



His Last Bow

Adventure XLII -- The Adventure of Bruce-Partington Plans

First published in:

The Strand Magazine, and in *Collier's Weekly*, both December 1908.

Time frame of story (known/surmised):

November 21, 1895. (One of the few instances where Watson's statement of the date was totally clear.)

Holmes & Watson living arrangements:

Sharing quarters at 221B Baker St.

Opening scene:

November, and a dense yellow fog had enveloped London. The greasy, heavy brown swirl condensed in oily drops upon the windowpanes, and instilled a feeling of lethargy in Holmes & Watson. Holmes had on his mouse-coloured dressing-gown. Then, a telegram. Mycroft was planning a visit.

Coming at once, regarding Cadogan West, a young man who was found dead on the Underground on Tuesday morning.

Client:

The British Government, represented by Mycroft Holmes.



Crime or concern:

West's body found with skull crushed, alongside the tracks near the Aldgate Station on the Underground.

West was a junior clerk at the Woolwich Arsenal, and upon his body was found some of the missing plans (but not the most crucial portions) for a top-secret submarine of a radically new and important type. Enemy naval warfare would become impossible within the radius of a Bruce-Partington's operation.

Villain:

Col. Valentine Walter, brother of the head of the Submarine Department at the arsenal, Sir James Walter.

Motive:

Sell the plans to a foreign agent to cover a Stock Exchange debt that had to be paid.

Logic used to solve:

The key point was that West was killed elsewhere, and his body fell from the roof of the train. Deduced by Holmes from the fact that there was very little blood on the body even though there was a considerable wound. There was no ticket in West's pockets. There were points (switches, to Americans) on a curve of the tracks, so the carriage would pitch and sway as it came round.

Policemen:

Lestrade of Scotland Yard arrived at 221B accompanying Mycroft.

Holmes' fees:

"I play the game for the game's own sake," said Holmes. "But the problem certainly presents some points of interest, and I shall be very pleased to look into it." After solving the case and returning the submarine plans, Holmes got a fancy tie-pin from the Queen. No mention of a monetary reward.

Transport:

After inspecting the location where the body was found, Holmes & Watson took their seats in the Woolwich train. Then a cab to & from Sir James Walter's house, having learned Sir James had died. He was the government expert in charge of the plans and the arsenal. His decorations and sub-titles would fill two lines of a book of reference. He had grown gray in the service, was a gentleman, a had been a favoured guest in the most exalted houses, and, above all, a man whose patriotism was beyond suspicion.

Food:

Holmes ate at Goldini's garish Italian restaurant. Watson joined him there. Holmes & Watson had breakfast the next day, and a light dinner that evening. The day after Holmes & Watson burgled the spy's lodgings. Mycroft Holmes and Lestrade had come round by appointment after breakfast.

Drink:

At Goldini's Holmes & Watson had coffee and curacao.

Vices:

Holmes & Watson tried one of the proprietor's cigars, which were less poisonous than one would expect.

Other cases mentioned:

GREE, and also mention of Brooks and Woodhouse, who had good reason for wanting to take Holmes' life.

Notable Quotables:

"Act, Sherlock — act!" cried Mycroft, springing to his feet. Use your powers! Go to the scene of the crime! See the people concerned! Leave no stone unturned! In all your career you have never had so great a chance of serving your country."

"It was one of my friend's most obvious weaknesses that he was impatient with less alert intelligences than his own." — Watson, describing Holmes.

"See the foxhound with hanging ears and drooping tail as it lolls about the kennels, and compare it with the same hound as, with gleaming eyes and straining muscles, it runs upon a breast-high scent — such was the change in Holmes after he came up with the idea about the body falling off the train." — Watson, describing Holmes.

"It is fortunate for this community that I am not a criminal." — Holmes

Other interestings:

Having had some personal experience as a draughtsman, we wonder how much space is taken up by the plans for a submarine. We would guess closer to a truckload than a pocketful. But in this story, they were probably talking about the plans of some unique and important feature, not the whole thing. In any event, we at McMurdo's Camp do not view our role as questioning the premises of a story as related by the author.

Mycroft's salary in his government position was £450/year.

In this story, Holmes developed a new hobby, music of the Middle Ages. In his spare moments, he had undertaken a monograph upon the Polyphonic Motets of Lassus. It was later printed for private circulation, and was said by experts to be the last word upon the subject.

When all was said and done:

Once Holmes figured out the body had been placed upon the top of the carriage, he looked at the living quarters of known international spies, and quickly found the one whose rooms abutted upon the Underground (in a spot where the tracks were not under ground). He then lured the suspect to an appointment with a fake message in the agonies and captured the crooked colonel.

After the case was solved, Holmes spent a day at Windsor, whence he returned with a remarkably fine emerald tie-pin. When asked him if he had bought it, he answered that it was a present from a certain gracious lady in whose interests he had once been fortunate enough to carry out a small commission.

Colonel Walter died in prison two years later.

McMurdo's Camp