes. Molly’s told me all about you. Are you on one of your cases?” His voice was slow, like syrup, and just slightly too friendly.

“Jim works in IT upstairs,” explained Molly. “That’s how we met. Office romance.”

Sherlock gave Jim the briefest of glances before turning back to his microscope. “Gay,” he said, almost as if he didn’t care if he was heard, though John knew he intended for Molly to hear him perfectly clearly.

“Sorry, what?” said Molly, her smile evaporating.

“Nothing. Urm, hi,” he said, nodding at Jim.

“Hi,” said Jim, stepping closer to the edge of the lab table and knocking a specimen tray to the floor with a clatter. Sherlock raised his eyebrows and John turned away, embarrassed for the guy.

“Well,” said Jim, putting the tray back, “I’d better be off. I’ll see you at the Fox? ‘Bout sixish?” he said to Molly, his hand drifting vaguely between her shoulder blades. She nodded. “Bye,” he said, and Molly replied, but it was Sherlock he was looking at. “It was nice to meet you.”

Sherlock did not look up. After a few seconds, John stepped in. “You too,” he said. Jim looked from Sherlock to John and blinked, then turned and left without saying anything more.

Molly didn’t even wait for the door to swing entirely closed before confronting Sherlock. “What d’you mean, gay?” she demanded. “We’re together.”

“And domestic bliss must suit you, Molly, you’ve put on three pounds since I last saw you.”

“Two and a half.”

“Three.”

“Sherlock—“ started John.

“He’s not gay. Why do you have to spoil—he’s not,” said Molly, her voice rising.

“With that level of personal grooming?”

“Because he puts a bit of product in his hair?” asked John sceptically. “*I* put product in my hair.”

“You *wash* your hair, there’s a difference. No, no. Tinted eyelashes, clear signs of taurine cream around the frown lines. Those tired, clubber’s eyes. Then there’s his underwear.”

“His underwear?” said Molly blankly.

“Visible above the waistline. *Very* visible. Very particular brand. That plus the extremely suggestive fact that he just left his number under this dish here—“ Sherlock lifted the dish that Jim had knocked to the floor and held up a piece of paper with a phone number on it, “--I’d say you’d better break it off now and save yourself the pain.”

Molly stared at him incredulously for a moment, then turned on her heel and stalked out of the lab.

“Charming,” John told him. “Well done.”

Sherlock seemed genuinely nonplussed. “I’m just saving her time, isn’t that kinder?”

“Kinder? No, Sherlock. *That* wasn’t kind.”

Sherlock sighed, giving up on people. His attention turned back to the trainers on the table, and he pushed one toward John. “Go on, then.”

“Hmm?”

“You know what I do, off you go.”

John laughed. “No.”

“Go on.”

“I don’t want to stand here so you can humiliate me while I try and disseminate--“

“An outside eye, a second opinion. It’s very useful to me. Really.”

John studied him, trying to figure out if Sherlock had a purpose beyond redirecting the conversation back to more comfortable fields. They regarded each other. John blinked first. “Fine.” He picked up the shoe and studied it. “Well, they’re just a pair of shoes. Trainers.”

“Good.”

“Umm...they’re in good nick. I’d say they were pretty new, except the sole’s been well worn, so the owner must have had them for awhile. Uh...very ‘80s, probably one of those retro designs.”

“Sparkling form. What else?”

“They’re quite...big, so, a man’s. But...” he turned the sneaker over in his hands. “But there’s traces of a name inside. In felt tip. And adults don’t write their names inside their shoes, so these belonged to a kid.”

“Excellent. What else?”

“Uhh...that’s it.”

“That’s it?”

“How did I do?”

“Well, John. Really well. I mean, you missed almost everything of importance, but, you know...”

he held his hand out for the shoe, which John placed in his hand. “The owner loved these. Scrubbed them clean. Whitened them where they got discoloured. Changed the laces three, no, four times. Even so, there are traces of his flaky skin where his fingers have come into contact with them, so he suffered from eczema. Shoes are well worn. More so on the inner side, which means the owner had weak arches. British make, twenty years old.”

“Twenty years?”

“They’re not retro, they’re original. Limited edition, two blue stripes, 1989.” He showed the product listing on his phone to John.

“But there’s still mud on them. They look new.”

“Someone’s kept them that way. Quite a bit of mud caked on the soles. Analysis shows it’s from Sussex with London mud overlaying it.”

“How do you know?”

“Pollen. Clear as a map reference to me.” He nodded at the botany database. “South of the river, too. So the kid who owned these trainers came to London from Sussex twenty years ago and left them behind.”

“And what happened to him?”

“Something bad. He loved those shoes, remember, he’d never leave them filthy. Wouldn’t leave them at all unless he had to. So a child with big feet gets...” he stopped talking, his eyes drifting out of focus. “Oh.”

“What?”

“Carl Powers,” said Sherlock softly.

“Sorry, who?”

“Carl Powers, John.”

“What is it?”

“It’s where I began.” He could see the story spooling out in front of him, becoming simultaneously more clear and more muddier. He could see the puzzle he had to solve now—figure out what happened to Carl Powers. But Carl Powers was...It meant the bomber knew him, knew *Sherlock*,

and was dedicated enough to have been plotting this, or something like it, or at least accounting for the possibility, for more than twenty years.

Sherlock explained more in the taxi on the way back to Baker Street. “1989. Young kid, champion swimmer. Came up from Brighton for a school sports tournament, drowned in the pool. Tragic accident. You wouldn’t remember it, why should you.”

“But you remember?”

“Yes.”

“Something fishy about it?”

“Nobody thought so. Nobody except me. I was only a kid myself, I read about it in the papers.”

“Started young, didn’t you?”

“The boy, Carl Powers, had some kind of fit in the water, but by the time they got him out it was too late. There was something *wrong*, something I couldn’t get out of my head.”

“What?”

“His shoes.”

“What about them?”

“They weren’t there. I made a fuss, I tried to get the police interested, but nobody seemed to think it was important. He’d left all the rest of his clothes in his locker. But there was no sign of his shoes.” He looked down at the shoes in his lap, safely wrapped in a plastic bag. “Until now.”

Silence fell between them. John looked out the window, his thoughts divided between a thirteen-year-old Sherlock, trying to explain something that no one else could see, and the lost, crying woman, somewhere in London—hopefully in London—with only six hours to live.

FIVE PIPS

SIX HOURS LEFT

Sherlock, somewhat incredibly, still had all his articles on Carl Powers from all those years ago; even more incredibly, he knew where he kept them. John left him alone for awhile, knowing that Sherlock would concentrate better on his own, but after an hour of twiddling his thumbs in frustration he opened the door to the kitchen and looked in. “Can I help? I want to help. There’s only five hours left.” John’s phone chimed and he pulled it out.

Any developments? Mycroft Holmes.

“It’s your brother. He’s texting me now. How does he know my...never mind.”

“Must be a root canal,” said Sherlock absently.

“Look, he did say ‘national importance’.”

“How quaint.”

“What is?”

“You are. Queen and Country.”

“You can’t just ignore it.”

“I’m not ignoring it. I’m putting my best man onto it right now.”

“Right. Good. Who’s that?”

Sherlock smiled at him.

In spite of the hour, Mycroft was in his office, which—in contrast to Sherlock’s living space—was laid out with bare precision. The office contained neither nor more less than Mycroft needed to function at his work and except for the red phone—they really have those, marvelled John—could have belonged to a college professor or, perhaps, a doctor. John sat, somewhat awkwardly in his only suit, in the chair placed precisely in the centre of the room, in front of Mycroft’s desk. He had barely been there a minute when Mycroft came in, at which point John hastily rose again.

“John! How nice. I was hoping you wouldn’t be long. How can I help you?” He motioned for John to sit without looking up from the file folder he was reading.

“Thank you, um, well, I was wanting to, erm, your brother sent me to collect more facts about the stolen plans. The missile plans.”

Mycroft turned and looked at John. “Did he?”

“Yes,” John smiled cheerily at Mycroft. “He’s investigating now. He’s, uh, investigating away. I just wondered what else you could tell me about the dead man.”

“Uh, 27, clerk at Vauxhall Cross, MI-6. He was involved in the Bruce Partington Program in a minor capacity. Security checks a-ok. No known terrorist affiliations or sympathies. Last seen by his fiancée at 10:30 yesterday evening. He told her he had to go out and ‘see someone’.”

“He was found at Battersea, yes? So he got on the train?”

“No.”

“What?”

“He had an Oyster card, but it hadn’t been used.” Mycroft winced and put his hand to his jaw.

“Must have bought a ticket.”

Mycroft shook his head. “There was no ticket on the body.”

“Then—“

“Then how did he end up with a bashed-in brain on the tracks at Battersea? That is the question. And one I was rather hoping Sherlock would provide an answer to. How’s he getting on?”

“He’s fine. And it’s going very well, it’s um...he’s completely focused on it.” He smiled at Mycroft. Mycroft did not smile back.

FIVE PIPS

THREE HOURS LEFT

It was nearly midnight when John arrived back at Baker Street. Sherlock was seated at his microscope, and when John came in, he pounded the table in triumph. “Poison!”

“What’re you going on about?” Mrs Hudson asked, as she cleared the table.

“*Clostridium botulinum!*” He turned to John. “It’s one of the deadliest poisons on the planet!” John looked at him blankly. “*Carl Powers!*”

“Wait, so you’re saying he was murdered?”

“Remember the shoelaces?” said Sherlock, walking over to where, John saw, he’d hung up not just Carl Powers’ shoelaces, but had dissected the shoes entirely and inspected each piece individually, “The boy suffered from eczema. It’d be the easiest thing in the world to introduce the poison into his medication. Two hours later he comes up to London, the poison takes effect, paralyzes the muscles, and he drowns.”

“How come the autopsy didn’t pick that up?”

“It’s virtually undetectable. And nobody would have been looking for it. There were still tiny traces of it left inside the trainers. From where he put the cream on his feet.” Sherlock had his laptop open and his browser had loaded his own website, thescienceofdeduction.co.uk. “That’s why they had to go.”

“So how do we let the bomber know—?”

“Get his attention. Stop the clock.” He hurriedly created a new topic in the forum section of his blog.

FOUND. Pair of trainers belonging to Carl Powers (1976-1989).

Botulinum toxin still present. Apply 221B Baker Street.

As he clicked submit, he checked his watch.

“The killer kept the shoes all these years?”

“Yes. Meaning?”

“He’s our bomber.”

Before Sherlock could answer, the phone rang. The pink phone. Sherlock answered it on speakerphone, and the sobbing of the woman filled the kitchen. “Well done, you. Come and get me.”

“Where are you?” asked Sherlock. “Tell us where you are.” John had his phone out and was calling Lestrade before she’d even got all the words out.

FOUR PIPS

Lestrade refused to meet with Sherlock until after he was done with his first round of evidence gathering, so it was full daylight before he met them in his office at the Yard. Sherlock, who'd been up all night edgily pacing even after he'd solved the mystery, looked rested and alert. Lestrade, who had also been up all night, was on his fourth cup of coffee and looked ruffled and tired. John had managed a nap on the couch and had eaten a sandwich from Speedy's next door to 221B, and so was functional.

"She lives in Cornwall," Lestrade told them. "Two men broke in wearing masks, forced her to drive to the car park, and decked her out in enough explosives to take down a house. Told her to phone you. She had to read out from this pager." He put a text display pager on the desk in front of him.

John picked it up and idly turned it over in his hands.

"And if she deviated by one word, a sniper would set her off," said Sherlock.

"Or if you hadn't solved the case," said John.

"Elegant," breathed Sherlock, pacing the room.

"Elegant?" repeated John, his face going stony.

"What was the point?" asked Lestrade. "Why would anyone do this?"

"I can't be the only person in the world who gets bored," said Sherlock softly. The pink phone chimed with a text and ended further conversation. Lestrade sank back in his chair.

"You have one new message," said the phone. Four beeps sounded.

"Four pips," said John.

"First test passed, it would seem," said Sherlock. "Here's the second." He held the phone out to Lestrade. It was a picture of a car. Nothing was visible in the frame except windscreen, bonnet, and license plate. "It's been abandoned, wouldn't you say?"

"I'm sure it's been reported," said Lestrade, picking up his desk phone.

Sally Donovan, the sergeant, let herself into Lestrade's office and leaned on the door jamb.

"Freak?" she said to Sherlock, holding out her own cell phone, "It's for you."

Sherlock took the phone and left Lestrade's office. "Hello?"

"It's okay that you've gone to the police." It was a man this time. Young man.

"Who is this? Is this you again?"

"But don't rely on them. Clever you. Guessing about Carl Powers." The man's voice was shaking. It sounded to Sherlock like his whole body was shaking. He could hear traffic in the background. "I never liked him. Carl laughed at me. So I stopped him laughing." The voice was starting to cry now.

"You've stolen another voice, I presume?"

“This is about you and me.”

“Who are you?” asked Sherlock. “What’s that noise?”

“The sounds of life, Sherlock. But don’t worry. I can soon fix that. You solved my last puzzle in nine hours. This time you have eight.” The caller hung up.

Lestrade had hung up his phone as well. “We found it!” he called to Sherlock. Slipping Donovan’s phone in his pocket, Sherlock turned and followed Lestrade and John out of the Yard.

FOUR PIPS

EIGHT HOURS LEFT

The car was parked in the middle of an abandoned construction site on the south side of the river, out past Deptford. Forensic teams were already there, had been there working the site even before the four pips had come to the pink phone. “The car was hired yesterday morning by an Ian Monkford. Banker of some kind. City boy. Paid in cash. Told his wife he was going away on a business trip but he never arrived.”

“You’re still hanging round him?” Donovan asked John.

“Yeah, well...” said John.

“Opposites attract, I suppose.”

“No, we’re not...”

“You should get yourself a hobby. Stamps maybe. Model trains. Safer.”

Sherlock and Lestrade were bent over the car. The centre console and the driver’s seat were covered in a puddle of blood. “Before you ask,” said Lestrade to Sherlock, “Yes, it’s Monkford’s blood. DNA checks out.”

Sherlock briefly checked the various crevices in the car—centre console, under the seats, and in the glove box, from which he pulled a business card. “No body?”

“Not yet,” said Donovan.

“Get a sample sent to the lab.” He meant, Lestrade knew, the lab at St. Bart’s. Lestrade looked at Donovan, who looked back at him in silent rebellion for a moment before letting out a sigh of exasperation and going to tell the techs that the freak needed some of their evidence.

