

SHERLOCK HOLMES
&
THE CASE OF THE TWELFTH DRUMMING
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Chapter One

The holiday season was upon us.

Much to the chagrin of my roommate, Sherlock Holmes, Mrs. Hudson had festooned 221B Baker Street with holly, garland and a large wreath on the door.

He could hardly complain, for as little as he cared for such celebrations, it was her home and we, merely tenants.

I had enjoyed some recent successes as an author, in publishing several of our cases in The Strand Magazine.

This notoriety was something new for Holmes, whose previous work had been confined to some quiet assistance to Scotland Yard and several cases which came to him through referrals of previous clients.

We were starting to find ourselves called upon much more often for detective work.

Unfortunately, this led to some pleas for assistance from the most mediocre of clientele, much to Holmes' displeasure.

It also led to the following case, which, due to its macabre and sensationalist implications, shall remain unpublished until after Holmes' passing.

The reasons for this shall become clear when its solution is revealed.

By the calendar it was still Autumn, the Southern solstice being a few days hence.

Mother Nature, however, was already wrapping London in her white winter coat.

We had just sat down to an early breakfast of Mrs. Hudson's delicious ham and bell pepper omelets with steaming rolls and coffee.

Suddenly she returned and brought us the card of a visitor awaiting Mr. Holmes pleasure.

"The young man says it's an emergency, Mr. Holmes, or I would not have disturbed your breakfast," she apologized.

Holmes gave the card a brief examination and handed it to me.

"It's quite all right, Mrs. Hudson. What do you make of this, Watson?"

I read the name on the card aloud.

"John Smith, Esquire. Smith and Smythe, Attorneys at Law. 410 Brixton Rd. London." I paused, checked the back of the card and handed it back to Holmes. "The address is south of the river, near Lambeth Hospital. Since his name matches that of the firm, I would assume he is one of the partners."

"Is that all?" he challenged.

"That's all I can discern," I replied.

Then, somewhat sarcastically, I added, "I suppose you'll tell me he is left-handed, walks with a limp and had eggs for breakfast."

He smiled, "Hardly all that, old chap. He is in fact right-handed, as can be detected from the thumb mark on the right side of the card. The card is newly printed and still retains some freshness of texture and fragrance. He is unlikely to be one of the partners, or the law firm is not quite so successful, for he has drawn this card from his wallet, as you will note by its bend and the smears of ink on the back, from other papers it rubbed against. A more prominent barrister would have a separate case to keep his calling cards pristine, so as to leave a better impression. From these facts and Mrs. Hudson's statement that he is young, I would gather he is newly admitted to the bar and is either a younger relative who is not being coddled, but required to work his way up, or he is not related at all and just happens to share the family name."

He then turned to our patiently waiting landlady, "Please show the gentleman up, Mrs. Hudson, perhaps he will enliven our holidays with a worthy case."

In less than a minute a heavily bundled fellow in his mid-twenties entered our sitting room.

I greeted him and took his hat, gloves, overcoat and walking stick.

He retained a well-worn brown leather briefcase rather diligently.

Once unburdened of his outerwear, Mr. Smith was revealed to be a slight young man, lean as a rail and standing only five foot six or so.

He was wearing a black suit with a grey waistcoat.

Grey felt spats covered his shoes.

Holmes bid him to sit by the fire and observed him casually as he waited for me to sit as well.

As I did, he gave me a brief glance, rubbed his left cufflink and murmured, "You were right about the eggs, Watson."

Although taken by surprise, I managed to retain enough of my wits to look at our visitor's own left cuff.

I noted a slight egg stain, where he had apparently reached across his breakfast plate without clearing his sleeve.

"I am Sherlock Holmes," announced my friend, "and this is my trusted colleague, Dr. John Watson. You may speak freely before him. What brings you to our humble home instead of your office today, Mr. John Smith?"

Smith, warming his hands by the flames (I had observed his gloves were worn quite thin), looked across at my friend.

"How did you know I'd not been to the office this morning, Mr. Holmes?"

Holmes sat back and put his thumb to his jawline and two fingers to his temple as he gazed intently upon our potential client.

"Your mode of transport was not an enclosed carriage, which surely you would have engaged for a long trip on such a day as this. More likely you flagged down the first available cab upon leaving your home, near Kensington I believe, for the mud on your boots would suggest the soil of that area. Your overcoat was subjected to the misty air, but not long enough to have soaked through, for there are still beads of moisture lying atop the fabric. A journey from your offices in such a cab would have left your garments far more waterlogged."

Smith smiled at that, "I can see now why my client has chosen you, Mr. Holmes. Such detailed observation will be vital to his case, I am sure."

"And who is your client, Mr. Smith?"

"Sir James Piersall, Mr. Holmes, of Boston Manor, near the park in Brentford."

"Would that be any relation to the famous cricket player, Piersall of a few years back?" I asked.

"One and the same, Dr. Watson. He's long retired from the game of course. In fact, his health has not been well for some time."

Holmes, whose interest in team sports was nominal at best, pressed the young solicitor for information.

"Just how, precisely, can we help Sir James?"

Smith shifted in his seat and first looked at me, then Holmes, as if afraid to voice his request.

Finally he responded.

"He wants you to find out who killed him."

Chapter Two

This statement nearly caused me to drop the pencil I had taken up to jot down anything of note Mr. Smith might impart to us.

Holmes seemingly took the news in stride.

Without a flinch, he folded his hands in his lap and prodded Smith for more information.

"When did his demise occur, Mr. Smith?" asked the detective.

"Just last night, Mr. Holmes, or perhaps I should be technically accurate and state that it was this morning, for he was killed at the twelfth stroke of midnight."

With a nod to me, my friend indicated that I should write this information down and take subsequent notes as the story unfolded.

"I presume that no ghost spoke to you to seek out my assistance," Holmes continued. "How is it that you have come to us today?"

Smith cleared his throat and undid the strap on his briefcase.

He removed a sealed envelope and handed it to Holmes.

"Lord Piersall was convinced that he was going to be killed before the holidays. He instructed me to give this to 'Sherlock Holmes', for he was convinced that you would be much more efficient than the police."

"Scotland Yard has not been called?" Holmes asked, with a lift to his

eyebrow, as he accepted the envelope with his name in broad strokes.

“My client was very specific that if anything happened, you should be called in first before, as he put it, ‘the bloody Bobbie’s muck up the evidence’.”

“Hmmp,” said Holmes, as he studied the envelope.

First he held it up to the light and then examined its edges and the seal upon its flap.

He even retrieved his magnifying lens to study the ink and handwriting more closely.

Satisfied that he had gleaned all he could from the exterior, he carefully slit open the edge to remove its contents.

He examined the letter and murmured, “Right handed, creative, methodical. The writing confirms ill health, as you said. Mr. Smith, was Sir James suffering from any serious disease or condition?”

Smith leaned forward, his forearms resting on the briefcase that now lay flat on his lap and spoke in low tones, as if afraid he were betraying a secret.

“It was not generally known outside the household, Mr. Holmes, but Lord Piersall’s health was deteriorating recently. However, to my knowledge, only he and his doctor were aware of his actual diagnosis.”

