



Arthur Conan Doyle Encyclopedia

His Last Bow

Adventure XLII -- The Adventure of the Bruce-Partington Plans

SUMMARY (Diogenes Club)

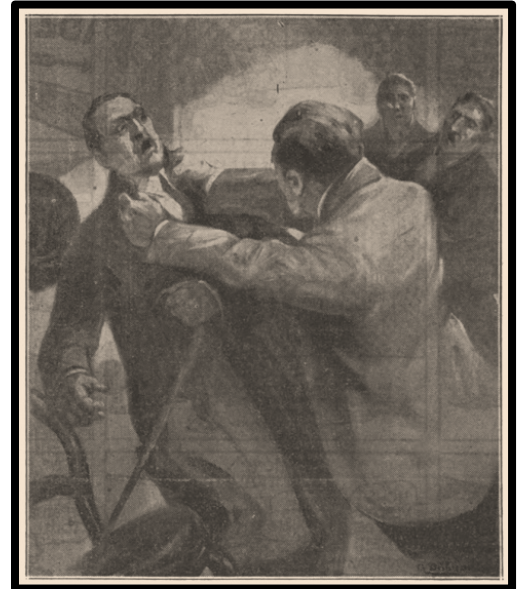
London has been blanketed in heavy fog for several days. Holmes is restless; he is studying the music of the middle ages. Mycroft comes to visit, accompanied by Lestrade. Holmes tells Watson that at times Mycroft IS the British government. Mycroft is "the most indispensable man in the country...his specialism is omniscience."

West's body has been found along the underground tracks near Aldgate station. He died of a fractured skull. In his pocket were the plans for the Bruce-Partington submarine, a revolutionary war machine. The plans were ultra-top-secret. There were 10 pages to the plans. Only seven were in West's pocket. The missing pages were almost enough to allow someone to construct a submarine. Mycroft implores Sherlock to find the missing pages.

West worked almost daily with the plans. Two people had keys to the safe - Sir James Walter and Sidney Johnson. Both had airtight alibis for the entire night of the murder.

Sidney Johnson is positive that the plans were in the safe when it was closed the day of the murder. He locked them there himself and was the last to leave the office. He also told Holmes that a fourth page of the plans, dealing with valves and compressors, would be extremely helpful to someone trying to build the submarine.

Holmes visits Sir James and finds that he has died suddenly, either from a heart attack or by his own hand.



He visits Violet and learns that she and Arthur were walking to the theater on the night of the murder when he suddenly stopped and told her to wait. They were near the arsenal office at the time. He did not return.

Holmes has Mycroft send him a list of foreign agents known to be in London at the time. One of them - Oberstein - lives beside the railroad tracks.

Holmes asks Watson to help him burglarize Oberstein's house. "'Think of the exalted person who waits. We are bound to go.' I rose from the table."

In the house they find the window from which West's body was placed on the train and a series of agony column ads placed by Oberstein, arranging to buy the plans.

Holmes places another ad asking to meet with the unknown seller that night. Watson is very restless while they wait but Holmes relaxes with "the polyphonic motets of Lassus."

Colonel Valentine Walter answers the ad and is caught. He copied his brother's keys. West saw a light through the shutters on his way to the theater and peeked in. He followed Valentine to Oberstein's house and confronted him. Oberstein clubbed him. Holmes has Valentine write a letter to Oberstein offering the additional page of gear/compressor plans. Oberstein is also captured and the plans recovered.

Colonel Walter died in prison. Oberstein served 15 years. The Queen gave Holmes an emerald stick-pin. Holmes published, for private circulation, a monograph on the polyphonic motets of Lassus, which is "the last word on the subject.

SUMMARY (ACD Encyclopedia)

One morning in November 1895, Sherlock Holmes is very surprised to receive a visit from his brother Mycroft, bringing him the case of Arthur Cadogan West. West was a civil servant found dead on subway tracks at Aldgate, with plans of a top secret submarine plans on his person. According to Mycroft, the plans were kept in a safe whose keys are held by men considered to be above suspicion: Sir James Walter and Sidney Johnson. Arthur Cadogan West was known as a serious employee, and Johnson's deputy. It is believed he stole plans to sell them and was killed during the transaction. But Holmes wonders why Cadogan West had stolen the plans while he could copy them.

Visiting the crime scene, Holmes deduces that the body fell from the roof of a subway car. He decides to pay a visit to Sir James, but only meets Sir James' brother, Colonel Valentine Walter, as Sir James has just died, stunned by the dishonor. Holmes and Watson then visit Cadogan West's fiancée, who informs him that the young man left her without explanation on the way to the theatre the night of the murder.