Sherlock approached a woman standing gingerly in the mud, off to the side, who could only be Mrs Monkford. She had an expensively simple haircut and was wearing a pinstripe pantsuit. “Mrs Monkford?” he asked her.

“Yes. Sorry, but I’ve already spoken with two policemen.” She looked away, ready to dismiss their existence.

“We’re not from the police,” said John, “we’re—“

“Sherlock Holmes,” said Sherlock, holding out his hand to shake. “Very old friend of your husband’s.” His voice came out thin and shaking, and John looked at him to see the lines had gone slack around his mouth, his eyes pale and scared. “We, um, grew up together.”

“I’m sorry, who?” she said, some steel coming into her voice through her own tears. “I don’t think he ever mentioned you.”

“Oh, he must have done, he... This is horrible, isn't it, I just can't believe it. I only saw him the other day.” He shrugged helplessly. “Same old Ian, not a care in the world.”

“Sorry?” said Mrs Monkford in confusion. “My husband has been depressed for months. Who are you?”

“Really strange that he hired a car,” said Sherlock, ignoring her. “Why would he do that? It's a bit suspicious, isn't it?”

“No, it isn't. He forgot to renew the tax on the car, that's all.” She folded her arms across her chest.

“Ah, well,” said Sherlock, tears spilling down his cheeks. “That was Ian. That was Ian all over.”

“No it wasn't!”

“Wasn't it?” said Sherlock, all trace of tears and anxiety gone at once from his voice.

“Interesting.” He turned and walked away, leaving Mrs Monkford in indignant confusion.

“Why did you lie to her?” John asked Sherlock as they walked back to the car.

“People don't like telling you things,” said Sherlock, pulling off a glove and wiping his eyes.

“They love to contradict you. Past tense, did you notice?”

“Sorry, what?”

“I referred to her husband in the past tense. She joined in. Bit premature, they've only just found the car.”

“You think she murdered her husband?”

“Definitely not. That's not a mistake a murderer would make.”

“I see. No I don't. What am I seeing?”

“Fishing!” Donovan called to John. “Try fishing!”

“Where now?” John asked, ignoring Donovan.

“Janus Cars,” said Sherlock, handing John the card he'd pulled out of the glove box. “Just found this in the glove compartment.”

FOUR PIPS

SIX HOURS LEFT

The car rental business didn't look like it had updated the décor since the 1970s—all flat wood panelling and fake plants. The manager, too, had no tie, the first three buttons of his shirt unbuttoned, and his hair oiled back. "I can't see how I can help you gentlemen," he said, apologetically.

"Mr Monkford hired the car from you yesterday?" asked John.

"Yeah. Lovely motor. Mazda RX-8. Wouldn't mind one of them myself."

"Is that one?" asked Sherlock, pointing at a framed photo on the wall and slipping behind the desk to look at it more closely.

The manager turned to look at the picture Sherlock had pointed at. "No, they're all Jags. I can see you're not a car man, eh?"

"But surely you can afford one. A Mazda, I mean."

"Yeah, that's a fair point. You know how it is, it's like working in a sweet shop. Once you start picking up the liquorice all-sorts, when does it all stop?" he scratched his arm through his sleeve.

"But you didn't know Mr Monkford?" clarified John.

"No, he was just a client. Came in here and hired one of my cars. No idea what happened to him. Poor sod."

"Nice holiday, Mr Ewart?" asked Sherlock abruptly.

"Eh?"

"You've been away, haven't you?"

"Oh, the, the, no, it's sun beds I'm afraid," he said, gesturing to his tan. "Too busy to get away. My wife would love it, though. A bit of sun."

"Have you got any change for the cigarette machine?"

"What?"

"I noticed one on the way in and I haven't got any change. I'm gasping." He held out a twenty pound note to Ewart.

"Oh, um, well," said Ewart, pulling out his wallet and looking in. "No, sorry."

"Oh, well," said Sherlock. "Thank you very much for your time, Mr Ewart. You've been very helpful. Come on, John."

They exited through the shop where returned cars were being detailed.

"I've got change," said John, "If you still need to—"

"Nicotine patches, remember? I'm doing well."

"So what was that all about?"

“I needed to look inside his wallet.”

“Why?”

“Mr Ewart’s a liar.”

The next stop was the lab at St. Bart’s. The blood sample from Ian Monkford’s car had arrived, and John left to find himself some food while Sherlock examined it. He was in the middle of a test when the pink phone rang again. “Hello?”

It was the young man with the shaking voice. “The clue’s in the name. Janus Cars.”

“Why would you be giving me a clue?”

“Why does anyone do anything? Because I’m bored. We were made for each other, Sherlock.”

The heavy traffic sounds were still the same. “Then talk to me in your own voice.”

“Patience.” The line went dead.

Sherlock stared into space for a moment before turning back to the blood sample, but some back corner of his mind turned the new clue over and over. The clue in the name. As he held the blood sample up to the light, a smile spread across his face. All the pieces fit perfectly.

FOUR PIPS

THREE HOURS LEFT

Lestrade met them at Ian Monkford's car, which had been moved to the forensic unit's garage. "How much was on that seat, would you say?" Sherlock asked him.

"How much?" Lestrade shrugged. "About a pint."

"Not about. Exactly a pint. That was their first mistake. The blood's definitely Ian Monkford's but it's been frozen."

"Frozen?"

"There are clear signs. I think Ian Monkford gave a pint of his blood some time ago and that's what they spread on the seat."

"Who did?" asked John.

"Janus Cars. The clue's in the name."

"The god with two faces?" asked John.

"Exactly. They provide a very special service. If you've got any kind of a problem—money troubles, bad marriage, whatever—Janus Cars will help you disappear. Ian Monkford was up to his eyes in some kind of trouble. Financial, at a guess. He's a banker. Couldn't see a way out. But if he were to vanish, if the car he hired was found abandoned with his blood all over the driver's seat..."

"So where is he?" John asked.

"Colombia."

"Colombia?" sputtered Lestrade.

"Mr Ewart of Janus Cars had a \$20,000 Colombian peso note in his wallet. Quite a lot of change, too. He told us he hadn't been abroad recently. But when I asked him about the cars, I could see his tan line clearly. No one wears a shirt on a sun bed. That plus his arm."

"His arm?" asked Lestrade.

"He kept scratching it. Obviously irritating him. And bleeding. Why? Because he'd recently had a booster jab. Hep B, probably, difficult to tell at that distance. Conclusion? He'd just come back from settling Ian Monkford into his new life in Colombia. Mrs Monkford cashes in the life insurance and she splits it with Janus Cars."

"Mrs Monkford?" asked John.

"Oh, yes, she's in on it, too. Now go and arrest them, Inspector, that's what you do best. We need to let our friendly bomber know that the case is solved. I am on fire!" He turned and walked out of the garage.

Lestrade stared after him, his eyebrows slowly drawing together.

Congratulations to Ian Monkford on his relocation to Colombia

Sherlock posted on the *Science of Deduction*'s forum when they returned to 221B, without even taking off his coat or his scarf. The pink phone rang almost immediately, and Sherlock put it on speaker.

“He says you can come and fetch me,” said the man. “Help. Help me, please.” He was in Piccadilly Circus, surrounded by thousands of people. If Sherlock hadn't solved the puzzle, he would've gone off in the middle of the evening rush hour.

THREE PIPS

Early that afternoon, John forced Sherlock to accompany him to a diner, even if he didn't eat. The bomber would call when he called; pacing at Baker Street wouldn't make him call any faster. Might as well eat while they could. The pink phone was sitting on the table.

"Feeling better?" asked Sherlock. He hadn't eaten anything, as far as John could tell, in over twenty-four hours, but he seemed unfazed. John wondered what the limits of his constitution were.

"You realize we've hardly stopped for breath since this thing started?" asked John, shovelling eggs in his mouth. "Has it occurred to you—"

"Probably."

"Has it occurred to you that the bomber's playing a game with you? The envelope, breaking into the other flat, the dead kid's shoes. It's all meant for you."

"Yes, I know," said Sherlock softly.

"Is it him, then? Moriarty?"

"Perhaps."

The pink phone interrupted them with a chirp. Sherlock opened the messages app to see a picture of a smiling older lady. Three pips sounded. "That could be anybody," said Sherlock, aggravated.

"It could be, yeah," nodded John, looking at the picture. "Lucky for you I've been more than a little unemployed."

"How do you mean?"

"Lucky for you, Mrs Hudson and I watch far too much telly." He pushed his chair back and, after consulting with the waitress, was given custody of the remote control so he could change the channel on the television that was bolted to the ceiling.

The woman in the picture message appeared on the telly, commanding the audience to applaud for a lovely woman named Tyra. Sherlock didn't have time to do much more than recognize the woman from the picture before the pink phone rang. "Hello?" he said.

"This one...is a bit...defective. Sorry. She's...blind. This is...a funny one. I'll give you...twelve...hours."

"Why are you doing this?" asked Sherlock.

"I...like...to watch you dance." The lady sounded thin and old. Older than Mrs Hudson. She wasn't crying, but her breath was coming in high whistles.

Sherlock hung up the phone and turned back to the telly. He realized that he wasn't watching the woman on her own show, but rather clips of her show that the local news was using. The headline,

along the bottom of the screen, was “Make-over Queen Connie Prince Dead at 43.” The anchor was explaining that Miss Prince was found dead by her brother two days ago in the house they shared in Hampstead.

The next round of the game had begun.

They had to call Lestrade to get into the city morgue. Miss Prince was on the block, cleaned up and waiting to be autopsied later that day.

Lestrade had also pulled the file that the investigators had already compiled. “Connie Prince, 54. She had one of those makeover shows on the telly, did you see her?”

“Nope.” Sherlock circled the body.

“Very popular. She was going places.”

“Not anymore,” said Sherlock. “So, dead two days. According to one of her staff, Raul de Santos, she cut her hand on a rusty nail in the garden. Nasty wound. Tetanus bacteria enters the bloodstream...good night, Vienna.”

“I suppose,” said John sceptically, bending over the wound on Connie Prince’s hand.

“Something’s wrong with this picture,” muttered Sherlock.

“Eh?” asked Lestrade.

“It’s can’t be as simple as it seems, otherwise the bomber wouldn’t be directing us towards it. Something’s wrong.” He bent more closely at the body, looking at all the cuts and puncture wounds. He pulled out his pocket magnifying glass to examine her forehead. “John.”

“Hmm?”

“The cut on her hand. It’s deep. Would’ve bled a lot, right?”

“Yeah.”

“The wound’s clean. Very clean. And fresh.” He snapped the magnifier shut and put it in his pocket. “How long would the bacteria have been incubating inside her?”

“Eight, ten days.” John’s eyes opened in recognition. “The cut was made later.”

“After she was dead?” asked Lestrade.

“Has to be. Only question is, how did the tetanus enter the dead woman’s system? You want to help, right?” Sherlock asked John.

“Of course.”

“Connie Prince’s background, family history, everything. Give me data.”

“All right.” John left the morgue.

Sherlock was on his way out the door as well when Lestrade stopped him. "There's something else that we haven't thought of," he said.

"Is there?" asked Sherlock.

"Yes. Why is he doing this? The bomber? If this woman's death was suspicious, why point it out?"

"Good Samaritan?" suggested Sherlock.

"Who press-gangs suicide bombers?"

"Bad Samaritan?"

"I'm serious, Sherlock. Listen. I'm cutting you slack here. I'm trusting you. But out there somewhere some poor bastard's covered in Semtex and just waiting for you to solve the puzzle. So just tell me: What are we dealing with?"

Sherlock could not entirely erase the smile from his face. "Something new."

THREE PIPS

EIGHT HOURS LEFT

Lestrade followed Sherlock back to Baker Street, no longer willing to let Sherlock simply do his own thing and check in only when he needed official assistance. “Connection connection connection,” Sherlock muttered as if he could will clarity to the fore—which, Lestrade considered, perhaps he could. Sherlock had covered the wall with pictures and maps and bits of string linking it together. Lestrade realized it was a Sherlock version of a case diagram, though at the moment it looked rather mad. “There must be a connection.”

Sherlock turned to Lestrade. “Carl Powers, killed twenty years ago. Bomber knew him, admitted that he knew him. Bomber’s iPhone was in stationary from the Czech Republic. First hostage from Cornwall, the second from London, the third from Yorkshire, judging by her accent. What’s he doing? Working his way round the world? Showing off?” His rant was cut short by the pink phone ringing. He answered it on speakerphone.

“You’re enjoying this, aren’t you?” said the shaky Yorkshire voice. “Joining the dots? Three hours. Boom. Boom.”

Sherlock hung up and put the phone in his pocket, exchanging a look with Lestrade. The bomber was changing the rules.

John gained access to Connie Prince’s house by telling her brother that he wrote for the *Daily Mirror*. “We’re devastated,” said the brother, Kenny, leading John into an immaculately symmetrical sitting room. “Of course we are.”

“Can I get you anything, sir?” asked Raul, the houseboy, who had trailed in behind them.

“No,” said John, sitting on the couch. “No, thanks.” A bald cat nosed onto John’s lap. Kenny leaned picturesquely against the mantel.

“Raul is my rock. I don’t think I could have managed.” He looked down. “We didn’t always see eye to eye. But my sister was very dear to me.”

“But to the public, Mr. Prince?” asked John, gently moving the cat back to the couch cushions.

“Oh, she was adored. I’ve seen her take girls who looked like the back end of rootmasters and turn them into princesses. Still, it’s a relief in a way to know that she’s...beyond this vale of tears.”

“Absolutely,” said John, as the cat stubbornly settled itself on his lap. “It’s more common than people think. The tetanus is in the soil, people cut themselves on rose bushes, garden forks, that sort of thing. Left untreated—“

Kenny sat on the loveseat next to John and stared at him unblinkingly. “I don’t know what I’m going to do now. I mean, she left me this place. Which is lovely. But it’s not the same without her.”

John tried to lean back without the brother noticing. “That’s why my paper wanted to get to hear the full story straight from the horse’s mouth.”

“You’re sure it’s not too soon?”

“No, no.”

“You...fire away,” said Kenny.

“Great,” said Sherlock into his cell phone. “Thank you. Thanks again.”

“It’s a real shame,” said Mrs Hudson, who had come upstairs to see if the nice Detective Inspector wanted a cuppa and stayed when she saw all the pictures of Connie Prince on the wall. “I liked her. She taught me how to do your colours.”

“Colours?” asked Lestrade.

“You know, what goes best with what. I should never wear cerise, apparently. Drains me.”

Sherlock hung up his mobile and came back over. “Who was that?” asked Lestrade.

“Home Office.”