Holmes paused a moment and then stood and handed the letter to me.

“We must examine the scene immediately! Let us be off to Boston

Manor. Watson, please hold on to this for now.”

We quickly bundled ourselves against the cold and hailed a cab.

Once settled inside, Holmes asked me to read the letter aloud.

“My Dear Mr. Holmes,” it said. “Please forgive this intrusion into what must be a busy schedule for such a successful detective as yourself. From my readings of Dr. Watson’s works, I have come to realize you may be the only person capable of assisting me. I have a foreboding that someone is out to harm me. I have no proof of this, however, and until I do so, I am loathe to seek your services. For the time being, should something befall me before I have enough evidence to bring you, I have instructed my solicitor, Mr. John Smith, to give you this letter, in hopes that you will be able to solve the case. I have also designated a sum of five hundred pounds each, for you and Dr. Watson, to be awarded should you prove successful.

With respect, Sir James Piersall
Boston Manor “

“Good Lord, Holmes, this is extraordinary!” I exclaimed.

Holmes turned to face Smith, “What precisely, did Sir James tell you about the circumstance that led to this letter?” he demanded.

Smith tugged at his collar and gripped his briefcase in his lap as he had before, then spoke.

“Approximately one month ago, Sir James sent a note to my father, Josiah Smith, the senior partner at the law firm. Our home is not far

from Boston Park Manor and my father has been there on many social occasions where neighbors and friends of Sir James gathered. He has been the family solicitor for many years. The arrival of this note however, coincided with my father’s recent decision to reduce his workload due to his own health issues. He decided that the rigors this case may entail would be better served by my youth, and the straightforwardness of it would be in line with my current level of experience, for I have just joined the firm this past summer.”

“I surmised as much,” stated Holmes.

“Your briefcase was surely one passed on to you by your father for it bears both your initials, J.S., yet is certainly at least ten years old. Its handle and stitching have both been repaired recently, yet the leather itself is well-worn. I would venture to say that your father’s illness also troubles his walking about. Your walking stick, also bearing the same initials, is quite old and the brass knob a bit tarnished. It has obviously been passed on to you as your father has chosen to purchase a new one with a more substantial handle to support his weight, likely a ‘J’ or ‘derby’ grip.”

“Correct on every count, Mr. Holmes,” replied the younger Smith. “This note my father received indicated that Lord Piersall had been subjected to several close calls or accidents that, he believed, may have been failed attempts upon his life.”

“What were the nature of these accidents?” I asked, hoping to be helpful.

“He claims that a load of bricks fell from scaffolding at a construction site

landing mere feet from him as he passed by. On another occasion a runaway carriage nearly ran him down and failed to stop, even though he had lost his balance and fallen as he jumped out of the way."

"These may have been mere accidents," responded Holmes. "Did Sir James have any idea who would wish him harm?"

"Ah, therein lies the crux of the matter," said Smith.

"Even though these incidents took place within a week of each other, he was quite content to dismiss them as accidents. What prompted his note to my father was quite a different matter."

"Pray tell," Holmes requested.

Our client swallowed and then revealed, "That very day, he was walking in the woods behind the manor when suddenly his hat flew off and he heard a loud smack against a nearby tree."

Smith turned and looked up at Holmes face, "Someone had taken a shot at him, Mr. Holmes."

Chapter Three

"Sir James heard no shot?" enquired the detective.

"None, Mr. Holmes. His slouch hat bore the hole of a bullet that passed through high on the crown, barely missing Sir James' skull. I myself recovered the bullet from the tree. I have it here in my briefcase, should you wish to examine it."

"Later," responded Holmes.

The conditions in the cab were quite crowded.

The dull grey skies made a close examination, especially under movement, rather problematic.

"Tell us what happened last night," he continued.

"I was awoken by our butler just before 1:00 a.m." Smith replied.

"A messenger had arrived from Boston Manor informing me Sir James had been shot and my presence was required. I immediately dressed and rushed over, arriving about one-thirty. I found Sir James in his ground floor study, slumped over his desk with a bullet wound to his heart."

"How was the body discovered?" asked Holmes.

"Perkins, their butler was dressing for bed. His room is just down the hall. He says he heard a shot precisely at the last stroke of midnight and he immediately rushed to his master's study, for the sound came from that direction. He found Sir James as I did. One of the French doors to the rear garden was slightly ajar and there was a smell of gunpowder in the room. He kept the other servants out and especially Sir James' young son, Carlton. Having instructions from Sir James in the event of such an occurrence, he immediately sent for me. Upon my arrival, I took in the scene. Realizing I must seek your assistance, Perkins and I made our plans. He had already searched the rear grounds for any sign of the assailant but found nothing. I determined that you would want the scene as intact as possible, but the morning dew might disturb any evidence around the doorway. I

marked exactly where it was open to and then closed it, to keep the floor's surface from contamination from the elements."

"A wise precaution," said Holmes, with a hint of admiration at Smith's foresight.

"After Perkins and I organized our plan of action," Smith continued, "I returned to my home and retrieved the papers and the bullet relevant to Sir James' case. As our coach is under repair, I was forced to wait until daylight when a servant was able to hail a cab for me. I consumed a hurried breakfast and was finally able to come to you."

"Did Sir James leave you any instructions, in case I was not available?" Holmes asked, pensively.

"He only insisted that you be involved, Mr. Holmes. As a member of the judicial community I could not allow the crime to go unreported to the official police indefinitely. Even now, I fear we have stretched the bounds a bit."

"Let us put your mind to rest, Mr. Smith," agreed Holmes.

"Once we have arrived, I suggest you may send for the local constabulary immediately. The time it takes for them to return should be sufficient for us to glean what we can."

The rest of our journey continued in this vein and soon we found ourselves at Boston Manor.

We were greeted at the door by Perkins who immediately escorted us to the master study.

Perkins had stationed one of the maids at the door, primarily to keep

out young master Carlton, who wanted to see his father.

He informed us that a stable hand was watching the French doors from a distance so as not to create any footprints, and ensure no one disturbed any evidence outside the house.

Holmes commended Perkins for his actions and the four of us entered.

Smith and Perkins remained by the door to answer any questions.

I waited until Holmes had inspected the floor between the door and the desk, then crossed over and proceeded to examine the body.

The layout of the room was as follows: The door from the hallway was in the middle of the inner wall, directly across from French doors leading to the rear gardens.

The desk where our victim lay was to the right so that, for someone sitting there, he could look to his left and see someone enter from the hall, or look to his right and see out into the gardens.

To the left of the French doors on the outer wall was a substantial fireplace.

Between this fireplace and the garden doors was a large grandfather clock.

The wall opposite the desk was entirely made up of bookshelves.

The wall shared with the hallway had a gun cabinet to the left as one entered, some other low cabinets and artwork on the walls.

The gun cabinet held rifles, shotguns and pistols, some being remnants of

Sir James military service as a young man straight from Cambridge.

It was his service that earned him his knighthood, though his family was well established in the peerage.