Holmes asks his brother which foreign agents are likely to have been interested in buying the plans. One of them, Hugo Oberstein, attracts Holmes' interest because his house has windows that overlook a railway. Accompanied by Watson, Holmes breaks into Oberstein's home and discovers traces of blood and an envelope of messages clipped from the Daily Telegraph's agony column referring to the transaction. Holmes then places an ad in the same newspaper to make an appointment with Oberstein's accomplice. Colonel Valentine Walter, brother of Sir James responds to the ad and is arrested. He admits that, pressed by debt, he stole the safe's keys and contacted Oberstein. Cadogan West, on the way to the theater, saw Colonel Walter enter the offices and followed him to the Oberstein's house. The spy killed the young man and threw his body on the roof of a train car, putting the less important pages of the plans in his pockets so that he will be believed to be the thief.

Holmes asks Colonel Walter, guilt ridden, to write to Oberstein requesting an appointment. The latter comes to the rendez-vous and is arrested. The Bruce-Partington plans are therefore found before being sold to a foreign power; as a result, Holmes returned from a day at Windsor a few weeks later with a fine emerald tie-pin.

SUMMARY (Wikipedia)

The monotony of thick smog-shrouded London is broken by a sudden visit from Holmes' brother Mycroft. He has come about some missing, secret submarine plans. Seven of the ten missing papers were found with Arthur Cadogan West's body, but the three "most essential" papers are still missing. West was a young clerk in a government office at Royal Arsenal, Woolwich, whose body was found next to the Underground tracks near the Aldgate tube station, his head crushed. He had little money with him (although there appears to have been no robbery), theatre tickets, and curiously, no Underground ticket.

Inspector Lestrade tells Holmes that a passenger reported hearing a thud, as though a body had fallen on the track, close to where West's body was found. The passenger could not see anything, however, owing to the thick fog.

After an examination of the track near Aldgate, Holmes concludes that West had been killed elsewhere, was deposited on the roof of an Underground train, and fell off when the jarring action of going across a railway point at Aldgate shook the coach.

Holmes decides to visit Sir James Walter, who was in charge of the papers. He has, however, died, apparently of a broken heart from the loss of his honour when the papers were stolen, according to his brother Colonel Valentine Walter.

On visiting West's fiancée, she tells Holmes that West had something on his mind for the last week or so of his life. He commented to her on how easily a traitor could get hold of "the secret" and how much a foreign agent would pay for it. Then, on the night in question, as the two of them were walking near his office, on the way to the theatre, he dashed off and did not return.

Holmes next goes to the office from which the plans were stolen. Sidney Johnson, the senior clerk, tells Holmes that, as always, he was the last man out of the office that night, and that he had put the papers in the safe. Anyone coming in afterwards to steal them would have needed three keys (for the building, the office, and the safe), but no duplicates were found on West's body, and only the late Sir James had all three keys. Johnson also mentions that one of the seven recovered papers includes an invention without which the submarine could not be properly built. Holmes also discovers that it is possible to see what is happening inside the office from outside even when the iron shutters are closed.

After leaving, Holmes finds that the clerk at the nearby Underground station remembers seeing West on the evening in question. Deeply shaken by something, he had taken a train to London Bridge.

Acting on information from Mycroft, and on what he has learnt thus far, Holmes identifies a person of interest, Hugo Oberstein, a known foreign agent who left town shortly after West's murder. Some small reconnaissance shows Holmes that Oberstein's house backs onto an above-ground Underground line, and that, owing to traffic at a nearby junction, trains often stop right under his windows. It seems clear now that West's body was laid on the train roof just there.

Holmes and Dr. Watson break into Oberstein's empty house and examine the windows, finding that the grime has been smudged, and there is a bloodstain. An Underground train stops right under the window. Some messages from the Daily Telegraph agony column, all seeming to allude to a business deal, are also found, posted by "Pierrot". Holmes posts a similarly cryptic message in the Daily Telegraph demanding a meeting, signing it Pierrot, in the hopes that the thief might show up at Oberstein's house.

It works. Colonel Valentine Walter shows up and is stunned to find Holmes, Watson, Lestrade, and Mycroft all waiting for him. He confesses to the theft of the plans, but swears that it was Oberstein who killed West. West had followed the Colonel to Oberstein's and then intervened, and Oberstein had dealt West a fatal blow to the head. Oberstein then decided, over the Colonel's objections, that he had to keep three of the papers, because they could not be copied in a short time. He then got the idea of putting the other seven in West's pocket and putting him on a train roof outside his window, reasoning that he would be blamed for the theft when his body was found.

Deep in debt, Colonel Walter had acted out of a need for money. He redeems himself somewhat by agreeing to write to Oberstein, whose address on the Continent he knows, inviting him to come back to

England for the fourth, vital page. This ruse also works; Oberstein is imprisoned, and the missing pages of the plans are recovered from his trunk. Colonel Walter dies in prison, not long after starting his sentence. For his efforts, Holmes is given an emerald tie pin by "a certain gracious lady", implied to be Queen Victoria, as the pin was received at Windsor in the 1890s.