“Home Office?” gaped Lestrade.

“Well, Home Secretary actually. Owes me a favour.”

“Such a pretty girl,” mused Mrs Hudson. “But she messed about with herself too much. They all do these days. People can hardly move their faces. It’s silly, isn’t it?” She giggled, and Lestrade smiled politely. “Did you ever see her, Sherlock?”

“Not till now,” said Sherlock, turning round and opening his laptop, which was still open to video clips on Connie Prince’s website. Kenny Prince was talking about a disappointing vacation he’d just returned from, and Connie was mocking him for being pasty and pale.

“That’s the brother,” explained Mrs Hudson. “No love lost there, if you can believe the papers.”

“So I gather. I’ve just been having a very fruitful chat with people who love this show. Fan sites. Indispensable for gossip.” In the video clip, Connie was now bullying her brother to take off his clothes on national television.

Sherlock’s phone rang again. He looked at the caller ID as he answered. “John.”

“Hi. Look, get over here. Quickly. I think I’m onto something. You’ll need to pick up some stuff first. You got a pen?”

“I’ll remember.”

Kenny was smoothing his hair out in the mirror when Sherlock blustered in, laden with camera bags and long lenses. “Ahh, Mr Prince, isn’t it? Very good to meet you,” said Sherlock, grabbing his hand in a firm handshake.

“Yes. Yes, thank you.”

“So sorry to hear about—“

“Yes, yes, very kind.”

Sherlock turned his back on the pretence of setting up his camera, allowing John a moment of whispered consultation. “You were right. The bacteria got into her another way.”

“Yes?”

“Yes.”

“Right, we all set?” called Kenny from the other end of the room, where he was already posing at the mantelpiece—had been posing, John realized, since he’d arrived.

“Not too close,” cautioned Kenny, as Sherlock set off the flash in his face. “I’m raw from crying.”

“Oh, who’s this?” asked Sherlock, as the bald cat pushed against his ankles.

“Sek Met,” said Kenny Prince. “Named after the Egyptian goddess.”

“How nice. Was she Connie’s?”

“Yes,” said Kenny, picking up the cat. “A present from yours truly.”

“Er, Sherlock,” said John, petting the cat and touching its paws, “Light reading?”

“Oh, yes,” said Sherlock, setting off the flash again.

“Bloody hell,” said Kenny, shutting his eyes, “What’re you playing at?”

“Sorry,” said John, as Sherlock took flashed pictures of the cat.

“What’s going on?” asked Kenny, shying away from Sherlock’s aggressive flashing.

“Actually, I think we’ve got what we came for,” said John quickly. “Excuse us. Sherlock? We’ve got deadlines.”

“But you’ve not taken anything!” called Kenny, staring after Sherlock and John in bewilderment as they left the house. He looked like he thought he should be angry, but couldn’t figure out why.

“You think it was the cat?” said Sherlock to John, out on the street. “It wasn’t the cat.”

“But...yes, yeah it is. It must be. It’s how he got the tetanus into her system. It must be. Its paws stink of disinfectant.”

“Lovely idea.”

“No, he coated it onto the claws of her cat. New pet. Bound to be a bit jumpy around her. Scratch is almost inevitable. She wouldn’t—“

“I thought of it the minute I saw the scratches on her arm. But it’s too random and clever for the brother.”

“He murdered his sister for her money.”

“Did he?”

“...Didn’t he?”

“Nope. It’s revenge.”

“It’s—but who wanted revenge?”

“Raul, the houseboy. Kenny Prince was the butt of his sister’s jokes week in, week out. Virtual bullying campaign. Finally he had enough. Fell out with her, badly. It’s all on the website. She threatened to disinherit Kenny. Raul had grown accustomed to a certain lifestyle—“

“Wait, wait. Wait a second.” John put his hand on Sherlock’s chest to stop his forward progress down the street. “What about the disinfectant on the cat’s claws?”

“Raul keeps a very clean house. You came through the kitchen door, saw the state of that floor. Scrubbed within an inch of its life. *You* smell of disinfectant now. No, the cat doesn’t come into it. Raul’s Internet records do, though. I hope we can get a cab from here.”

THREE PIPS

ONE HOUR LEFT

The Serious Crime Command office was almost empty when Sherlock and John returned. Only Lestrade and a few other DI's with urgent, active cases were still in the office.

"Raul de Santos is your killer," announced Sherlock without preamble. "Kenny Prince's house boy. Second autopsy shows it wasn't tetanus that poisoned Connie Prince. It was *botulinum* toxin." He leaned in to Lestrade and spoke in a low, significant voice. "We've been here before. Carl Powers? Our bomber's repeating himself."

"How'd he do it?" asked Lestrade.

"Botox injection."

"Botox?"

"Botox is a diluted form of *botulinum*. Among other things, Raul de Santos was employed to give Connie her regular facial injections. My contact at the Home Office gave me the complete records of Raul's Internet purchases. He's been bulk-ordering Botox for months. Bided his time, then upped the strength to a fatal dose."

"Are you sure about this?"

"I'm sure."

"All right," said Lestrade, "My office."

"Hey, Sherlock," asked John, stepping in front of Sherlock on his way to Lestrade's office, "How long?"

"What?"

"How long have you known?" For hours, John knew. Since before he'd shown up in Hampstead as a "photographer."

"About this move? Quite simple, actually. Like I said, the bomber repeated himself. That was a mistake—"

"But—Sherlock, the hostage. The old woman. She's *been* there all this time!"

"I *knew* I could save her. I also knew that the bomber had given us twelve hours. I solved the case quickly. *That* gave me time to get on with other things. Don't you see? We're one up on him!" Sherlock went into Lestrade's office and used the DI's laptop to sign into his blog. He posted in the forum: "Raul de Santos, the house-boy. Botox." The pink phone rang almost immediately. Sherlock answered.

"Hello?"

"Help me," cried the old woman, her voice a wire of fear.

"Tell us where you are. Address."

“He was so...his voice...he...”

“No, no, no, tell me nothing about him. Nothing.” Lestrade, hearing the alarm in Sherlock’s voice, moved a step closer.

“He sounded so...soft...”

The connection abruptly dropped.

“Hello?” asked Sherlock.

“Sherlock?” asked Lestrade, leaning forward. Sherlock didn’t answer. His eyes had slipped into their faraway stare.

“What’s happened?” asked John.

TWO PIPS

Lestrade managed to convince the higher ups to tell the media that it was a gas explosion, on the grounds that the bomber was ultimately out for attention and admitting that he'd blown up part of a building would only panic people. The media had the story on the telly by the time John and Sherlock got back to 221B, which was where they saw the pictures for the first time of the smoking, gutted building.

"A whole block of flats..." said John, shaking his head. He had gotten so used to watching Sherlock pull success out of the clear blue sky that the possibility that the bomber might win one hadn't even entered his head. The death of the old woman—along with eleven other people—settled in his stomach like a stone. "He certainly gets about."

"Well, obviously I lost that round," said Sherlock, sounding casual but speaking more slowly than was usual. "Although technically I did solve the case." He muted the telly.

John stared at him.

"He killed the old lady because she started to describe him. Just once, he put himself in the firing line."

"What do you mean?"

"Usually he must stay above it all. He...organizes these things, but no one ever has direct contact."

"So...the Connie Prince murder, he arranged that? People come to him, wanting their crimes fixed up, like booking a holiday?" If that was true, John thought, then Moriarty—whoever he was—had arranged both the murder and the capture of the murderer.

"Novel," breathed Sherlock to himself. On the telly, Raul the houseboy was being pushed into a police cruiser, surrounded by cameras and yelling reporters. "He's taking his time this time," said Sherlock, turning the pink phone over in his hands.

"Anything on the Carl Powers case?" asked John, his eyes on the telly.

"Nothing. All the living classmates check out spotless. No connection."

"Maybe the killer was older than Carl?"

"The thought had occurred."

"So why's he doing this, then? Playing this game with you. Do you think he wants to be caught?"

"I think he wants to be distracted."

"Well, you'll be very happy together," muttered John, getting up to go to the kitchen.

Sherlock blinked. "Sorry, what?"

John wheeled on him. He'd let that poor lady *sit* there, strapped with Semtex, with no company but the bomber. Of *course* she'd started bloody talking to Sherlock the minute she could, and all Sherlock could say was that he'd technically won, as if the only two players in this were him and the bomber. "There are *lives* at stake, Sherlock. Actual, human li—just so I know, do you care about that at all?"

Sherlock looked at him. "Will caring about them help save them?"

John sucked in a breath. That was not the point, not at all, but he didn't know how to explain what the point *was*. "Nope."

"Then I will continue not to make that mistake."

"And you find that easy, do you?"

"Yes, very. Is that news to you?"

John laughed humourlessly. "No."

Sherlock gave him an evaluative stare. "I've disappointed you."

"That's a good deduction, yeah," said John, still smiling. He knew that Sherlock was right, that caring wasn't helpful, but on another level he was so terribly *wrong* that John felt it twisting in his stomach. Normal people compartmentalized their feelings. You do what needs doing until the crisis is over, and then you decompress. Blow off steam the way John and the staff at the medical base in Kandahar did after a day sewing Royal Marines back together when IEDs had blown them apart. But Sherlock wasn't compartmentalizing. He wasn't prioritizing action over reaction, he simply had no reaction at all. But what was John supposed to do? Demand that Sherlock be more bothered? He felt stupid for even letting this surprise him, after knowing Sherlock for all these months, and had no way to articulate the horribleness and the dread that were swarming over his heart. He wanted to know when this would end, the kidnappings and the deadlines, but he knew Sherlock didn't know that either. He felt his jaw close, stopping the words from getting out as surely as if he'd sewn his mouth shut.

If Sherlock had been the sighing sort, he might've sighed just then. "Don't make people into heroes, John. Heroes don't exist, and if they did, I wouldn't be one of them." Before John had a chance to respond, the pink phone chimed. "Excellent," breathed Sherlock, and opened the message. "A view of the Thames," he said to John. "South Bank, somewhere between Suffolk Bridge and Waterloo. You check the papers. I'll look online—" He stopped midsentence. John had not moved from where he was standing, but had dropped his head and was staring at his feet. "Oh, you're angry with me so you won't help. Not much cop, this caring lark." He started typing search terms into his phone. John stared at him for a long moment, then wordlessly walked over to Sherlock's week-long stack of papers and started leafing through them.

Sherlock called Lestrade. “It’s me. Have you found anything between Waterloo Bridge and Suffolk Bridge?”

Lestrade and a preliminary team were already at work when Sherlock and John arrived. A body lay in the mudflat that the river left behind when the tide was out. “D’you reckon this is connected, then? The bomber?”

“Must be. Odd, though. He hasn’t been in touch.”

“So we must assume that some poor bugger’s primed to explode, yeah?”

“Yes,” said Sherlock, circling the body.

“Any ideas?” asked Lestrade.

“Seven,” said Sherlock, his gaze sweeping over the mudflat. “So far.”

“Seven?”

Sherlock bent over the body, peering closely at the dead man’s eye, unbuttoning his shirt to look at his chest, even pulling off a sock and examining the bottom of his foot. As he stood up and pulled out his phone, John knelt down. “He’s been dead about twenty-four hours,” said John. “Maybe a bit longer. Did he drown?” he asked Lestrade.

“Apparently not. Not enough of the Thames in his lungs. He was asphyxiated.”

“Yes,” said John, “I’d agree. There’s quite a bit of bruising around the nose and mouth. More bruises here and here.” He pointed to the man’s neck, behind and below his ears.

“Fingertips,” said Sherlock.

“He’s late thirties, I’d say,” said John. “Not in the best condition.”

“He’s been in the river a long while,” said Sherlock. “The water’s destroyed most of the data. But I’ll tell you one thing. That lost Vermeer painting’s a fake.”

Lestrade looked at him blankly. “What?”

“We need to identify the corpse. Find out about his friends—“

“Wait wait wait wait wait,” interrupted Lestrade. “What painting? What’re you on about?”

Now Sherlock stared blankly. “It’s all over the place. Haven’t you seen the posters? Dutch Old Master. Supposed to be destroyed centuries ago. Now it’s turned up. Worth thirty million pounds.”

“Okay, so what does that got to do with the stiff?”

“Everything. Have you ever heard of the Golem?”

“Golem?” Lestrade shook his head.

“It’s a horror story, isn’t it?” put in John. “What’re you saying?”

“Jewish folk story. A gigantic man made of clay. It’s also the name of an assassin. Real name Oscar Dzungza. One of the deadliest assassins in the world. *That*—“ he pointed at the body in the mud “—is his trademark style.”

“So this is a hit?” asked Lestrade.

“Definitely. The Golem squeezes the life out of his victims with his bare hands.”

“But what does this got to do with that painting? I don’t see—“

“You *see*, you just don’t *observe*—“

“Alright, alright,” cut in John. “Girls, calm down. Sherlock, do you want to take us through it?”

“What do we know about this corpse?” asked Sherlock. “Killer’s not left us with much. Just the shirt and the trousers. They’re pretty formal, maybe he was going out for the night. But the trousers are heavy duty. Polyester. Nasty. Same as the shirt. Cheap. They’re both too big for him. So some kind of standard-issue uniform. Dressed for work, then. What kind of work? There’s a hook on his belt, for a walkie talkie.”

“Tube driver?” suggested Lestrade.

“Security guard?” said John.

“More likely,” said Sherlock, nodding at John. “That’d be borne out by his backside.”

“Backside?” asked Lestrade.

“Flabby. You’d think that he’d led a sedentary life. Yet the soles of his feet and the nascent varicose veins in his legs show otherwise. So, a lot of walking and a lot of sitting around. Security guard’s looking good. And the watch helps too. The alarm shows he did a regular night shift.”

“Why regular? Maybe he just set his alarm like that the night before he died.”

“No no no, the buttons are stiff. Hardly touched. He set his alarm like that a long time ago and his routine never varied. But there’s something else. The killer must have been interrupted. Otherwise he would have stripped the corpse completely. There was some kind of badge or insignia on the shirt front that he tore off, suggesting the dead man worked somewhere recognizable, some kind of institution. Found this” —he held up a wad of damp paper—“inside his trouser pocket. Sodden by the river but still recognizably—“

John examined it. “Tickets?”

“Ticket stubs. He worked in a museum or gallery. I did a quick check. The Hickman Gallery has reported one of its attendants is missing. Alex Woodbridge. Tonight, they unveil the rediscovered masterpiece. But why would anyone want to pay the Golem to suffocate a perfectly ordinary gallery attendant? Inference, the dead man knew something about it. Something that would stop the owner getting paid thirty million pounds. The picture’s a fake.” He paused long enough to pull in a breath.