Behind the desk there was a portrait of Sir James and his wife from their wedding day.

Also there were other photos showing various scenes from their lives and some of his actions as a Cricket player, along with framed newspaper articles of his exploits.

Piersall, himself, was only in his mid-forties.

His hair showed no signs of grey, being dark brown and thick.

He wore no moustache, as he had when he was a well-known athlete.

His body had not retained its athletic build, however.

The once muscular arms had deteriorated and his overall weight could not have been more than eleven stone .

A mere shadow of his prime at fifteen or sixteen stone and his dressing gown hung loosely on his frame.

His state of rigor mortis coincided with the report that his death occurred at midnight.

There was little blood loss, for his heart had stopped pumping immediately upon its severance by the bullet.

Holmes examined the chair back thoroughly, although he spent some time on the bullet hole, he did not ignore any other portion of the fabric

as he looked for anything that might be useful to his investigation.

The bullet itself had lodged in the chair's upholstered back.

When Holmes has finished his examination he asked me to use my forceps to extract it and I did so.

It came out easily and appeared to be a smaller caliber than the one Smith produced from his briefcase.

Holmes had me assist him to lean Sir James back up into a sitting position, but held him slightly away from the chair's back so that the bullet's path could be observed.

Gaging the trajectory from the chair's damage through the heart, assuming he had been sitting straight up, the bullet would likely have come from the direction of the open French door.

Holmes had me hold the body in place while he stood at that doorway, pointing his hand as though holding a pistol, nodded to himself and allowed me to lower the body back onto the desk.

He then got down on all fours and proceeded to examine the floor.

"Perkins," he enquired, "you were the only one to enter this room after the shot was heard?"

"Yes, sir," the butler answered.

He was a medium built man, in his fifties, balding with a fringe of brown hair and sideburns.

"Once I saw the master slumped over his desk I checked for a pulse and then rushed back to the door to keep

everyone out of the room, especially the child.”

“Where is the boy now?” asked Holmes.

“My wife, the housekeeper, has taken him back to his room. Where, I am told, he cried himself back to sleep. He has not been told of his father’s death, but obviously he’s aware something is wrong.”

Holmes nodded to himself, then asked the butler to sit down.

“If you would be so good as to hold up your foot,” requested the detective.

Perkins looked at Smith, who nodded, and then held his right foot out.

Holmes examined the sole of his shoe and thanked him.

“Forgive me, Perkins. I needed to determine which footprints were yours. Obviously you were in your stocking feet when you first entered the room upon hearing the shot.”

“Yes, Mr. Holmes,” replied the butler, “As I said, I was preparing to retire when the shot went off and I ran immediately here without bothering to put my shoes back on.”

“Your actions are commendable,” replied Holmes.

“If I may surmise, you came through the door, saw Sir James slumped over his desk, and checked for a pulse. Finding none and hearing the oncoming footsteps of other household members you returned to the door and kept everyone out. You shut the door and crossed the room to the French door that was open. You stood there some time, trying to

see any sign of an intruder. Your lack of footwear kept you from venturing out into the snow yourself. Noting nothing save for the exceedingly cold temperature of the room, due to the open door, you knelt to add logs to the fire. You then returned to the hall door and addressed the gathering staff members. I presume it was then you assigned a guard to the back of the house and dispatched the messenger to Mr. Smith.”

Perkins, who had remained unperturbed to this point, rose with his mouth agape.

“My word, sir, it’s as if you had been here. Those were my exact actions.”

“Easily decipherable from the prints left by your stocking feet,” answered my friend.

“You then returned to your room, donned your shoes and came back. It appears you have checked Sir James safe, to discern if it had been opened.”

“It was not, Mr. Holmes,” replied the gentlemen’s gentleman.

“It was closed and locked. Only Sir James and his solicitor have the combination.”

“I checked it myself, Mr. Holmes,” inserted young Smith.

“There appeared to be nothing missing from his papers and valuables.”

At the mention of ‘valuables’, I spoke out with a question, “Is there anything else of value that is kept in this room? Coins? Artwork? A rare book, perhaps?”

Holmes frowned and shook his head.

“No coins, Dr. Watson,” answered the butler.

“The only artwork is what you see on the walls and it is not especially valuable. His books were for reading, not collecting, so there were no rare volumes of great worth among them.”

I looked about the room and saw the artwork was indeed, pleasant to look at, but of modest value.

The books were popular novels, biographies or reference works, certainly nothing worth killing for.

“Remember, Watson,” my fellow lodger declared, “This is not the first attempt Sir James reported.

If there is anything of value involved, it would be something he carried on his person.

Something the killer would have been able to snatch away at any of the other crime scenes, had he or she been successful.”

I nodded in understanding and replied, “Then are we to assume it is strictly a case of murder, with a motive as yet unknown?”

“With the facts as they currently stand, yes, Watson.”

Chapter Four

Suddenly, there was a click and then a drum roll from behind me.

Startled, I turned and found myself facing the Grandfather clock.

A figure of a military drummer had emerged from beneath the clock face and was beating out the time.

The drum roll was followed by ten flamacues, (or paradiddles, I'm not precisely sure of the definitions), marking the hour as ten o'clock.

Composing myself, I turned back toward Perkins, "My word, that is quite a timepiece," I managed.

"Yes, Doctor. It is a bit startling if one isn't used to it. On the other hand, that is how I knew the precise time when the shot went off."

"How's that?" questioned Holmes.

Perkins pointed up at the ceiling, "The air vent, sir. When this clock strikes the hour I can hear it through the air vent in my room down the hall. It was immediately after the twelfth drumming that the shot sounded."

Holmes gazed up at the vent and appeared to make a mental note then asked a further question, "When did Sir James obtain this clock?"

"Last summer, Mr. Holmes. He took Master Carlton on a tour of Europe during the month of August and this was one of the items they brought back."

"Indeed?" Holmes responded, a he made a cursory examination of the clock itself, "Whereabouts in Europe did they travel?"

"France, Italy, Switzerland and Germany. I believe I still have their itinerary if you wish it."

"I believe I would, Perkins, thank you."

He then proceeded beyond the clock to the fireplace.

Using his lens he examined the bricks, especially around the edges.

He then knelt down, removed his homburg, set aside the screen, protruded his head into the chamber as far as the flames would allow and peered up the chimney.

Setting things aright again, he turned to the rest of us and announced, "Gentlemen, I shall be examining the grounds outside. I suggest you await the arrival of the police and I shall return shortly."

Gliding out the French door, Holmes tip-toed his way about the exterior, staring intently at the ground.

We retired to a sitting room, which was festively decorated with a large Christmas tree.

Ribbons, holly and ivy appeared to sprout along the walls and stockings were hung from the fireplace mantle.

Perkins arranged for some tea to be served as Smith and I sat and discussed the case.

Before Holmes returned, Inspector Williams arrived with the local coroner, Dr. Burleson.

Williams was a rotund fellow, about my height but significantly heavier.

His grey hair descended down his cheeks in long sideburns and culminated in a full moustache over a small mouth with pursed lips that somehow gave his face a porcine look.

