

# The Mystery of Lord Blackwood

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The fog, that perennial London visitor, clung to the windows of 221B Baker Street like a spectral shroud. Within, Detective Arthur Pendleton sat ensconced in his armchair, a wreath of smoke from his briar pipe curling towards the ceiling. His study was a beautiful chaos of leather-bound books, chemical apparatus, and scattered papers.



"The alkaloid reaction is conclusive, Vance," Pendleton stated, not looking up from a precipitant in a glass vial. "A toxin derived from the *\*Aconitum\** genus. Remarkably fast-acting."

Dr. William Vance, perched on the edge of a chair, adjusted his round spectacles and made a hurried note in his pocketbook. "Monkshood? But Arthur, that's—"

Their discourse was shattered by a thunderous knock upon the door. Moments later, Inspector Harold Groves stood in the doorway, his stern face framed by impressive mutton chops, his police uniform damp from the fog. He held his lantern like a sceptre of authority.



"Pendleton. Vance. We've got a bad one. Lord Alistair Blackwood. Found dead in his library in Mayfair. The wife is... peculiar. The scene is untouched. Your particular talents are required."

Without a word, Pendleton seized his deerstalker and long trench coat. The chase had begun.

The carriage ride through the gaslit streets was a journey through a phantom city. Yellow haloes from the lamps fought a losing battle against the oppressive fog, creating shifting, amorphous

shapes in the gloom.



"The details, Groves," Pendleton demanded, his intelligent eyes gleaming in the intermittent light. "Found by the butler an hour ago. Lord Blackwood on the floor, a book beside him. No visible wound. Lady Blackwood was in her sitting room, claims she heard nothing. She's too calm, Pendleton. Ice cold."

Blackwood Manor's library was a tomb of knowledge turned crime scene. The body of Lord Blackwood, an elderly aristocrat in a fine silk suit, lay sprawled near a heavy oak desk. A volume of Tacitus's histories lay splayed open beside his outstretched hand. Other books were scattered

nearby, as if from a frantic search.



Pendleton became a vortex of activity. He dropped to his knees, examining the body without touching it, then scrutinised the floor, the desk, and the books. He used a magnifying glass to study the victim's fingernails and lips. Finally, he sniffed the air near the dead lord's face and plucked an almost invisible filament from the cuff of the fine suit. "Vance, note the faint, bitter almond scent beneath the port wine. And this... a single strand of dark hair, not his own."

Lady Blackwood was a vision of controlled elegance in the stark interrogation room. Her dark hair was impeccably coiffed, her red silk dress a splash of violent colour in the dim light. She held a fan,

not using it, but simply possessing it like a weapon. Her gaze was steady, secretive.



"My husband was a collector of rare texts, Detective," she said, her voice cool. "He often worked late. I retired early with a headache. I heard nothing until the scream."

"And the missing volume of his diary, My Lady?" Pendleton asked casually. "The one for this current year. It is not on the shelf with its fellows."

For the first time, a flicker of something-alarm?-crossed her face. "I... I wouldn't know."

Suddenly, a young constable burst in, whispering to Groves. The Inspector's eyes widened. "The footman's bolted! Saw us bringing in the mistress and took to the rooftops!"

Pendleton was already in motion. "The accomplice! He has the diary! Vance, with me!"

The chase was a mad ballet across a jagged, moonlit landscape of slates and chimneys. The fog thinned at this height, revealing a silver-drenched city below. Ahead, a dark figure scrambled desperately.



"He's heading for the mews!" Vance puffed, struggling to keep up.

Pendleton, moving with ferocious grace, cornered the fleeing footman on a precarious ledge overlooking a quiet street corner. Below, Groves and his men converged. The footman, clutching a small leather-bound book, surrendered with a whimper.

Back on solid ground, under the glow of a hissing gaslight, Pendleton assembled the truth. Lady Blackwood, her composure finally shattered, stood beside the arrested footman-her secret lover.



"The hair on his lordship's cuff was yours, Madam," Pendleton declared. "You argued when he discovered your affair and the money you'd embezzled, documented in his diary. You plucked the monkshood from your own garden days ago. You poisoned his evening port. The footman, here, was to stage the burglary and steal the incriminating diary, but the butler's early arrival panicked him, leading to the scattered books. The toxin's scent was masked by the wine, and the argument dislodged your hair."

Lady Blackwood said nothing, her fan clattering to the cobblestones. As Groves led her away, Pendleton turned to Vance. "The tragedy, Doctor, is not the murder, but the mundane greed that conceived it. A puzzle solved, yet the taste is peculiarly bitter." He lit his pipe, the match flare illuminating his sharp, weary features in the London dark.