John stared at him in begrudging admiration. “Fantastic.”

Sherlock shrugged. “Meretricious.”

“And a happy new year,” muttered Lestrade.

John looked down at Alex Woodbridge. “Poor sod.”

“I better get my feelers out for this Golem character,” said Lestrade.

“Pointless. You’ll never find him. But I know a man who can.”

“Who?”

“Me.” And he walked away, John on his heels.

Back in a cab on their way to the gallery, Sherlock sank back into himself, still turning the pink phone over in his hands. “Why hasn’t he phoned? He’s broken his pattern, why?” Up until now, the bomber had set Sherlock a case with a picture and the countdown of pips. The hostage then called with his deadline. The lack of hostage was nibbling at the corners of Sherlock’s mind. His face tensed as something occurred to him, and he leaned toward the cabbie. “Waterloo Bridge,” he said, changing their destination.

“What, not the gallery?” asked John.

“In a bit.”

“The Hickman’s contemporary art, isn’t it? Why have they got hold of an Old Master?”

“Dunno. Dangerous to jump to conclusions. I need data.” He pulled his notebook out of his pocket and wrote something on one of the pages, then tore the page off and rolled it up inside a £50 note so that it was invisible, then slipped the whole bundle back in his pocket. They drove on for several blocks, then Sherlock abruptly called for the driver to stop. “Can you wait here? I won’t be a moment.” He got out of the cab and hopped the rail between the road and the pavement, John following.

A shabby woman was sitting on a bench under Waterloo Bridge. “Change?” she asked them casually. “Any change?”

“What for?”

“Cuppa tea, of course.” She blinked at Sherlock.

“Here you go,” said Sherlock, holding out the £50 with the note inside. “Fifty.”

She took the note. “Thanks.” Without another word, Sherlock turned back towards the cab.

“What’re you doing?” asked John.

“Investing,” said Sherlock, hopping the rail and getting back in the cab. “Now we can go to the gallery...have you got any cash?” John rolled his eyes as he got back in the cab.

At the gallery, Sherlock stopped John from getting out. "I need to find out all you can about the gallery attendant. Lestrade will give you the address."

"Okay," said John, a little confused but willing. Sherlock went on into the gallery alone.

Alex Woodbridge, it turned out, rented the top level of a house from a woman who lived on the ground level. "We've been sharing about a year," said the landlady to John, bringing him up the stairs. "Just sharing." The flat wasn't tidy, but there was a clear space on the carpet around a something that was nearly as tall as John, and covered neatly with a sheet. "May I?" asked John, nodding at the sheet. The woman nodded.

It was a telescope, aimed out the skylight. Maybe why he had an attic flat in the first place, mused John. "Stargazer, was he?"

"God, yeah. Mad about it. All he ever did in his spare time." Her voice got wavery. "He was a nice guy, Alex. I liked him. He was, uh, never much of a one for hoovering." She tried to laugh to cover her tears.

"What about art?" asked John. "Did he know anything about that?"

She sighed. "It was just a job, y'know?"

John nodded. "Has anyone else been round asking about Alex?"

"No. We had a break in, though."

"When?"

"Last night. There was nothing taken. Oh, there was a message left for Alex on the landline."

"Who was it from?"

"I can play it for you, if you like. I'll get the phone."

"Please."

She left the room and was back in a moment with a cordless phone. She dialled the voicemail and accessed the saved message and put the phone on speaker. "...Oh, should I speak now? Alex, love, it's Professor Cairns. Listen, you were right, you were bloody right. Give us a call when—" the message abruptly cut off.

"Professor Cairns?" asked John.

She shrugged. "No idea, sorry."

"Can I try and ring back?"

"No good. I've had other calls since. Sympathy ones, you know." She shrugged helplessly.

John's cell phone buzzed with a text, and as he pulled his phone out, she left to put the cordless back in its cradle. It was from Mycroft.

Re: Bruce Partington Plans. Have you spoken to West's fiancée yet?
Mycroft Holmes.

The display walls of the Hickman Gallery were bare, stark white except for the Vermeer, which hung—small and alone, flanked on either side by velvet ropes—in the centre display wall. Sherlock was examining it when the gallery owner came up behind him, her high heels echoing loudly in the blank space. “Don’t you have something to do?” she challenged Sherlock.

“Just admiring the view,” said Sherlock, who was wearing a security guard’s cap and jacket.

“Yes. Oddly. Now get back to work, we open tonight.”

Sherlock spun round and looked at her. “Doesn’t it bother you?”

“What?”

“That the painting’s a fake?”

Her voice grew low. “What?”

“It’s a fake, it has to be. It’s the only possible explanation. You are in charge, aren’t you, Miss Wenceslas?”

“Who are you?”

“Alex Woodbridge knew that the painting was a fake, so somebody sent the Golem to take care of him. Was it you?”

“Golem? What the hell are you talking about?”

“Or are you working for someone else? Did you fake it for them?”

“It’s not a fake.”

“It is a fake. Dunno why, but there’s something wrong with it. There has to be.”

“What the hell are you on about? You know I could have you sacked on the spot.”

“Not a problem.”

“No?”

“No, I don’t work here, you see. Just popped in to give you a bit of friendly advice.”

“How did you get in?”

He bared his teeth in what was almost a smile. “Please.”

“I want to know.”

“The art of disguise is knowing how to hide in plain sight.” He took off his hat and hung it on one of the rope stanchions.

“Who are you?” she asked him.

“Sherlock Holmes.” He started for the door.

“Am I supposed to be impressed?”

“You should be. Have a nice day.” He pushed open the doors and was gone.

John stopped at West’s fiancée’s house before going back to Baker Street. She was the third grieving person he’d sat with in two days—but where Kenny Prince’s grief was posed and theatrical, Lucy Harrison’s was much quieter. She greeted John as another interview she had to get through, not as an audience.

“He wouldn’t,” she said, in response to his question about whether West had stolen the plans.

“He just wouldn’t.”

“No. But stranger things have happened,” said John quietly.

“Westie wasn’t a traitor,” she said fiercely. “That’s a horrible thing to say.”

“I’m sorry,” said John, “but you must understand, that’s—“

“That’s what they think, isn’t it? His bosses?”

“He was a young man, about to get married. He had debts—“

“Everyone’s got debts. And Westie wouldn’t want to clear them by selling out his country.”

“Can you, um...Can you tell me exactly what happened? That night?”

She wiped her eyes. “We were having a night in. Just watching a DVD. He normally falls asleep, you know, but he sat through this one. He was quiet. Then out of the blue he said he just had to go and see someone.”

“And you’ve no idea who?”

She shook her head, her face crumpling.

John tried to think of other questions to ask, but he didn’t think she knew anything, and it was obvious that his presence was causing her pain, so he apologized and stood to go. As they stepped out the front—Lucy followed him to the porch—a bloke on a bike in a stocking cap with a messenger bag around his torso and a chain lock around his hips was coming up the steps, carrying his bike. “Oh, hi, Luce,” he said. He looked at her face. “You okay, love?”

“Yeah.”

“Who’s this?” he asked, nodding at John.

“John Watson.” John spoke for himself. “Hi.” The man did not return the greeting.

“This is my brother, Joe,” said Lucy to John. She turned to Joe. “John’s trying to find out what happened to Westie, Joe.”

“You with the police?” asked Joe, looking John up and down.

“Sort of, yeah.”

“You tell em to get off their arses, would you? It’s bloody ridiculous.”

“I’ll do my best.”

Joe pushed his bike inside the house without another word.

“Well, uh, thanks very much for your help,” John said to Lucy. “And again, I’m very very sorry.”

“He didn’t steal those things, Mr Watson. I knew Westie, he was a good man.” Her shoulders sank. “He was *my* good man.” She went back in the house. John walked away, deep in thought.

TWO PIPS

? HOURS LEFT

It was dark by the time John's cab got back to Baker Street. As he got out of the cab, Sherlock came out of the flat.

"Alex Woodbridge didn't know anything special about art," said John.

"And?" Sherlock was looking up the block. John followed his gaze to the homeless woman outside Speedy's sparing for change. She looked like the same one from Waterloo Bridge this morning.

"And...?"

"What, is that it? No habits, hobbies, personality--?" He started up the block toward woman.

"Give us a chance! He was an amateur astronomer."

"Hold that cab," said Sherlock, pointing to the taxi John had just exited. He went and leaned on the railing next to the woman.

"Spare change, sir?" she asked him.

"Don't mind if I do," he said, and took the note she offered him. It was the same piece of paper he'd handed her earlier, only now it said "Vauxhall Arches" in chicken scratch underneath his own writing.

Sherlock climbed into the cab with John. "Fortunately, I haven't been idle. Come on."

The cab let them out in an alley near the Vauxhall Tube. Sherlock walked up an alley, parallel to a set of elevated railroad tracks. He cast his eyes upward, past the tracks, into the clear sky where stars poked through, in defiance of London's lights and pollution. "Beautiful, isn't it?" he remarked.

John looked up too. "I thought you didn't care about things like that."

"Doesn't mean I can't appreciate it."

Sherlock led them down a covered pedestrian tunnel that ran under the elevated train tracks. The pavement was wet and the tunnel—not quite an indoor area, not quite outdoor—smelled of garbage and urine.

"Listen," John said as they walked. "Alex Woodbridge had a message on the answerphone in his flat. A Professor Cairns—"

"This way."

"Nice," said John, looking down at the rats scabbling along the walls. "Nice part of town...Any time you want to explain?" He figured they had to be either after the man who had killed Alex Woodbridge—the Golem—or after proof that the painting was a fake. Given the locale, it seemed to be the former.

“Homeless network. Really is indispensable.”

“Homeless network?”

“My eyes and ears all over the city.”

“Oh. That’s clever. So you scratch their backs and…”

“Yes. And then disinfect myself.”

Further back in the tunnels, the arches became less like alleys and more like rooms, and John saw evidence of human habitation—bundles of belongings and shopping carts and sleeping bags and blue tarps in the corners. Sherlock and John pulled out their torches and caught men and women, squinting like blind moles in the glare of the light. In front of him, but around a corner, John could see the flickering yellow glow of a barrel fire. He could see the shadow of a huge man standing in front of the fire, his posture wary. Watching.

“Sherlock!” hissed John, turning off his torch and sliding to one side. In a moment they were both flat against the wall, behind the corner where the shadow couldn’t see them even if he looked straight down the tunnel.

“What’s he doing, sleeping rough?” whispered John, as Sherlock carefully tilted his head around the corner and looked at the shadow, which was now standing alert.

“Well, he has a pretty distinctive look. He has to hide somewhere where tongues won’t wag. Much.”

“Oh, sh—“ hissed John, his hands groping at his pockets.

“What?”

“I wish I’d—“ John stopped.

“Don’t mention it,” said Sherlock, pulling John’s service gun out of his trench coat and handing it to him. A flash of movement caught the corner of his eye, then, and he whipped back around in time to see, not just the shadow, but the real, shambling man, bolting up the tunnel, away from them. Sherlock cursed and ran after him, in time to see the Golem stuff himself into the passenger side of a car, which squealed away.

“No, no no, no!” cried Sherlock in frustration. “It could take us weeks to find him again!”

“Or not. I have an idea where he might be going.”

“What?”

“I told you. Someone left Alex Woodbridge a message. There can’t be that many Professor Cairnses in the book. Come on.”

It was peaceful, mostly, being in the Planetarium when no one else was around. The narration of the solar system tour, several years old now—and which Professor Cairns could recite in her sleep—had been updated in places, and she was running through the narration and the video together to make sure they were still synchronized. She could've done it at the video editing workstation in the office, sure. But she loved the big, empty room, the planets zooming towards her from out of the dark. It was the closest she ever came to flying.

“Jupiter—the fifth planet in our solar system, and the largest. Jupiter is a gas giant. Planet Earth could fit into it eleven times,” said the film’s narrator.

“Yes, we know,” Cairns told it, scrubbing the video forward so that the narration turned into a high-pitched, scrabbly whine.

“Titan is the largest moon,” the narrator informed her when she let go of the scrubber to see where she was. She fast forwarded further.

The heavy fire door clanged behind her. She turned, but in the dark theatre, could see nothing. “Tom?” she called. “Is that you?”

“Many are actually long-dead,” said the narrator. “Exploded into supernovas. Discovered by Urbain Le Verrier in 1846...” Well, that was wrong, she thought crossly. Le Verrier predicted the orbit of Neptune in 1846, he didn’t find a supernova. Somehow a chunk of audio about stars had been had been transposed into this tour of the solar system.

She did not hear anything behind her. Her first warning that the fire door had not been opened by Tom was the hand over her face, so huge it seemed to wrap around her entire head. She couldn’t breathe, but fought blindly, her hands drumming on the console, the film tripping into fast forward again. The hands remained implacably around her face and neck. She tried to scream. It came out a gurgle.

She heard a shout, a baritone rising over the squeal of the film. “*GOLEM!*”

It was the second-to-last thing she heard. The last thing was a small, sharp crack just below her skull as her head turned in a direction it was not meant to go.

Sherlock tried to not blink in the strobing, flickering light, but to scan in the momentary flashes. He did not know which way the Golem had gone after he dropped the woman. He did know that the Golem could move fast, for a big man. For any man. He heard John break away to patrol the edges of the theatre—and probably to check and see if anything could be done for the woman—but stayed where he was, in the centre of the stage. He’d already given away his position by yelling, and out in the open it was harder to sneak up on him.

Golem snuck up on him anyway.

“Who are you working for this time, Dzundza?” called Sherlock.

“Their light takes so long to read us that many are actually long dead, exploded into supernovae,” said the narrator.

A hand clamped over his face, another on the back of his neck. The Golem was huge, Sherlock realized, head and shoulders taller than he was. Sherlock managed to wedge one arm under Dzundza’s and force it outward, just a little, just enough so that Golem couldn’t get the leverage he needed to twist Sherlock’s neck around.

And then John was there, gun out, and Sherlock felt the grip on his neck change almost imperceptibly, from about to kill him to holding him as a human shield.

“Let him go,” said John in a soft voice that still managed to carry over the clanging orchestral soundtrack, “Or I will kill you.” But John had misjudged Golem’s height and the reach of his legs. Using Sherlock as a pivot point, the Golem swung his body around and kicked out at the same time, and John’s gun clattered out of his hands. In a fury, Golem grabbed John around the neck, letting go of Sherlock.