He carried a heavy walnut walking stick with a large brass doorknob top and wore a black ulster and derby.

Burleson was a small, wiry fellow.

His brown eyes darted about, as if taking in the surroundings of a potential crime scene.

He was clean shaven and wore a short, khaki overcoat and a brown leather flat cap.

He was perhaps thirty years of age, rather young for a coroner, a profession usually reserved for physicians approaching the latter years of their careers.

He sported an umbrella, his medical bag and an eager disposition.

We stood as they entered and Smith made introductions.

Just as we finished shaking hands, Sherlock Holmes entered the room.

Once introduced, he bade us to follow him to the study, where he informed Williams and Burleson of the steps he had taken thus far.

"The footprints you find will be of the victim, myself, Dr. Watson, Mr. Smith and Perkins. You will also find stocking footprints of Perkins from when he first responded to the shot. We have also touched nothing, save for the body to determine the angle of the shot. I will leave you to draw your own conclusions."

Williams harrumphed, "Mr. Smith," he said, accusingly, "why was I not called immediately? This amateur interference could impede my investigation. As an officer of the court, you have an obligation and responsibility to report all crimes as soon as you become aware of them."

To Smith's credit he did not back down at the threatening tone of the larger man.

"I was following the orders of my client, Sir James, whose title outranks yours, Inspector. Once I had fulfilled his request you were sent for immediately."

Williams crossed his arms and glared at the solicitor, "And just how could you be following the orders of a dead man after he was dead?"

Smith actually smiled and pulled a letter from his briefcase and held it up to Williams face.

"My written order from a knight of the realm, Inspector Williams," he declared, "He foresaw his death and this was how he wanted it investigated, so I suggest you investigate. If Mr. Holmes has any insight to share, you should listen to it very carefully."

Williams snatched the letter from Smith's hand.

His pallor turned red as he seethed at the contents.

Finally he thrust it back and strode away to scrutinize the room.

In the meantime, Burleson was examining the body.

He called me over to assist him to lift Sir James off the desk, in order to view the entry wound.

He took some measurements of the entry and exit wounds and where the bullet had entered the back of the chair.

He continued with his work and finally declared, "Time of death agrees with the account that he was shot at midnight, Inspector. I've done

all I can here. We can take him back to the morgue now."

Williams answered, brusquely, "You go ahead, I'll be here awhile, determining who I should seek to arrest." He looked pointedly at Smith, then at Holmes.

Smith ignored him and Holmes spoke to me, "Watson, would you go along with Dr. Burleson and observe his findings? With your permission of course, Doctor."

Burleson nodded, "Dr. Watson's reputation precedes him, Mr. Holmes, I would certainly not object to any assistance he might contribute."

Burleson and I retreated to his wagon to obtain a litter, then proceeded to remove Sir James and drive on to Burleson's laboratory.

Holmes, meanwhile, took aside Mr. Smith and went back to the sitting room to gather more data.

"Your attitude toward the official police was quite...unique, Mr. Smith," said the detective.

Smith smiled, "You mean the fact that I stood up to him when my normal demeanor is more reserved? Bullies and incompetents do not intimidate me, Mr. Holmes. I only tend to withdraw in the face of true genius or expertise, such as yourself."

At that point Perkins came by to ask if they needed anything, Holmes asked him to stay to answer a few more questions.

"Have you noticed anyone lurking about, or any visitors that were especially unpleasant or left Sir James in an unusual mood?"

"No loiterers about, Mr. Holmes," answered the butler, "and Sir James visitors have been limited to his doctor, Mr. Smith and his sister."

"Is she his only family then, other than his son?"

"Yes, sir, Sir James' wife died from an illness a year and a half ago. His sister, Miss Janet Browning, came down from Leeds to see him about a month ago and stayed for a week. She wished to remain and attempt to nurse him back to health, but he would not hear of it."

"I see," replied Holmes.

"That will be all, Perkins, thank you."

When the servant had left them, Holmes turned his attention to the lawyer.

"Mr. Smith, are you aware of the contents of Sir James' Will?"

"I am somewhat familiar with it, yes," he replied.

"Are there any heirs or recipients among his beneficiaries who might have gained significantly enough to hasten Sir James' death by murdering him?"

"No one that I can imagine. The bulk of the estate will go to his son, of course. His sister will have guardianship until the boy is of age. She will also receive a share and there are some smaller endowments to his household staff. A few charities will benefit, as well. Why do you ask Mr. Holmes?"

"There were no footprints out in the snow, save Perkins, to indicate

anyone coming or going from the French doors."

Smith digested that statement, looking down in contemplation with a forefinger to his lips.

After a few moments the implication manifested itself.

"My God," he exclaimed slowly, hesitant to voice the obvious. "That means the killer was already in the house!"

Chapter Five

The echo of that statement from Smith's lips had hardly died when another voice asked, "Will you catch my father's killer, Mr. Holmes?"

The boy, Carlton, was standing in the doorway, fully dressed now and bravely standing his ground.

Smith took the lead, having known the boy, inviting him in to sit down with them.

"You are aware your father was killed last night, Carlton?"

Just then Perkins showed up, panting with shortness of breath, "I'm sorry, sirs. Master Carlton you should not be bothering these gentlemen."

"It's quite all right, Perkins," answered young Smith. "We'll look after him."

Perkins left and Smith turned back to the boy who was looking down sadly, "When Mrs. Perkins took me back to bed last night she fell asleep in my room. I was able to sneak down the stairs and heard enough to know what was going on. I... I went back to bed before she knew I was gone. They served me breakfast in my

room, but now that my father's been taken away, they've decided to let me out. I ran away from Perkins to find Mr. Holmes. You are Sherlock Holmes, aren't you, sir? You will catch my father's killer?"

Holmes looked at the boy intently.

Around children he was generally gruff, as with his Baker Street Irregulars, but in this instance some deeply buried tenderness emerged.

He stood and faced the boy.

The young Piersall was only eleven years old and of slight build.

His sandy hair and blue eyes favored his deceased mother.

Holmes took the boy gently by the shoulders and looked down at him.

Softly he said, "Can you be brave enough to come with me to the study, young man?"

Smith started to protest, but Holmes waved him to silence and kept his gaze on the boy.

Carlton never flinched, "If I can help you catch the person who did this, then let's go," he answered.

"One moment," answered Holmes.

He stepped over and whispered something to Smith who immediately left the room.

Turning back to the lad Holmes declared, "Mr. Smith is preparing the way for us. First, I have a question for you. I am told your father has read the stories that Dr. Watson has written about our cases. Have you read them as well?"

"Oh, yes, Mr. Holmes. They're very exciting."

"Yes," replied the detective, with a slight frown, "Watson does tend to leave out the dull and tedious aspects of the work. However, you must be aware then of how important it is not to touch anything. Do I have your word that you will keep your hands to yourself and do exactly as I tell you?"

"Yes, Mr. Holmes. Anything you say."

"Good lad," my friend replied, putting his hand on the boy's shoulder and steering him toward the door.

Arriving at the study, they found that Smith had arranged, at Holmes' request, for the blood stains on the desk and floor to be covered by some cloths to keep the boy from seeing them.

Smith and Mrs. Perkins waited by the door.

Inspector Williams was tromping about in the rear gardens so Holmes and Carlton entered the room by themselves.

Holmes stood by the gun cabinet and asked, "Master Carlton, are you aware of any secret passages that may exist in this room?"

The boy was staring at the desk where his father had so often sat.

"Master Carlton?" repeated Holmes.

"What? Oh, sorry, Mr. Holmes. No I don't know about any secret passages in the house."

"When your father sat at his desk, did he always face forward or did he sometimes face the window?"

The boy looked up, as if searching his memory, "If he was writing or going over business papers, he would face forward. He would lean over the papers with his head down. But, if he was reading the newspaper or a book, he would face toward the windows and look outside between stories."

Holmes looked thoughtful.

He strode over to stand behind the chair at the desk and swiveled it toward the French doors with their numerous window panes.

"When your father faced outside to read, did he sit straight up, or did he lean to one side on the arm of the chair?"

"He usually leaned on the left arm of the chair."

With the chair now facing the French doors, Holmes walked around and observed the angle of the chair and the placement of the bullet hole in the chair back.

He called young Piersall over to the doorway and crouched down, "This door was open when your father was found, but there are no footprints out in the snow. Can you think of any way someone might have escaped this way?"

The lad sank down on the floor, crossed his legs, and put his chin on his folded hands.

He gazed intently outside for a minute or two and then turned to Holmes.

"May I open the door and step out on the walkway?"

Holmes nodded his ascent and they both stepped just across the threshold.

Carlton looked all around and then turned back toward the house.

"If he didn't go straight out he must have gone up, down or sideways. Wouldn't he, Mr. Holmes?" he asked, looking up at the tall detective.

"Where would he go if he did that?" responded Holmes.

"There's a cellar door on the other side of the chimney," replied the boy.

"Or he could have used a rope with a hook to climb up the bricks of the chimney and across the roof."

Holmes nodded, thoughtfully.

"Excellent, young man. Let us return to the warmth of the house. You do not have a coat and it is decidedly chilly."

Upon their return to the room, Holmes again placed a hand on the lad's shoulder.

"You have been of inestimable assistance, Master Carlton. I shall pursue your theories alongside my own. I have no doubt we will solve this mystery."

He took the boy to the housekeeper and instructed her, "Get the boy some hot cocoa, please."

After they had left for the kitchen, Holmes invited Smith to join him in the study.

"Was the boy really helpful, Mr. Holmes?" asked the solicitor.

"He shows a remarkable focus for one so young," replied the detective.

"While I have already considered his theories, the fact that he recognizes those possibilities may be of use when the solution becomes clear."

Holmes walked over to the gun cabinet.

It was locked, but Holmes made quick work of the latch.

He pulled the cartridge Smith retrieved from the tree out of his pocket and examined it with his lens.

He then pulled one of the pistols from the cabinet and opened the chamber.

After a quick examination he put it back in place and re-locked the cabinet.

"What is it, Mr. Holmes?" enquired Smith.

"Surely none of these guns could be the murder weapon, there would have been no time to put it back here before the staff entered the room."

"You are quite correct, Mr. Smith. None of these guns are the murder weapon."

Inspector Williams returned and stood before the fire, warming his hands.

"I've finished my preliminary investigation, gentlemen," he declared. "Mr. Smith, I should like you to come back to my office to make an official statement. And you," he glared at Holmes, "may leave the premises. I warn you not to interfere with my investigation."

"I assure you, Inspector," replied Holmes, "The work I have been engaged to perform for Sir James, shall not cross paths with your search for his killer."

"See that it doesn't," growled Williams, and he stormed off with Smith in tow.

Chapter Six

When I returned to Baker Street, Holmes was smoking what must have been his second pipe, judging by the amount of haze in the room.

"Ah, Watson, there you are. How thorough was Burleson's autopsy of Sir James?"

After I hung up my hat and coat I turned to him, "Initially no more than usual, Holmes. Once he determined that the bullet pierced the right atrium he was ready to write up the death certificate."

"That was fairly self-evident," he growled.

I sighed as I sat by the fire and lit a cigar.

"I've learned of your passion for data after all these years, Holmes. Therefore, I convinced my colleague to take some extra effort beyond mere cause of death."

"Ah, good chap, Watson. What did you find?"

I inhaled and blew out a long stream of smoke, savoring the hint of vanilla in the tobacco of this new brand I was trying.

"First of all, Sir James' body was riddled with cancer. I am amazed his pancreas was still able to function. In

my opinion he would have died within a month, possibly within a week."

"That's very telling, Doctor."

"Indeed, but that's not the most interesting find of our examination."

Holmes leaned forward in anticipation.

"The bullet struck the sixth thoracic vertebrae as it passed through the body, and being of such a small caliber...."

"It was deflected," my friend finished, with a hint of a smile.

"Yes, Holmes, by nearly twenty degrees," I replied.

"The shot didn't come from the French doors."

Holmes leaned back in his chair and clapped his hands together.

He proceeded to his desk and wrote out a telegraph form.

"I shall be but a few minutes, Watson. Will you be free tomorrow morning to join me for a return to Boston Park Manor?"

"Yes, Holmes, I've no patients until late in the afternoon."

"Excellent," he replied, "Thanks to your thoroughness, I believe we can find all the answers we need in Sir James' study."

Just as he opened the door to step over to the telegraph office, a messenger was coming up the stairs, telegram in hand.

Holmes invited the boy in and tore open the form.

After a quick read he threw it on the floor with an exclamation of disgust, and dashed off another telegram.

Handing it to the boy, with some extra coinage for a speedy delivery, he sent him on his way.

I picked up the telegram he had discarded.

It was from Smith.

When I read it I was incredulous.

"Good heavens, Holmes," I cried, "this cannot be true!"

"Of course it's not true," he replied, "but that dunderhead Williams has sought the convenient way out in order to close his case."

"The butler did it?" I said, "What sort of nonsense is that?"

"Nonsense that we must correct, Watson. If you care to join me, I'm off to the Yard."

Reaching for my coat I affirmed, "I'm right with you, old man."

* * *

Half an hour later we were dodging snowflakes, crossing the sidewalk from the cab through the doors at Scotland Yard.

As we made our way to Williams' office we ran into Inspector Lestrade, with whom Holmes had worked on several occasions.

"Ah, Mr. Holmes, Dr. Watson," he called in a cheery voice, "What brings you out in such weather as this?"

Perchance you need assistance from the official police?"

I must state that there are times when Lestrade can be absolutely insufferable, though Holmes insists he is 'the best of a bad lot'.

"Indeed, Inspector," replied Holmes to the surprise of both Lestrade and myself, "you may be just the fellow who can assist us. Would you show us the way to Inspector Williams office?"

"Williams? Oh yes, he just wrapped up that murder in Boston Park. Nasty business from what I hear."

"Yes," Holmes declared, as we continued walking, "Very nasty indeed. Ah, there he is!"