Sherlock leapt—not at the Golem, but at his forearms, bringing down all his weight on Golem’s wrists and breaking his grip on John. He and John tumbled to a heap on the floor, but Sherlock was up in a moment, taking a boxing stance in front of Golem. He aimed an uppercut for Golem’s solar plexus—what would’ve been a shot to the jaw in a shorter man—but Golem deflected Sherlock’s fist and brought down his own, overhand like a swinging hammer, on Sherlock’s shoulder. Sherlock buckled under the blow and then Golem was on him again, both hands over his face, blocking his air.

But then John was up, and he hurled himself on Golem’s back, his arm around the Golem’s neck, cutting off the assassin’s air as well. The Golem stood up, letting go of Sherlock and spinning furiously, but John clung piggyback. Then the Golem bent sharply at the waist, and John flipped over, landing flat on his back at the Golem’s feet.

Sherlock realized that he’d landed almost on top of John’s gun and picked it up and fired, but Golem was already running. Then he was out the door.

Sherlock dropped the gun, then pounded the floor with his fist in frustration.

TWO PIPS

? HOURS LEFT

Early the next morning, Sherlock and John were back at the gallery, with Lestrade and Miss Wenceslaus. All that was left was for Sherlock to try and see what Alex Woodbridge had seen, on his shifts patrolling the gallery.

Alex had had weeks to stare and patrol and think. Sherlock had no idea how much time he had. The bomber still hadn't contacted him.

Even Lestrade could recognize the signs of frustration beginning to bleed through the cracks of Sherlock's usual brusqueness. "It's a fake, it has to be," he said again, searching on his phone.

Miss Wenceslas, the gallery owner, was adamant. "That painting has been subjected to every test known to science."

"It's a very good fake, then," snapped Sherlock. He turned on Miss Wenceslas. "You know about this, don't you? This is you, isn't it?"

She sneered and put her hands on her hips. "Inspector, my time is being wasted. Would you mind showing yourself, and your friends, out?"

The pink phone rang. Sherlock answered it on speakerphone. "The painting is a fake."

Only the sound of someone breathing replied.

"It's a fake, that's why Woodbridge and Cairns were killed."

A long exhale came out of the phone, and nothing else.

"Oh come on, proving it's just an extra detail. The painting's a fake. I've solved it, I've figured it out. It's a fake, that's the answer, that's why they were killed."

Silence.

Sherlock gathered himself with visible effort. "Okay, I'll prove it, give me time. Will you give me time?"

The voice that came out of the phone was small and scared. "Ten."

"It's a *kid*," said Lestrade in angry horror. "Oh, god, it's a kid."

"What'd he say?" asked John.

Sherlock had already spun round and was examining the painting. "Ten."

"Nine," said the small voice.

"It's a countdown. He's giving me time."

"Jesus," cursed Lestrade.

"It's a fake," muttered Sherlock rapidly to himself. "How can I prove it how *how*—"

"Eight."

Sherlock wheeled on Miss Wenceslaus. “This kid will die. *Tell me* why the painting is fake. Tell me!”

“Seven.”

She flinched and looked like she was about to open her mouth, but Sherlock changed his mind and cut her off. “No, shut up. Don’t say anything. It only works if I figure it out.” He spun back around to the painting. “Must be possible must be staring me in the face.” His eyes flickered to the signature, the lines on the buildings, the reflection of the sky in the water. All the things that the authenticators had looked at, but they had missed something, they had to have missed something.

“Six.”

“Five.”

“Sherlock—“ said John, to say what, he didn’t even know.

“Four.”

Sherlock’s eyes passed over the painting’s sky, and his eyes suddenly widened. “The Planetarium! You heard it too! That’s brilliant, that is *gorgeous*.”

“What’s brilliant?”

“Three.”

Sherlock turned and walked away from the painting. “This is beautiful. I *love* this.”

All three were staring at him. “What’s brilliant?” demanded John.

“*Sherlock!*” roared Lestrade, thinking, *give him the bloody answer you absolute donkey’s arse*.

“Two,” said the little boy.

“The Van Buren Supernova,” said Sherlock.

A hush fell.

“Please, is somebody there?” came the plaintive cry through the phone. “Can somebody help me?”

“There you go,” said Sherlock, passing the phone to Lestrade. “Go find out where he is and pick him up.” He pointed to the constellation painted on the canvas. “The Van Buren Supernova. So called. Exploding star. Only appeared in the sky in 1858.”

“So,” said John, breathing—and thinking—again, “How could it have been painted in the 1640s?” Not bad for a man who’s never heard of a heliocentric solar system, he thought. As he followed Sherlock out the door, his phone beeped with a text.

My patience is wearing thin. Mycroft Holmes.

After the bomb squad found and freed the little boy, Lestrade, Sherlock, and Miss Wenceslaus reconvened in Lestrade's office. John was off placating Mycroft.

"It's interesting," mused Sherlock, sitting slightly behind Miss Wenceslaus. "Bohemian stationary. An assassin named after a Prague legend. And *you*, Miss Wenceslaus. This whole case has a distinctly Czech feeling about it. Is that where this leads?"

Miss Wenceslaus stared miserably at her lap.

"What are we looking at, Inspector?" asked Sherlock, not taking his eyes off Miss Wenceslaus.

Lestrade cleared his throat. "Well, um, criminal conspiracy, fraud, and accessory after the fact, at the very least. The murder of the old woman, all the people in the flat—"

"I didn't know anything about that!" burst out Miss Wenceslaus. "All those things. Please believe me." Behind her back, Sherlock gave Lestrade a slight nod. She was telling the truth—at least, insofar as she knew any of it. "I just wanted my share. The thirty million." She sighed. "I found a little old man in Argentina. Genius, I mean...really, brushwork immaculate. Could fool anyone."

Sherlock made a noise in the back of his throat.

"Well, nearly anyone," she amended. "But I didn't know how to go about convincing the world the picture was genuine. It was just an idea. A spark which he blew into a flame."

Sherlock pounced. "Who?"

She shook her head. "I don't know."

Lestrade scoffed.

"It's true! It took a long time, but eventually I was...put in touch with people. His people. But there was never any real contact. Just messages. Whispers."

Sherlock leaned forward in his chair, his elbows on his knees. "And did those whispers have a name?"

She looked pleadingly at Lestrade, her eyes wide and scared. Her mouth opened, but she made no sound for a long, long moment. And then, tripping over fear on its way out: "Moriarty."

Three crimes—the murder of Carl Powers, the murder of Connie Prince, the forging of the painting—all traced back to this Moriarty. Plus the murder of the old woman. Plus the murderous cabbie from months ago, who had set Sherlock searching for Moriarty to begin with. Plus, maybe, the Tong—they would've needed criminal contacts in London to be able to accomplish their goals. Sherlock thought it was logical and likely that they would've found Moriarty. He'd been grasping at the finest of threads, looking for a pattern. And now, here Moriarty was, dancing just out of sight, just beyond the mirrors. Only the case of Janus Cars and Ian Monkford didn't seem to involve Moriarty—except, of course, Moriarty had drawn Sherlock's attention to the case, so Sherlock knew he had to have been

involved. Maybe Ewart had had a business idea—just as Miss Wenceslas had had a forgery idea—and Moriarty had helped him get it off the ground. But why? Why was Moriarty coming out now?

Sherlock sat back, lost in thought.

?

John went to the Battersea train yards and found one of the yard workers who was on duty the night that Westie had died. The sky was deep and clear, but it was chilly enough that John had his jacket zipped to his chin. The surly yard worker had given him a spare orange reflective vest to wear on the tracks. He himself was in a full hi-vis suit. “So this is where West was found?” asked John, as the man stopped at a bend in the tracks.

“Yeah. You gonna be long?”

“I might be.”

“You’re the police, then?”

“Sort of.”

“I hate ‘em.”

“The police?”

“No. Jumpers. People who chuck emselves in front of the trains. Selfish bastards.”

“Well, that’s one way of looking at it.”

“I mean it. It’s all right for them. It’s over in a split second. Strawberry jam all over the lines. What about the drivers, eh? Got to live with it, haven’t they?”

“Speaking of strawberry jam, there’s no blood on the line. Has it been cleaned off?”

“Nah, there weren’t that much.”

“You said his head was smashed in.”

“It was. But there weren’t much blood.”

John looked thoughtfully down at the track. “Okay.” Westie hadn’t died when he fell off the train, he realized. And if he’d died in a train carriage, the staff would’ve found a puddle of blood, or evidence of violence. Which meant...

“Well,” said the yard worker, “I’ll leave you to it, then. Just give a shout when you’re off.” He trudged back the way he’d come.

“Right, so,” said John to himself. “Andrew West got on the train, somewhere. Or did he? No ticket on the body. How did he end up here?”

As if in answer, the railroad switch points on the bend clicked and slid over, knocking into place against the next rail over. The oncoming train would be diverted onto a spur. Intrigued, John crouched on his heels, watching the train come round the bend.

“The points,” said a voice behind him, and John stood and turned to see Sherlock, his hands clasped behind his back. “I knew you’d get there eventually. West wasn’t killed here, that’s why there was so little blood.”

“How long have you been following me?” asked John.

“Since the start. You don’t think I’d give up on a case like this just to spite my brother, do you?” He didn’t wait for John to answer. “Come on,” he said, turning and walking away, “We’ve got a bit of burglary to do.” Wordlessly, John followed him.

Wherever they were going was in walking distance. Sherlock filled John in on the way. “Missile defence plans haven’t left the country, otherwise Mycroft’s people would have heard about it. Despite what people think, we do still have a secret service.”

“Yeah, I know,” said John. “I’ve met them.”

“Which means whoever stole the memory stick can’t sell it or doesn’t know what to do with it. My money’s on the latter. We’re here.” He turned right and went up a set of outside steps to an upstairs flat.

John followed him. “Sherlock! What if there’s someone in?”

“There isn’t,” said Sherlock, bending down and deftly picking the door lock.

“Where are we?” asked John, as Sherlock strode into the entry hall.

“Sorry, didn’t I say? Joe Harrison’s flat.”

“Joe—“

“Brother of West’s fiancée. He stole the memory stick.” Sherlock pushed back the curtains of the living room window and looked down at the train running just below. “Killed his prospective brother-in-law.” He turned away from the passing train and examined the windowsill with his pocket magnifier.

“Then why’d he do it?”

“Let’s ask him,” asked Sherlock, standing at the noise of the deadbolt—which John had re-locked—being slid back. John went back out into the hallway. When he saw John, Joe picked up his bike to hurl at the intruder, but John already had his gun drawn. “Don’t,” warned John. “Just don’t.” Joe looked almost relieved as he dropped his bike and came meekly into the living room and sat on the couch. All the same, John stayed between him and the door.

“It wasn’t meant to happen,” said Joe. As Sherlock rolled his eyes, he added, “What else can I say.”

“Why did you kill him?” asked John.

“It was an accident. I swear it was.”

“But stealing the plans for the missile defence program wasn’t an accident, was it?” said Sherlock.

“I started dealing drugs. I mean, the bike thing’s a great cover, right? I dunno, I dunno how it started. I just got out of my depth. I owe people thousands. Serious people. Then at Westie’s engagement do, he starts talking about his job. I mean, usually, he’s so careful. But that night, after a few pints, he

really opened up. Told me about these missile plans. Beyond top secret. He showed me the memory stick, he waved it in front of me. You hear about these things getting lost, ending up on rubbish tips and whatnot. But there it was, and I thought it could be worth a fortune. It was pretty easy to get the thing off him, he was so plastered. Next time I saw him, I could tell by the look on his face that he knew.”

“What happened?” repeated John.

He’d thrown Westie down the concrete stairs leading up to his flat. Watched him tumble. Watched his neck fold backward under the weight of his shoulders, and the blood splatter on the curb.

“I was going to call an ambulance, but it was too late. I just didn’t have a clue what to do. So I dragged him in here. And I just sat in the dark, thinking.”

“When a neat little idea popped into your head,” said Sherlock.

A train had come, and—as trains often did late at night—paused below Joe’s windows, next to his building, waiting for the line to clear. Joe hauled Westie’s body onto the porch roof outside his window, and from there, it was an drop step down onto the train roof. The train clunked forward, Joe jumped back through the window, and the train left, “carrying Andrew West way away from here,” said Sherlock. “His body would’ve gone on for ages if the train hadn’t met a stretch of track that curved—“

“And points,” added John.

“Exactly.”

“Do you still have it, then?” asked John. “The memory stick?”

Joe nodded.

“Fetch it for me,” said Sherlock. “If you wouldn’t mind.”

Joe did not look like telling the truth had relieved his conscience at all. On the contrary, his face had gone pale, and he seemed to have shrunk. Wordlessly, he got up and shuffled into his bedroom. Sherlock crossed the room to stand next to John.

“Distraction over the game continues,” he whispered.

“Well, maybe that’s over, too. We’ve heard nothing from the bomber.”

“Five pips, remember, John? It’s a countdown. We’ve only had four.” He did not understand, yet, why the bomber was going gradually silent. Maybe even this game was beginning to bore him. Maybe he felt he had lost—if the game had been to distract Sherlock from the Bruce-Partington Plans, it hadn’t worked. Hours had passed since he solved the puzzle of the painting, and no new picture message had arrived. No new puzzle. Combined with the bomber’s failure to set Sherlock a specific deadline to solve the Grand Master painting puzzle, it felt like the bomber’s presence was dissipating, like so many whispers.

ONE PIP

That night in the flat, Sherlock could not relax. He paced tensely, holding the pink phone in his hands, sometimes stopping to look at the case diagram he had taped to the wall. Finally, in an effort to stop himself going mad, John convinced Sherlock that nothing he did would make the bomber contact him any faster, and got him to turn on the telly. Sherlock crouched in his chair, knees pulled to his chest, still wearing his overcoat and shoes, pink phone on the chair arm beside him. John discovered that Sherlock watching telly was almost as annoying as Sherlock pacing.

“No, no, no! Of course he’s not the boy’s father! Look at the turnups on his jeans!” Sherlock was almost shouting in frustration.

“I knew it was dangerous,” said John from the table, where he was hunt-and-peck typing on his laptop.

“Hmm?”

“Getting you into crap telly.”

“Not a patch on Connie Prince.”

“You give Mycroft the memory stick yet?”

“Yep. He was over the moon. Threatened me with a knighthood. Again.”

“You know, I’m still waiting.”

“Hmm?”

“For you to admit that a little knowledge of the solar system, and you’d’ve cleared up the fake painting a lot quicker.”

“It didn’t do you any good, did it?”

“No. But I’m not the world’s only consulting detective.”

“True.”

John shut his laptop and stood up. “I won’t be in for tea. I’m going to Sarah’s. There’s still some of that risotto left in the fridge.”

“Mmm.”

“Milk. We need milk.”

“I’ll get some.”

John paused in momentary disbelief. Sherlock had not done the shopping once since John had moved in. John was not sure how Sherlock had eaten when he lived on his own, and sometimes thought that maybe he simply hadn’t. “Really?”

“Really.”

“And...some beans, then?”

Sherlock grunted in a manner which John took to be general assent. John hesitated in the door for a moment, then left.

When he heard the front door shut, Sherlock pulled his laptop out from the side of the chair where he'd shoved it. He opened it and waited for the *Science of Deduction* to load. Then he wrote a post on his forum.

Found. The Bruce Partington Plans. Please collect. The pool. Midnight.

One last pip, Sherlock thought. One more puzzle to figure out. Unless he'd solved it already. He hit Post.

The ceiling of the old municipal pool was lost in darkness. The ground level was bathed in an eerie glow from the blue lights that were set beneath the water in the walls of the pool. Sherlock entered slowly, hands behind his back. He'd left his trench coat back at Baker Street—it was too warm in the humidity of the building, and would pull him under if he somehow got thrown into the pool. He looked around, breathing in the smell of chlorine, looking for evidence that Moriarty had gotten here first. Every noise he made rattled off the tile and metal walls. Somebody was here, he was sure.

“I brought you a little getting-to-know-you present,” he said, holding up the Bruce-Partington memory stick. “That’s what it’s all been for, isn’t it? All your little puzzles, making me dance. All to distract me from this.” There was momentary silence. Then Sherlock heard the locker room door open behind him, and he turned.

John was standing there, clad in an enormous parka with a fur-lined hood that Sherlock knew he didn’t own.

Sherlock stared at him.

“Evening,” said John. “This is a turn-up. Isn’t it Sherlock.” His voice was curiously flat.

Sherlock was as close to flabbergasted as he had ever been. This could not, could not, could *not* be true. “John? What the hell—“

“Bet you never saw this coming.”

Sherlock took a few steps forward, his brain spinning.

John pulled his hands out of his pockets and opened the parka. Bricks of plastic explosives were wired together and strapped to his chest. “What,” said John, his voice still blank and flat, “would you like me to make him say next? Gottle o’ geer? Gottle o’ geer. Gottle o—“

“Stop it,” said Sherlock, turning in a slow circle. The puppet master had to be nearby. Had to be about to show himself.

“Nice touch, this. The pool. Where little Carl died. I stopped him. I could stop John Watson too. Stop his heart.” A little red light danced on John’s chest.

“Who are you,” asked Sherlock, not to John, but the pool at large. Looking for the puppet master. He heard another door open, and turned around, but nobody appeared.

“I gave you my number,” called a voice, sounding disappointed. “I thought you might call.” From behind a row of hanging flotation devices stepped Jim. Molly’s Jim. Jim from IT. Except he was now wearing an immaculate bespoke suit, and his body language was different. Casual. Relaxed. “Is that a British Army Browning L9A1 in your pocket, or are you just pleased to see me?” He sounded lazy.

“Both,” said Sherlock, raising the gun and pointing it at Moriarty. Of course. He should’ve known about Jim. Should’ve seen. All of his months of sniffing for Moriarty, ever since the case with the cabbie, and he’d been right there the whole time. Of course.

Moriarty didn’t flinch. Didn’t react to the gun at all. He stood easily with his hands in his pockets. “Jim Moriarty,” he said, introducing himself. “Hi.” This last came out in a little sing-songy chirrup. Then he continued, taking what he thought should be Sherlock’s part of the conversation. “Jim? Jim from the hospital? Did I really make such a fleeting impression?” He walked towards Sherlock and John, and Sherlock adjusted his grip on the gun. Adjusted his aim. “But then I suppose that was rather the point. Don’t be silly,” he admonished Sherlock. “Someone else is holding the rifle. I don’t like getting my hands dirty.” His voice had an Irish roll to it, but one softened by long years away. “I’ve given you a glimpse, Sherlock. Just a teensy glimpse of what I’ve got going on out there in the big bad world. I’m a specialist, you see. Like you.”

“Dear Jim,” quoted Sherlock. “Please will you fix it for me. To get rid of my lover’s nasty sister. Dear Jim, please will you fix it for me to disappear to South America.”

“Just so.” Moriarty smiled. He never seemed to blink, or when he did, it was slow and languid, like a lizard left in the sun.

“A consulting criminal. Brilliant.”

“Isn’t it? No one ever gets to me. And no one ever will.”

“I did,” said Sherlock, pulling back the hammer on the gun.

“You’ve come the closest,” conceded Moriarty. “Now you’re in my way.” He spoke to Sherlock as if Sherlock was a rebellious six-year-old who needed everything explained.

“Thank you.”

“Didn’t mean it as a compliment.”

“Yes you did.”

“Yeah, okay, I did. But the flirting’s over, Sherlock. Daddy’s had enough now.” His voice rose into a high, childish sing-song that contained no warmth. No amusement. Sherlock knew then that Moriarty had noticed him months ago, had tried to divert him or ignore him, until he got too close—and then the dance had begun. “I’ve shown you what I can do. I cut loose all those people. All those little problems. Even thirty million quid just to get you to come out and play. So take this as a friendly warning, my dear: Back off. Although,” he conceded, smiling for just a moment, “I have loved this. This little game of ours. Playing Jim from IT. Playing gay. Did you like the little touch with the underwear?”

“People have died.”

Moriarty’s fury was immediate and complete. “That’s what people *DO!*” he roared, his face contorted.

Sherlock didn’t flinch. “I will stop you,” he said, in the same calm voice.

“No you won’t.”

Sherlock spared a look at John. “You all right?” he asked. John just looked at Sherlock.

Moriarty crept up behind John. “You can talk, Johnny boy. Go ahead.” John said nothing, but gave Sherlock half a nod. Sherlock knew that the calm in John’s eyes was forty percent war veteran and half pure Watson stubborn, and that it wouldn’t give way as long as anyone was watching him.

Sherlock held out the memory stick. “Take it.”

“What? Oh. The missile plans.” Moriarty strolled forward, past John, and took the USB stick from Sherlock. He held the stick to his lips for a moment, and for a breath, looked down at the memory drive in his hands. Then he looked at Sherlock, a sarcastic smile on his face. “Boring!” he sang in his little sing song. “I could’ve got them anywhere.” And he threw the USB stick into the pool.

John suddenly leapt forward and grabbed Moriarty, wrapping his arm around Moriarty’s neck. “Sherlock, run!” he cried, holding Moriarty close.

Moriarty didn’t struggle. He laughed. “Oh, ho ho! Good! Very good!”

“Just like them. Pull the trigger, Mr Moriarty,” growled John, “and we both go up.”

Sherlock did not run. He backed up several steps, but that was all, and kept his gun trained on Moriarty.

“He’s sweet,” said Moriarty to Sherlock. “I can see why you like having him around. People do get so sentimental about their pets. So touchingly loyal. Oops! You’ve rather shown your hand there, Dr Watson.”

A red light danced on Sherlock’s forehead, and John’s grip slackened. Watching John’s face, Sherlock understood.

John let go and backed up, looking angry for just a moment. Moriarty straightened his suit and brushed it off. “Westwood,” he told Sherlock, gesturing at it. “Do you know what happens if you don’t leave me alone, Sherlock? To you?”

“Oh, let me guess. I get killed.”

“Kill you? No, don’t be obvious. I mean, I’m going to kill you anyway, someday. I don’t want to rush it though. I’m saving it up for something special. No no no no. If you don’t stop prying, I’ll burn you.” His voice sank into regret, as if ruining Sherlock would cause him genuine pain. “I’ll burn the heart out of you.”

“I have been reliably informed that I don’t have one,” Sherlock told him.

“But we both know that’s not quite true.” Moriarty smiled at him predatorily. Then he shrugged. “Well,” he said abruptly. “I better be off. It’s so nice to have had a proper chat.”

“What if I was to shoot you now?” asked Sherlock. “Right now?”

“Then you could cherish the look of surprise on my face.” Moriarty momentarily pulled his lips back from his teeth in the ghoulish smile of a dead person. “Because I’d be surprised, Sherlock. Really I would. And just a teensy bit...disappointed. And of course, you wouldn’t be able to cherish it for very long. Ciao, Sherlock Holmes.” And he left, slowly, by the nearest exit.

“Catch...you...later,” said Sherlock.

“No you won’t!” came the little singsong. Then the door clicked shut.

Both John and Sherlock stood silent and still for a moment. Then Sherlock put the gun down and knelt in front of John, checking the vest for tripwires. “All right?” he demanded. “Are you all right?”

“Yeah,” stammered John, “I’m fine. I’m fine, Sherlock—“ Sherlock pulled the parka and the bomb vest off John in one motion and half-threw, half-slid it down the length of the pool deck to get it away from them.

John’s legs buckled and he slid to the floor as Sherlock picked up the gun and ducked out the way Moriarty had gone. Within seconds he was back, though, pacing and scratching his head with the muzzle on his pistol, which alarmed John almost as much as being strapped into the vest. “Are you okay?” asked John.

“Me? Yeah, fine. Fine. That, uh, that thing that you did, that uh, you offered to do. That was...good.” He sounded off-kilter and breathless.

“Well. Glad no one saw that,” said John.

“Hmm?”

“You. Ripping my clothes off in a darkened swimming pool. People might talk.”

“People do little else,” said Sherlock automatically, and then he smiled, just for a moment, but John could tell he was settling himself. John was about to stand up when he saw the little dancing red lights again. At almost the same moment, a metal door creaked open. “Sorry, boys!” exclaimed Moriarty joyously. “I’m sooooo changeable! It is a weakness with me. But to be fair to myself, it is my only weakness. You can’t be allowed to continue.”

Sherlock looked down at John.

John looked up at Sherlock.

Then John gave Sherlock a nearly imperceptible nod.

“You just can’t,” said Moriarty. “I would try to convince you. But everything I have to say has already crossed your mind.”

“Then probably my answer has crossed yours,” said Sherlock, turning round and raising the gun again. Instead of aiming at Moriarty, though, he lowered his aim until the gun was trained on the bomb vest he’d taken off John, which was lying on the concrete in between him and Moriarty.

John stared at the vest. Moriarty and Sherlock stared at each other. Sherlock trying to evaluate Moriarty’s next move.

Moriarty smiled.

CANONICAL REFERENCES

“The Great Game” is not named after a Sherlock Holmes canon story. It is, however, a reference to Holmes’ referencing his career as “the game.” (“The game is afoot,” “I play the game for the game’s own sake,” and, in “The Adventure of the Mazarin Stone,” complimenting Watson by telling him that he has “never failed to play the game.”)

LONDON, ENGLAND

“What the hell are you doing?” After the introductory scene in Belarus, the first scene in Baker Street is a chance for us to see just how badly Sherlock copes with boredom and lack of work. This (along with his cyclical extremes between moodiness and productivity) is an aspect of Holmes’ personality that Doyle introduced very early, in *A Study in Scarlet*. In Watson’s early assessment of his new flatmate, he says, “Nothing could exceed his [Holmes’] energy when the working fit was upon him; but now and again a reaction would seize him, and for days on end he would lie upon the sofa in the sitting-room, hardly uttering a word or moving a muscle from morning to night.” In *The Sign of Four*, Holmes says in frustration, “My mind rebels at stagnation...give me work.”

“I don’t know what’s got into the criminal classes. Good job I’m not one of them.” Also in *The Sign of Four*, in a fit of exasperated boredom, Holmes says, “Crime is commonplace, existence is commonplace, and no qualities save those which are commonplace have any function upon earth.” (Holmes, of course, being decidedly un-commonplace, is now exempting himself from earthly function.) Holmes also says something very similar in “The Adventure of the Bruce-Partington Plans:” “This great and sombre stage is set for something more worthy than that. It is fortunate for this community that I am not a criminal.”

“The wall had it coming.” In the introductory scene of “The Musgrave Ritual,” Watson complains that, among other things, “I have always held...that pistol practice should be distinctly an open-air pastime; and when Holmes, in one of his queer humours, would sit in an armchair with his hair-trigger and a hundred Boxer cartridges and proceed to adorn the opposite wall with a patriotic V.R. done in bullet-pocks, I felt strongly that neither the atmosphere nor the appearance of our room was improved by it.” Sherlock paints (and then shoots) a smiley face, not a V.R. (V.R. stands for “Victoria Regina,” that is, “Queen Victoria”), but John’s indignation (as well as Mrs Hudson’s) are true to Canon.

“I’m measuring the coagulation of saliva after death.” Holmes conducts many scientific experiments in 221B Baker Street, though none of the mentioned Canonical experiments involve body parts (by contrast, Sherlock’s experiments have variously involved eyeballs, thumbs, and the severed head).

“I see you’ve written up the taxi driver case.” Holmes’ disdain for Watson’s literary efforts is well-documented. In *The Sign of Four*, he tells Watson, “Detection is, or ought to be, an exact science and should be treated in the same cold and unemotional manner. You have attempted to tinge it with romanticism, which produces much the same effect as if you worked a love-story or an elopement into the fifth proposition of Euclid.” Much later in his career though, Holmes, when writing up one of his own cases in “The Adventure of the Blanched Soldier,” grudgingly admits that “the matter must be presented in such a way as may interest the reader.”

“But it’s the solar system!” Canon Holmes also famously did not know about the heliocentric Solar System. “What the deuce is it to me?” he asked Watson in *A Study in Scarlet*. “You say that we go round the sun. If we went round the moon it would not make a pennyworth of difference to me and my work.” Instead of comparing his brain to a hard drive, of course, Holmes uses the metaphor of a “brain attic,” and contends that only a fool “takes in all the lumber of every sort that he comes across.” In “The Five Orange Pips,” he says, “A man should keep his little brain-attic stocked with all the furniture that he is likely to use, and the rest he can put away in the lumber-room of his library, where he can get it if he wants it.” If you’re wondering why I had John reflect for a moment that Sherlock has an incorrect conception of how human memory works, it’s because he does—there’s an American radio show/podcast called Radiolab, which did an episode called “Memory and Forgetting” (it’s from around 2010 but is still available on the Internet) in which they explicitly address this conception of memory as a storage system (a metaphor that’s been around probably for as long as chests of drawers) vs. how memory actually functions in the brain, and how subjective it is.

“All that matters to me is the work. Without that my brain rots.” Or, as Holmes says in “The Man With the Twisted Lip,” “My mind is like a racing engine, tearing itself to pieces because it is not connected up with the work for which it was built.”