Williams was just stepping out of an office ahead.

His face took on a bitter scowl when he saw us.

"What are you doing here, Mr. Busybody? The case is over, I've got my man."

"Perkins?" I blurted out in dismay.

Williams looked at me, "Yes, Doctor, or perhaps I should say 'Mr. Author', sometimes the butler does do it."

"Oh, I quite agree," said Holmes and three pairs of eyes snapped to his face in surprise, "I can name several cases in which it was so. However, this is not one of them."

"Come now, Holmes," barked Williams, "the footprints tell the tale. No one left by the French doors. The entire household confirms that Perkins was in the room when they came to investigate the gunshot. He cleared them all out while he

attempted to cover up his crime. However, when I returned to fetch him up, I also found a pistol in the gun cabinet that had been fired and not cleaned, no doubt it will prove to be the murder weapon."

"It will prove to be nothing of the kind," responded the detective.

"First of all, it is the wrong caliber and secondly, the murder weapon is still in the room."

"Humbug!" declared Williams.

"Lestrade," Holmes said calmly, "how many cases have you and I worked together?"

"Eh, I've lost track Mr. Holmes," answered the grizzled veteran, hesitantly. "Perhaps a dozen?"

"Seventeen, to date, Inspector," replied my friend.

"And may I ask you, have I ever mistakenly accused the wrong person?"

"Well, you have had some wild theories, Mr. Holmes."

Holmes stared at him, impatiently.

Lestrade gulped, "No, you've never accused the wrong man. In fact, you have been of great assistance, in many cases."

I hid a smile as I thought back to all the times that Holmes had saved Lestrade from making the same mistake to which Williams now embarked.

Turning back to Williams, Holmes announced, "If you will meet me back at Boston Park Manor tomorrow morning at eleven forty-five,

Inspector, I shall not only show you the murder weapon, but I will reveal the murderer."

"Mr. Holmes, if you know who the murderer is you must reveal him and allow us to arrest him immediately!" ordered Williams.

"I assure you, Inspector, the murderer shall not flee your jurisdiction this night and until I can show you the weapon used, you will not believe his identity."

Chapter Seven

We returned to Baker Street just in time for one of Mrs.

Hudson's culinary dinner delights.

Holmes, as usual, did not speak of his solution to the case.

He did ask some further questions about the autopsy, however.

"Tell me, Watson, if you are sitting at a desk and someone comes into the room, what is your first reaction?"

Finishing a sip of tea I posed, "I suppose I would put down whatever I was doing and turn toward my visitor."

"Undoubtedly," replied Holmes.

"Now, considering the true path you discovered for the bullet, think which way Sir James body was facing."

As I pondered that remark Holmes announced that he would be going out for two or three hours and retreated to his bedroom.

Emerging some ten minutes later, he was dressed in dark workman's clothing and carried a small satchel.

"Do be careful, Holmes," I cautioned.

"Perkins is depending on your testimony to release him tomorrow."

He smiled, "Do not fear, old fellow.

I am merely preparing a little demonstration for a very particular audience.

I shall be home in time to join you for a nightcap."

True to his word, Holmes returned within three hours, silent as to his whereabouts or actions.

All I could get out of him was that the next day all would be revealed.

"In fact, old friend," he announced, as he downed his last drop of sherry, "there will be much more revealed than is usual in such a case as this."

Having lived with Holmes for some years, I refused to speculate, knowing it would do no good, and bid him 'good night'."

* * *

Rising late, I found Holmes enjoying his morning tea.

"Ah, Watson, at last arisen from Morpheus arms." He immediately rang for our landlady and requested breakfast for the two of us.

"Something quick and simple if you please, Mrs.

Hudson, for we must be off by ten o'clock."

She bustled off and I queried Holmes while stifling a yawn, "What's the rush, old fellow? I thought we were

meeting Williams at eleven forty-five?"

"Williams, yes," he answered as he lit his pipe, "but we are meeting Mr. Smith at Boston Park Manor at ten-thirty."

Somewhat confused, not being quite awake as yet, I merely murmured, "Of course," and returned to my room to get dressed while breakfast was being prepared.

Once fed, I soon found myself seated alongside Holmes inside a cab winding through the slush-covered streets toward Kensington.

The satchel from the previous evening lay at our feet.

The day was bright and clear, the snow flurries having departed, but the sun seemed to produce no heat as the temperatures remained near freezing.

The door to the manor was answered by Mrs. Perkins, who, upon seeing my companion, fell onto him in despair.

"Oh, Mr. Holmes, you must save my husband! He did not do this terrible deed. I swear to you by all that is holy, he is innocent."

Holmes disentangled himself from the housekeeper and assured her.

"Have no fear, madam. I see no reason why you should not be enjoying your husband's company for dinner this very night."

She hugged him one last time and cried, "Oh, God bless you, sir!" Dabbing her eyes with a handkerchief she added. "Mr. Smith is waiting for you in the study."

She offered to take our hats and coats, but Holmes declined, informing her that we would be venturing outside again.

He asked her to bring Piersall's son to the study, bundled up to go outside and we made our way to greet the family lawyer.

Smith greeted us anxiously, "Mr. Holmes, Dr. Watson, I received your wire and all is as you asked. I admit I am somewhat confused as to your request. It appears you have two solutions to this crime?"

Holmes smiled as he set his satchel on the desk next to Smith's briefcase.

"If you will indulge me, Mr. Smith, all will become clear shortly."

In less than a minute, Mrs. Perkins produced young Carlton in his overcoat, scarf and a deerstalker cap with the flaps down over his ears.

Holmes addressed the lad, "Master Carlton, are you prepared to assist us in this investigation?"

"Of course, Mr. Holmes," he responded eagerly, "What do you want me to do?"

Holmes snatched up his satchel and bid us all follow him out the French doors and to the left, where the chimney protruded from the back of the house.

Kneeling down and opening the bag, he pulled out a length of rope attached to a grappling hook.

He proceeded to heave the hook upward to catch on the chimney top itself.

No small feat for it was over twenty feet high.

Yet, it only took him two tries to snag it securely.

Turning to the boy he said, "I've been exploring your theories as to how the person escaped the study without leaving footprints in the snow."

I noticed Holmes had deliberately avoided the use of the words 'killer', or 'murderer' in the boy's presence.

"I have eliminated the cellar, for there is no sign of anyone coming from, or going back down into it in recent days. Leaving by either side would eventually force someone to step out from under the eaves and into the snow. There were no prints there either."

Holmes waited a beat for the boy to understand.

Carlton spoke up at once, "Then he must have gone up!"

"I believe that is a distinct possibility," said the detective.

"Since it was your theory, I thought you should be the one to confirm it."

The young master looked up the rope, "You want me to climb up to the roof and look for footprints?"

Smith protested, "Surely not, Mr. Holmes! Even if the perpetrator used this method, certainly we could use a ladder for the boy's own safety."

"No!" declared the lad in a strong voice that belied his age. "I'll do it!"

At once he took hold of the rope and began to walk up the side of the

chimney, as he pulled himself along hand over hand.

Holmes held the rope steady and I stood beside him, ready to catch the boy if he fell.

Carlton proved to have his father's athleticism and clambered up the bricks like a monkey.

In less than a minute he stood atop the roof, leaning against the chimney to maintain his balance.

"Good show, Master Carlton!" I cried.

"Tell me," asked Holmes, "do you see any footprints?"

Those keen blue eyes looked toward the ridgeline of the roof and he answered, "Yes, Mr. Holmes. There are footprints leading over the ridge toward the parlor chimney."

"Wait there, I'll be right up," answered the detective.

He methodically made his way up the rope and joined the new master of the house.

Together, with Holmes' gloved hand holding onto the boy, they made their way over the ridgeline and out of our sight.

A few minutes later they returned.

The boy was smiling and Holmes helped him get a hold of the rope and return to us on the ground.

My friend then took up the rope, detached the hook and called down.

"Have Mrs. Perkins meet me at the front door, Watson."

I did as he asked and soon we were all in the parlor by the fire.

"What did you find, Mr. Holmes?" asked Solicitor Smith.

"It was Carlton's discovery, Mr. Smith. Let him tell you."

We all turned to the lad who was warming his hands by the fire.

He looked at Holmes who merely nodded and then began his account.

"It appears that the man climbed up the drainpipe that runs down beside the front portico. That way his footprints wouldn't be noticed among all the others who came in and out that way, especially after the police were called. He then went over the roof and used a grappling hook and rope to climb down the side of the chimney and come in through the French doors."

His voice broke momentarily, but he pulled himself together and continued.

"He went back out the same way. While everyone assumed he had gone toward the back, he actually was going over the roof and back down the drainpipe where his footprints mixed in with the other foot traffic by the front door."

He looked to Holmes for affirmation and the detective gave him one of his rare snatches of a smile.

"There you have it Mr. Smith," Holmes declared.

"We now know how the deed was done and it certainly eliminates Perkins. We shall impart our findings to Inspector Williams to obtain his release. In the meantime, Watson

and I shall concentrate on suspects who are athletic and clever enough to pull off such a feat.”

Smith congratulated us, especially the young Piersall for his bravery and foresight.

Mrs. Perkins entered the room, all dressed up to go out and reminded the boy of an appointment they had.

“It’s time to go, Master Carlton. We must meet your Aunt Janet’s train and then lunch before we proceed to make arrangements for your father’s memorial.”

“Must I go?” he implored.

Holmes spoke up, “You are the one entrusted with your father’s legacy, Master Carlton. You should take a hand in preserving his memory and in comforting your aunt at the loss of her brother.”

“Very well,” he agreed, grudgingly.

After they had gone, Smith suggested we return to the study where his briefcase was located.

“Yes,” Holmes agreed.

“When Inspector Williams arrives I shall reveal to you all what really happened.”

Chapter Eight

At precisely eleven forty-five, Inspector Williams arrived, with Inspector Lestrade whose curiosity was up about the case.

With both the Perkins’ gone, the cook in the kitchen and the coachman out in his lodgings by the stables, Smith left us alone in the study to admit the

Scotland Yarders so they could join us.

Once we were all together, Holmes insisted Williams sit at Sir James’ desk.

He positioned the rest of us near the gun cabinet and stood himself at the French doors.

He then began to weave his tale.

“I have convinced the young Master Piersall, that his father was murdered by an intruder who came up over the rooftop and exited the same way, thus leaving no footprints to find. In time, we will report to him the culprit was killed in some manner so that he will be satisfied justice was served.”

“What sort of poppycock is this, Holmes?” demanded Williams.

“You said you knew who the murderer was.”

“I do,” replied the detective and in just a few minutes I shall tell you, but allow me to elaborate.”

Holmes went on to explain how he had journeyed to the Manor last night.

He was the one who performed the climb up the drainpipe by the front portico, crossed the roof, leaving the footprints for Master Carlton to discover, and returned the same way.

Smith spoke up at this point, “But why go to all this charade, Mr. Holmes?”

My friend looked at him and declared, “I believe that is what your client, Sir James, would have desired. I cannot perceive that he wished the

killer’s true identity to become known to his son.”

Lestrade piped up, “Are you saying Sir James knew who his killer was going to be?”

At this point the clock began its loud drumming to announce the noon hour and Holmes held up his hand, indicating he would answer when it was quiet again.

After the twelfth trill of drums, a panel on the clock’s front sprang open and a muffled bang was heard.

Williams sprang up out of Sir James’ chair immediately.

“What the devil....?”

“That is the ‘how’ gentlemen,” stated Holmes.

“I made up a smaller charged blank cartridge and set the mechanism when Mr. Smith went to let you in. It will only work when the clock strikes twelve, thus the crime had to be staged for noon or midnight. Sir James chose the latter.”

Williams blurted out, “Are you saying Sir James killed himself?”

“Yes, Inspector and I believe Dr. Watson can best explain why.”

Holmes bade us all sit down.

I composed myself to illuminate the Scotland Yarders as to the knight’s condition.

“Sir James was suffering from terminal cancer, gentlemen. It is likely that he has known for several months. Now his time was growing short. He apparently chose to end his

life quickly rather than through a debilitating demise.”

I turned back to my friend, “But what of the other attempts on his life, Holmes?”

“There was no corroboration to any of those, Watson. The incidents with the bricks or the runaway horse may or may not have happened. He mentioned them to Smith to establish a foundation for the final act.”

“But what about the shooting in the woods?” asked Smith.

“I saw the hole in his hat and dug the bullet out of the tree myself.”

“A bullet whose caliber matches that of the pistol recently fired, which Inspector Williams confiscated from the gun cabinet. I submit to you that Sir James shot the hole through the hat, deliberately aiming for the tree, so as to provide further proof of the plot against him.”

“But why all this tomfoolery, Holmes?” demanded Williams, “Why not just kill himself and be done with it?”

“For the sake of his son, Inspector,” Holmes replied.

“He did not wish to appear cowardly to the lad by committing suicide.”

“That may explain this,” said Smith, withdrawing an envelope from his briefcase marked ‘Police’.

“I was instructed to give this to the officer in charge of investigating Sir James murder after three days. I think now would be appropriate, however.”

Williams walked over and snatched the envelope from the solicitor with a growl.

He read quickly through it and shoved it at Lestrade while expelling an epithet that I shall not record here.

Lestrade perused its contents and looked up at Holmes.

“It appears you are correct, Mr. Holmes. This letter is Sir James’ confession of suicide and apologies to the police for any inconvenience. There is also a request that we not reveal the truth to his son but to leave it to Dr. Watson to weave a tale to explain his murder in a satisfactory manner. It seems, Doctor, that he puts great stock in your writing ability.”

Lestrade then turned to Williams, “We need to get back to the Yard and release Perkins immediately.”

Williams seethed but said nothing.

The two of them departed, leaving Holmes and I alone with Smith.

“How did you puzzle it out, Mr. Holmes?” asked the family lawyer.