“Quiet, calm, peaceful. Isn’t it hateful?” Holmes’ ability to infer the worst into a peaceful tableau is from “The Adventure of the Copper Beeches” when Watson and Holmes go out to the country to help a client who may be in danger. “You look at these scattered houses,” says Holmes to Watson, “and you are impressed

by their beauty. I look at them, and the only thought which comes to me is a feeling of isolation and of the impunity with which crime may be committed there.” Sometimes, Holmes’ pessimism is out of boredom; sometimes it’s out of ample prior experience that tells him not to trust appearances, no matter how banal they might be.

The empty house. The house that explodes across the street from 221B is empty, as in “The Adventure of the Empty House,” which also features discussion of Moriarty (and the hunting of Moriarty’s minions).

“Never mind your usual trivia, this is of national importance.” Mycroft enlists Holmes to help in cases of national importance in “The Adventure of the Bruce-Partington Plans,” (telling Holmes, “Never mind your petty puzzles of the police-court. It’s a vital international problem that you have to solve,”) and Holmes himself mentions helping the British, French, and Bohemian governments as well as the Pope on several occasions. However, helping the rich and the royals is never high on Holmes’ priorities, nor is the identity (or status) of a client important to him when he considers taking a case, and he is indifferent to arguments of “national importance.” In “The Adventure of the Noble Bachelor,” Holmes says, “The status of my client is less to me than the interest of his case.” And in “The Adventure of Black Peter,” Watson describes Holmes as “so unworldly...that he had frequently refused his help to the powerful and wealthy where the problem made no appeal to his sympathies, while he would devote weeks of most intense application to the affairs of some humble client whose case presented those strange and dramatic qualities which appealed to his imagination and challenged his ingenuity.” The contempt that Gatiss’ Mycroft seems to hold for Sherlock’s work isn’t really present in the Canon (Holmes and Mycroft are relatively amiable with each other, or at least, that’s how I’ve always read it), but Holmes does say that “What is to me a means of livelihood is to him the merest hobby of a dilettante.”

“Besides, a case like this requires...legwork.” Mycroft’s distaste for “legwork,” (indeed, for anything that involves him to deviate from his usual routine) is mentioned in “The Adventure of the Greek Interpreter.” Holmes describes his brother as having “no ambition and no energy. He will not even go out of his way to verify his own solutions.” Mycroft “lodges in Pall Mall, and he walks round the corner into Whitehall every morning and back every evening. From year’s end to year’s end he takes no other exercise, and is seen nowhere else, except only in the Diogenes Club, which is just opposite his rooms.”

“Andrew West, known as Westie to his friends. Civil servant, found dead on the tracks at Battersea Station this morning with his head smashed in.” The victim in “The Adventure of the Bruce-Partington Plans” is named Arthur

Cadogan West, and the fiancée is Violet Westbury. In the original “Bruce-Partington Plans,” on which this part of the episode is based, West is found, next to the train tracks just outside Aldgate Station, with his head bashed in and a portion of the Bruce-Partington Plans (a highly technical submarine which the Royal Navy is attempting to build, “the most jealously guarded of all government secrets”) in his pockets. The remainder of the plans are missing. The way West’s death comes about is basically the same in both stories; though the actions of the murderer bear more resemblance to the perpetrator in “The Naval Treaty.” (I’m not sure why, if there’s a reason, the writers moved West’s death from Aldgate to Battersea; the two are about six miles apart.)

“I’d be lost without my blogger.” This is a reference to Holmes’ line, “I am lost without my Boswell” in “A Scandal in Bohemia” (which also opens with Holmes impugning Watson’s literary efforts). Boswell is in reference to James Boswell, an 18th-century lawyer and author who wrote a biography of Samuel Johnson (a British author who was a contemporary of Boswell’s) which was, at the time, revolutionary for its use of conversational notes and diary entries to present a whole picture of the man, and not merely a tribute. Mystery writer and Holmes enthusiast Loren Estleman wrote an essay called “On the Significance of Boswells” that is often used as an introduction to Holmes treasuries. This is one of relatively few times when Holmes can be said to be openly complimentary to Watson; usually Watson has to infer that Holmes is happy to have him around simply because he does not ever directly tell Watson to go away. As Watson says in “The Adventure of the Creeping Man,” Holmes “was a man of habits, narrow and concentrated habits, and I had become one of them.”

FIVE PIPS

“You like the funny cases, don’t you? The surprising ones?” In “The Adventure of the Six Napoleons,” Lestrade tells Holmes, “Although [the case] is trivial, it is undoubtedly queer, and I know that you have a taste for all that is out of the common.”

“Nice stationary. Bohemian.” Examining stationary and envelopes for clues is, of course, one of the basic skills a detective must master. The remark that the stationary is Bohemian is a reference to “A Scandal in Bohemia,” in which Holmes’ introduction to his client is through an anonymous note written on expensive Bohemian paper. He also examines the paper of an anonymously written note in *The Sign of Four*.

“An estate agent’s photo and the bloody Greenwich pips?” The five pips (in this story an electronic tone) are, in the Canon (“The Five Orange Pips”), warning signs from the Ku Klux Klan of imminent threat to one of Holmes’ clients. An entry in the *American Encyclopaedia*, which Holmes reads, says that “[The KKK’s] outrages were usually preceded by a warning sent to the marked man in some fantastic but generally recognized shape—a sprig of oak leaves in some parts, melon seeds or orange pips in others.”

Incidentally, I can’t find any evidence that the Klan actually used seeds or oak leaves to send messages to people; generally I think their communication methods were much more direct and brutal (i.e., riding up to your farmhouse in the middle of the night, pulling you out of bed, whipping you, dragging you behind a horse, burning a cross, killing you, etc). The environment in the South after the Civil War was such that the Klan didn’t have to resort to secretive tactics, because even when it was well-known who was in the Klan and what they were up to, nobody was ever arrested or convicted. When you know you’re not in danger of any consequences you don’t have to resort to ambiguous messages, you just show up with a rope and a rifle and go nuts. But it’s also possible that Arthur Conan Doyle was quoting an actual entry from an encyclopaedia; I’m not a historian on the South and it’s hard to prove a negative.

Lestrade’s reference to the “Greenwich pips” is a reference to a series of tones that most BBC radio stations broadcast to mark the start of every hour and have, with a couple of exceptions, done since 1924. They were originally synchronized to Greenwich Mean Time, and these days are synced with International Atomic Time. It must be a ubiquitous noise if you listen to BBC Radio regularly (the American radio stations I listen to don’t do anything like this).

“The curtain rises.” This is somewhat reminiscent of Holmes’ references to “the game.” It’s also a possible callback to references to Holmes’ talent as an actor; Watson comments in “A Scandal in Bohemia” that “The stage lost a fine actor...when [Holmes] became a specialist in crime.”

FIVE PIPS

TWELVE HOURS LEFT

“Why is my brother so determined to bore me when somebody else is being so delightfully interesting?” As Holmes says in “The Final Problem,” “My horror at Moriarty’s crimes was lost in my admiration of his skill.”

“And domestic bliss must suit you, Molly, you’ve put on three pounds since I last saw you.” This is from “A Scandal in Bohemia,” which takes place after the events of *The Sign of Four*, in which Watson finds himself a wife. Holmes comes to visit Watson in his new home and remarks that “Wedlock suits you...I think, Watson, that you have put on seven and a half pounds since I saw you.”

“Well, John. Really well. I mean, you missed almost everything of importance.” There’s at least three instances of Watson attempting to examine artefacts from cases: In *The Hound of the Baskervilles* he examines Dr. Stapleton’s walking stick (though “most of [his] conclusions are erroneous”); in “A Case of Identity” he tries to give Holmes insight into their client; and in “The Adventure of the Blue Carbuncle,” he declines to evaluate a hat left behind by a client. Watson never makes deductions to Holmes’ satisfaction.

“Someone’s kept them that way. Quite a bit of mud caked on the soles. Analysis shows it’s from Sussex with London mud overlaying it.” Holmes has a knack for pinpointing the origin of his clients by observing the mud on their clothing; in “The Five Orange Pips” he observes that his client has “come up from the south-west...That clay and chalk mixture which I see upon your toe caps is quite distinctive.” The client confirms that he’s from Horsham. In *The Sign of Four*, Holmes can tell that Watson has been to a particular post office based on the mud on Watson’s shoes. Also, any time a Sherlock Holmes story mentions Sussex, I assume it’s a reference to the Sussex Downs where Holmes retired to quietly conduct scientific experiments and write monographs on bee keeping.

“It’s where I began.” Where and when Sherlock Holmes really *really* began isn’t established in the Canon, however, he tells Watson in “The *Gloria Scott*” that the first case that he handled was brought to him by a school friend, Victor Trevor.

FIVE PIPS

SIX HOURS LEFT

“Sherlock, somewhat incredibly, still had all his articles on Carl Powers from all those years ago; even more incredibly, he knew where he kept them.” Holmes kept his own files on all of his cases; he pulled them out once for Watson to look at in “The Musgrave Ritual.” Watson tells us that he had “a horror of throwing away documents.”

“I’m not ignoring it. I’m putting my best man onto it right now.” There’s a couple of instances, like in *The Hound of the Baskervilles* and “The Disappearance of Lady Frances Carfax,” when Holmes sends Watson out as his delegate. Watson, of course, never makes deductions to Holmes’ satisfaction.

“No known terrorist affiliations or sympathies.” As Mycroft Holmes describes Arthur Cadogan West in “The Adventure of the Bruce-Partington Plans,” “He has the reputation of being hot-headed and imperious, but a straight, honest man. We have nothing against him.”

“He had an Oyster card, but it hadn’t been used.” Oyster cards are multiple-ride passes used on the London Underground. Arthur Cadogan West, in “The Adventure of the Bruce-Partington Plans,” had no ticket (punched or otherwise) in his pocket.

FIVE PIPS

THREE HOURS LEFT

FOUND. Pair of trainers belonging to Carl Powers (1976-1989). Botulinum toxin still present. Apply 221B Baker Street. Sherlock posts ads in newspapers to lure suspects in *A Study in Scarlet* (he advertises that he has the ring that was found at the crime scene); in “The Adventure of the Blue Carbuncle” he advertises finding a lost hat. He also occasionally places coded or semi-coded messages in the agony column, as in “The Adventure of the Red Circle.”

FOUR PIPS

EIGHT HOURS LEFT

“Sherlock Holmes. Very old friend of your husband’s.” Sherlock’s strategy in dealing with this woman—making statements to be contradicted, rather than asking her questions—is similar in style, though not content, to the way Holmes treats Mordecai Smith’s wife in *The Sign of Four*. Holmes is able to deduce what sort of questions a particular person will respond to, and get creative in his style of inquiry. “The main thing with people of that sort,” Holmes tells Watson about the irascible Mrs Smith, “is never to let them think that their information can be of the slightest importance to you. If you do they will instantly shut up like an oyster. If you listen to them under protest, as it were, you are very likely to get what you want.”

THREE PIPS

“You realize we’ve hardly stopped for breath since this thing started?” Another reference to the fact that Holmes doesn’t stop to eat (or sleep, occasionally). In the opening of “The Reigate Puzzle,” Watson finds that Holmes’ “iron constitution...had broken down under the strain of an investigation which had extended

over two months, during which period he had never worked less than fifteen hours a day and had more than once, as he assured me, kept to his task for five days at a stretch.” Sherlock is nowhere near that level of activity here, but even so, you’ll notice that they never show him eating or sleeping, even though the timeline of the case lasts for several days (you can track the passage of time by John’s eating or sleeping, and by the number of hours Moriarty gives Holmes to rescue each hostage). As Holmes says in *The Sign of Four*, “I have a curious constitution. I never remember feeling tired by work, though idleness exhausts me completely.”

“*Give me data.*” In “The Adventure of the Copper Beeches,” Holmes resists theorizing before the arrival of facts, saying, “Data, data, data! I can’t make bricks without clay.”

TWO PIPS

“*He had gotten so used to watching Sherlock pull success out of the clear blue sky that the possibility that the bomber might win hadn’t even entered his head.*” I paraphrased a line from “A Scandal in Bohemia” here: “So accustomed was I to [Sherlock’s] invariable success that the very possibility of his failing had ceased to enter my head.”

“*Usually he must stay above it all. He...organizes these things, but no one ever has direct contact.*” As Holmes says in “The Final Problem,” “[Moriarty] does little himself. He only plans. But his agents are numerous and splendidly organized.”

“*Any ideas?*” “*Seven. So far.*” Holmes occasionally makes reference to hypotheses that he has formed, without ever explaining what any of them are (he likes to talk about conclusions, not possibilities). For some reason, an inordinate number of these references involve sevens, as in “The Adventure of the Copper Beeches,” in which he tells Watson, “I have devised seven separate explanations, each of which would cover the facts as far as we know them.” In “The Naval Treaty,” in response to being asked if he has any clues, Holmes replies, “You have furnished me with seven.”

“*You see, you just don’t observe—*” Holmes says this to Watson in “A Scandal in Bohemia,” though in a much less combative fashion.

“*So some kind of standard-issue uniform. Dressed for work, then. What kind of work?*” Holmes’ ability to infer the status, occupation, and occasionally the personality of people before him is, of course, legendary, but in

the canon his observational powers are most often exercised on crime scenes and on clients when they first enter 221B Baker Street. Because the police arrive before him at crime scenes, most of the basic details (like the victim's name and occupation) are generally known. In "The Greek Interpreter," however, Mycroft and Sherlock take turns observing a man outside the window of the Diogenes Club and deduce that the man is an old soldier, recently discharged, non-commissioned officer in the Royal Artillery, recently widowed with several children.

"*Meretricious.*" Holmes describes Watson's work at writing up Holmes' cases as "meretricious" in "The Crooked Man."

"*Dangerous to jump to conclusions. I need data.*" This is a possible reference to Holmes' refusal to guess, calling it "a shocking habit—destructive to the logical faculty" in *The Sign of Four*.

"*Alex, love, it's Professor Cairns.*" I'm not sure if the scriptwriters did this on purpose, but a cairn is a pile of stones used to mark a trail in a landscape where trails aren't obvious (rocky ground, for instance). The professor here is a sort of story-cairn that brings John and Sherlock to the trail of the Van Buren Supernova.

"*The art of disguise is knowing how to hide in plain sight.*" Holmes, of course, is a master of disguise, capable of fooling even Watson, who knows him well. Several times, he disguises himself as a groomsman or a gardener to pick up gossip from household servants (going so far as to become engaged to a maid), dressing up as a priest to gain entrance to Irene Adler's home, or as an opium addict to conduct surveillance in an opium den. He also pretends to be deathly ill (again, even fooling Watson, though only by not allowing Watson to conduct any sort of medical examination) to extract a confession from a murderer.

"*Everyone's got debts. And Westie wouldn't want to clear them by selling out his country.*" As Miss Violet Westbury, Arthur Cadogan West's fiancée in "The Adventure of the Bruce-Partington Plans," says, "Arthur was the most single-minded, chivalrous, patriotic man upon earth. He would have cut his right hand off before he would sell a State secret confided to his keeping. It is absurd, impossible, preposterous to anyone who knew him."

“We were having a night in. Just watching a DVD.” In the original story, West and Miss Westbury were walking through a thick London fog to the theatre when West uttered “an exclamation,” and “darted away into the fog.” He wasn’t seen again until his body was found in Aldgate.

TWO PIPS

? HOURS LEFT

“Homeless network. Really is indispensable.” In the canon, Holmes makes use of what he calls the “Baker Street Irregulars” and what Watson calls “the dirtiest and most ragged street Arabs that I ever clapped eyes on.” Street Arabs were homeless children—of all ethnicities—that roamed over London (and, indeed, most cities of any reasonable size), preferring sleeping outdoors to the violence and exploitation that often happened within orphanages and workhouses. According to Holmes, “there’s more work to be got out of one of those little beggars than out of a dozen of the force... [They can] go everywhere and hear everything. They are sharp as needles, too; all they want is organization.” It is also worth noting that Holmes pays them well for their work; usually about a shilling per errand (a shilling was a little over half a pound, in an era where the average income was in the neighbourhood of maybe £70 a year. I have a memory that when Arthur Conan Doyle was in medical school, his budget for lunch was two pence per day, but he’d often buy a book from a street vendor instead and do without lunch, but I can’t find a citation for the source. A shilling is twelve pennies). Some pastiches tell stories of Wiggins or of other Irregulars, and their fates in adulthood.

“The Van Buren Supernova. So called. Exploding star. Only appeared in the sky in 1858.” In “The Adventure of the Creeping Man,” Holmes tells Watson that “The gravest issues may depend upon the smallest things.” The element of a painting with questionable provenance also appears—albeit briefly—in “The Valley of Fear” when Holmes points out that Professor James Moriarty owns a very expensive painting for someone living on an educator’s salary.

?

“The points. West wasn’t killed here, that’s why there was so little blood.” The broad strokes of West’s death—that he was murdered and his body deposited on top of a train car, only to slide off when the train went around a set of points—are exactly how they appear in the canon.

“Come on. We’ve got a bit of burglary to do.” Holmes and Watson commit burglary to gather evidence at least twice, in “The Adventure of Charles Augustus Milverton” and in “The Adventure of the Bruce-

Partington Plans.” In “The Greek Interpreter” Holmes breaks into a house to let in the police and save the life of a client. (One of my all-time favourite exchanges between Holmes and Watson is when Holmes tells Watson that he’s going to break into the home of Milverton. Watson asks, “When do we start?” Holmes says, “You are not coming,” to which Watson replies, “Then you are not going.” It shows how protective they both are of each other.)

“Missile defence plans haven’t left the country, otherwise Mycroft’s people would have heard about it.” Holmes comes to a similar realization in “The Naval Treaty,” when the murderer turns out to not be a foreign spy, but an opportunist who didn’t know what to do with the plans once he’d gotten them.

“Brother of West’s fiancée. He stole the memory stick.” Though much of the Andrew West storyline is taking from “The Adventure of the Bruce-Partington Plans,” this aspect—that the murderer is the brother of the victim’s fiancée—is taken from “The Naval Treaty.” The name of the brother (Joe Harrison) is the same as the brother in “The Naval Treaty.”

“Joe hauled Westie’s body onto the porch roof outside his window, and from there, an easy drop down onto the train roof.” This is from the Canon, even though—then as now, and to the best of my knowledge—London Underground trains don’t run that close to any dwellings. (They do run behind or between houses in a few neighbourhoods, as shown in Season Three, but they aren’t immediately under windows as in this episode.)

ONE PIP

“Sherlock crouched in his chair, knees pulled to his chest, still wearing his overcoat and shoes, pink phone on the chair arm beside him.” Holmes’ strange postures when he’s thinking (including playing his violin “slung carelessly across his knees,” what?) are fairly well established. In “The Naval Treaty,” “The Adventure of the Creeping Man,” and “The Red-Headed League,” Holmes curls himself up in his chair, “with his thin knees drawn up to his hawk-like nose, and there he sat with his eyes closed and his black clay pipe thrusting out like the bill of some strange bird” when he’s puzzling over a problem.

“Yep. He was over the moon. Threatened me with a knighthood. Again.” There is mention of Holmes refusing a knighthood in “The Adventure of the Three Garridebs.”

Found. The Bruce Partington Plans. Please collect. The pool. Midnight. The pool itself is a possible reference to the factor that water plays in the climax of “The Final Problem” (though, of course, that’s a waterfall, not a pool). The fall shows up at the end of the episode “The Fall of Reichenbach,” though in that one there is no water.

“Is that a British Army Browning L9A1 in your pocket, or are you just pleased to see me?” A similar line of dialogue in “The Final Problem” is when Moriarty tells Holmes that “It is a dangerous habit to finger loaded firearms in the pocket of one’s dressing gown.” It’s also a reference to a quote attributed to Mae West (“Is that a pistol in your pocket, or are you happy to see me?”), which it doesn’t appear that she ever actually said, at least, not in the movie that she is often credited as having said it in. In this way, she and Holmes have a lot in common. (“Elementary, my dear Watson.”)

“I’ve given you a glimpse, Sherlock. Just a teensy glimpse of what I’ve got going on out there in the big bad world. I’m a specialist, you see. Like you.” Canon Holmes describes Moriarty’s role as “the organizer of half that is evil and of nearly all that is undetected in this great city...He does little himself. He only plans. But his agents are numerous and splendidly organized.” Holmes also describes him as “a man of good birth and excellent education, endowed by nature with a phenomenal mathematical faculty.”

“Moriarty smiled. He never seemed to blink, or when he did, it was slow and languid, like a lizard left in the sun.” In “The Final Problem,” Holmes describes Moriarty as having, among other things, a “face [that] protrudes forward and is forever slowly oscillating from side to side in a curiously reptilian fashion.” He also says that Moriarty has a way of “peering and blinking,” and that “his soft precise fashion of speech leaves a conviction of sincerity which a mere bully could not produce.” In the Canon, Moriarty is “extremely tall and thin,” and actually not unlike Holmes’ physical description. One of the villains in “The Greek Interpreter” is described by Mr Melas as speaking “in a nervous, jerky fashion, and with little giggling laughs in between.” Though this villain is not Moriarty, he reminds me of Andrew Scott’s portrayal—the giggling laugh that is threatening rather than funny, the façade that slips off at the slightest provocation. Holmes confesses that Moriarty is his intellectual equal—and Moriarty confesses the same, saying that Holmes’ pursuit of him has been, while inconvenient, “an intellectual treat.”

“No one ever gets to me...Now you’re in my way.” As Moriarty tells Holmes in “The Final Problem,” “You hope to place me in the dock. I tell you that I will never stand in the dock...You must stand clear, Mr. Holmes, or be trodden under foot.”

“Sherlock knew then that Moriarty had noticed him on his trail, had tried to divert him or ignore him, until he got too close—and then the dance had started.” In “The Final Problem,” Holmes confesses that his machinations to capture Moriarty also tipped the criminal off: “He was too wily for that. He saw every step which I took to draw my coils round him.”

“Westwood.” Andrew Scott’s Moriarty does a solid job, as “Jim from IT,” at dressing and acting within the budget of a young IT professional. Canon Moriarty is not quite so effective—it is, indeed, one of the things that attracts Holmes’ attention—at masking his criminal income as that of a math professor’s; specifically, he owns a painting that costs well over ten times his annual income as a math professor, and his finances are scattered over at least twenty different bank accounts.

“That, uh, that thing that you did, that uh, you offered to do. That was...good.” Holmes also shows rare concern for Watson in “The Adventure of the Three Garridebs,” when Watson takes a bullet to the leg, and Holmes clubs the criminal into unconsciousness with the butt of his gun in retaliation. Watson says in narration, “For the one and only time I caught a glimpse of a great heart as well as of a great brain.”

“I would try to convince you. But everything I have to say has already crossed your mind.” “Then probably my answer has crossed yours,” Much of the conversation between Sherlock and Moriarty is very similar to the conversation between Holmes and Moriarty in “The Final Problem,” when Moriarty lets himself into Holmes’ flat at 221B with an ultimatum. In the original, Moriarty tells Holmes that he “will never stand in the dock” (“Catch you later.” “No you won’t.”), and that “If you are clever enough to bring destruction upon me, rest assured that I shall do as much to you.” (“I will burn you. I will burn the heart out of you.”) Sherlock’s taking aim at the pile of Semtex—showing his willingness to die, to kill John, to kill Moriarty’s invisible henchman with the rifle, if it kills Moriarty—references back to Holmes’ statement in “The Final Problem” that “If I could beat that man, if I could free society of him, I should feel that my own career had reached its summit, and I should be prepared to turn to some more placid line in life.” He also tells Moriarty that “If I were assured of the former eventuality [Moriarty in the

dock] I would, in the interests of the public, cheerfully accept the latter [Moriarty murdering him].”

AUTHOR'S NOTE

THE RECLAMATION OF JOHN WATSON

“If I have one quality upon earth it is common sense, and no one will persuade me to believe in such a thing [as the Hound].” —John Watson

I've said elsewhere that Watson, not Holmes, is the reason why I read the Canon. It's easy to lose sight of him in the shadow of the brilliant and eccentric Holmes, but we overlook Watson not only to his detriment, but our own.

“Directors,” says Loren Estleman, in his essay “On the Significance of Boswells,” “simply don't know what to do with Watson.” On the page, it's not a big deal to have Watson sitting quietly, not doing much, spending more of his time talking to the audience than to Holmes. But on screen, it's slightly awkward to have one of the principal characters lurking in the background. Which brings us to what we might call the Nigel Bruce Problem, some scriptwriter's bright idea in the 1930s that cursed Watson to forty-plus years of pratfalls and buffoonery. That's the Watson I had in my head when I first started reading the Canon. Brilliant Holmes and his idiot friend—it evidently not occurring to anybody that Holmes, who does not suffer fools gladly, would hardly spend his time with an idiot. Martin Booth, in his biography of Arthur Conan Doyle *The Doctor and the Detective*, said that Conan Doyle, “aware of this opinion of his character [as dense], defended him by saying that those who considered Watson to be a fool were simply admitting that they had not read the stories with sufficient attention.”

It doesn't surprise me that so many adaptations get Holmes some version of wrong. They tend to focus on one aspect of his personality—his intellect, or his brashness, or his mannerisms—to the detriment of the others. Even Jeremy Brett, my favourite Holmes, didn't show much of the physicality in his portrayal that's so prevalent in the Canon. Brett's Holmes doesn't carry himself like an expert boxer or a singlestick fighter. Rathbone's Holmes has the brains and the physicality, but is also a generally polite English gentleman. I was excited when Robert Downey Jr's Holmes started getting into—and

winning—fistfights, and I liked the way that the film illustrated his powers of observation, but both me and my friend William were distracted and annoyed by Holmes' sloppiness—not by his rooms at 221B, but by Holmes himself, leaving the house without shaving or buttoning his shirt.

You would think that, in comparison, putting together a portrayal of Watson would be easy-peasy. But the Nigel Bruce Problem combined with the Silent Lurking Problem trips everyone up. Add in that everyone spends way more time puzzling over Holmes and, well, I guess it's no surprise that Watson just sort of stumbles on screen sometimes, as an afterthought. Or that he ends up with all the expository dialogue (looking at you, Edward Hardwicke, much as I love you).

It's getting better, though. And hey, it only took 75 years.

The 2009 Guy Ritchie movie did better (in my opinion) with Watson than any previous adaptation, and maybe did better with Watson than it did with Holmes. I was happy to see justice done to Watson's more adventurous side. We also got to see him practice medicine and help Holmes gather evidence with scientific diligence. But still, when I heard they were making a movie starring Robert Downey Jr and Jude Law, my immediate assumption was that Law was Holmes and Downey was Watson, and I can never quite get over my belief that the casting directors got that movie completely backwards. And now we have Lucy Liu as Watson, who could be an entire essay unto herself, which I'll refrain from getting into except to say that I appreciate them giving her an independent arc for her character, though I wish it was less predictable, and I wish that they had kept her as an ex-soldier, because I think that would make her a very different person.

There's so much to Watson that's not mentioned in the stories, or only hinted at. We know he's a soldier, but (like so many soldiers) he never talks about how that affected him in the long term, except to say that he could still tolerate heat, and pack a suitcase quickly. We know he's an honourable man because of how he treats Mary Morstan, and because Holmes trusts him. He may have a gambling problem. Even though he's had an adventurous life of his own, he chooses to write about Holmes. He re-joined the Army as a medical officer well past the age of retirement, on the eve of World War I. In fact,

if you read a biography of Arthur Conan Doyle, Watson starts to look really familiar. If Holmes is hard to pin down because he's so many different contradictory things at once, Watson is the opposite—easy to miss because he's so quiet about so much of it. And so many adaptations of Watson miss that. That Martin Freeman (and Mark Gatiss and Steven Moffat) get, not just Watson's intelligence and courage, but also his quiet, kind of blows my mind. It's an entirely different thing than not giving Watson dialogue because you don't know what to make him say.

It wasn't until Martin Freeman, in fact, that I met a Watson who made me go, "Of course. I've met you before, inside my head. So nice to see you again." In fact, these are some notes I wrote about Watson back when I was planning a (still-unwritten) pastiche, back in (I swear 'fore God) 2007 or 2008: "Watson arrives back from India, injured, weak, w/symptoms of PTSD. He has no family, no close friends, is not well enough to work anywhere, and has no one to confide in about what he's thinking/feeling. He meets Holmes & suddenly doesn't need to explain how he feels; Holmes can figure it out & make allowances. It's unspoken...Watson's need for occupation & compassion, and Holmes' ability to give it. Holmes' personal reserve comes in handy here...Watson is a foil to Holmes & vice versa. If Holmes is cold & calculating, Watson is warm & accommodating; if Holmes conceals all his emotions, Watson must be willing to show his."

Welcome back, Watson. I missed you.