“I had narrowed it down to four possible theories when Watson returned from Sir James’ autopsy. With the revelation of his disease and the deflected bullet, it became obvious that the source of the gunshot was not some stranger at the French doors, but some mechanism in or near the clock.”

“Could it not have been Perkins, acting on his master’s behalf?” enquired Smith.

“Sir James would not implicate his long time trusted servant in a plot

that could result in his facing murder charges,” answered Holmes.

“No, this act had to be under Sir James’ control, yet mechanically delivered, to ensure no wavering hand caused a debilitating injury rather than the relief of death.”

Holmes walked over to the clock and opened the panel which the shot had come from.

The clock itself was a combination of tradition and uniqueness.

Snuggled up against the edge of the fireplace one would expect it to be facing straight out into the room.

However, its footprint was a unique pentagonal shape.

The front was a traditional rectangle but as the sides extended backward after a few inches they turned in at forty five degrees, instead of ninety, forming a triangular back.

This caused the dial to be facing toward the desk, making it much easier to read for someone working there.

“Apparently, Sir James had run across this unique solution while traveling through Europe last summer. Whether through some underground source or unethical doctor, we shall probably never know.

“The clock itself, you will note, was made in Germany. Yet Piersall had travelled through Switzerland, the center of manufacturing for the finest clockmakers in the world. This begs the question, ‘Why a German clock?’

“Further examination shows it was not manufactured by any of the well-known German clockmakers, but

rather, custom made by a master craftsman, possibly Von Herder, though there are others with the skill and diabolical mindset to have conceived it.”

“But why bring you into the case, Holmes?” I asked.

“If my surmises are correct,” he answered, “I believe Mr. Smith has a further communication from Sir James that will explain all.”

Smith, who had sat mesmerized by Holmes explanation, suddenly started out of his concentration and fumbled through his briefcase, eventually producing another sealed envelope addressed to ‘Mr. Sherlock Holmes’.

He handed it to Holmes who, in turn, passed it to me.

“If you please, Doctor,” he requested.

I broke the seal, unfolded the pages and read:

“My Dear Mr. Sherlock Holmes, Congratulations! The fact that you are reading this letter indicates that you have solved the ‘mystery’ of my death. You must forgive Mr. Smith for his part in this deception. He was not aware of the particulars. He was instructed not to open the letter that led to the delivery of this note to you, until you had confided the solution of the crime to him. I confess that I had great admiration for your skills Mr. Holmes. I saw you as the law enforcement equivalent of my athletic abilities on the cricket field, someone who stands above the rest, if you will forgive my immodesty. Like myself, you are someone who studies all aspects of your craft. Its nuances to the science of the effects of friction, angles, spin and psychology. I also must confess to my

own cowardice as my demise drew nearer.

The type of death my doctor described to me was not something I wished to live through. Better to end it all quickly with that single bullet. But to give my death some meaning, I perceived this scheme to at least give my son a chance to meet his hero, for you are that to him, Mr. Holmes.

Many was the time when I would read Dr. Watson’s stories to him by the fire, or at his bedside. Often he said to me, he wished to grow up as a great athlete like me and then, as he grew older, to take up the mantle of private detection to assist the police as a detective, like you. I do hope my ruse has not taken time away from your solving more important cases. I trust that my reward of £500 each, for you and Dr. Watson, will recompense you for your time. As my own time grows short I am emboldened enough to ask one more favor. Please do not reveal the true nature of my death to my son. I know I can hardly expect you to admit failure in solving the crime, but if you or Dr. Watson can invent a satisfactory solution that saves face for all of us, my gratitude will be eternal, literally, I’m afraid.

Thank you for your diligence in resolving my case. I wish you continued success and the greetings of the Season.

Truly yours,
James Percival MBE”

“Holmes, did you suspect this? Is that why you involved the boy in the investigation?” I asked.

“Not at first, Watson,” he replied.

“Involving Master Carlton on that first day was merely an attempt to distract him from the cruel fact of his father’s

death. As the solution formed in my mind I elected to shield him further, through the exercise of the rooftop investigation.”

“You are a wise and brilliant man, Mr. Holmes,” said Smith, standing and shaking hands with each of us.

“Sir James chose well to involve you.”

He then went to inform a staff member we were leaving and that Perkins would be back soon.

We took our separate cabs.

Soon Holmes and I were back in front of the fire at Baker Street, enjoying a late lunch of hot soup and cold sandwiches, provided by the ever diligent Mrs. Hudson.

“A most unusual case, Holmes,” I recalled.

“You are to be congratulated.”

“It was your autopsy results that clinched my theory, Watson,” he replied.

“I do have a request for you, however.”

“Anything you wish, old man,” I answered, finishing my tea before it grew cold.

“You have enjoyed some recent successes at publishing our adventures, however, this particular case must not see the public eye,” he declared.

“Certainly, Holmes,” I replied.

“I would respect Sir James’ request not to reveal the truth to his son.”

“Even so,” he said, “when the boy is grown you may be tempted to fictionalize it. I cannot have people thinking they can use me as part of their own selfish games. I have real cases that must take precedence.”

“Of course, Holmes, I understand.”

He nodded his thanks, then asked, “Have you thought of what you will tell Master Carlton about the final solution to his father’s death?”

“I have a germ of an idea,” I answered.

“I will cultivate it over the next few days and see if it meets your approval.”

“Thank you, Watson, I’m sure your literary skills will be quite adequate to the task.”

He stood and strode to the fireplace, where he lit his pipe and settled into his chair with the afternoon papers, seeking out possibilities for his next case.

Epilogue

A few days later, on Christmas Eve, I sent the following missive to young Piersall:

Master Carlton, Felicitations of the Season, sir.

I am pleased to be able to present you with the solution to the events of last week.

I realize it is not the sort of Christmas present you would wish, but hopefully it will bring some peace to you.

Sherlock Holmes has discovered that the man who perpetrated the terrible deed upon your father was named Stevens.

He was a stone mason by trade, perhaps explaining his skill at climbing up and down the exterior of your home.

Apparently, he has held a grudge against your father for many years.

He had bet heavily against your father’s cricket team during the championship tournament back in ’75.

I’m sure you’ve read, and been told, of how your father led his teams’ near miraculous comeback to take the title.

This loss proved devastating to Stevens.

He lost his home and his wife left him.

He has roamed throughout England seeking work in an attempt to win his family back.

It appears however, that the incident affected his mind and a growing insanity kept him from lasting long at any employer.

Eventually, his mind turned to revenge against your father and he committed the crime.

Holmes had tracked him as far as Southampton, where it was believed he was attempting to flee to America or Canada.

Before he could apprehend him however, Stevens accosted another gentleman in an attempt to rob him for funds to obtain passage.

This gentleman, though, was an army officer on leave.

He killed Stevens in the confrontation.

Justice has been served, Master Carlton.

I hope that knowledge will give you peace in regards to your father, at this season of peace.

I remain faithfully yours,
John H. Watson, M.D.

#

One stone equals fourteen pounds

Editor’s note – There was a reference, written in the margin of Watson’s manuscript, that infers actions and dialogues which took place while he was not present were re-created from later interviews with Smith and Holmes