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Arthur Conan Doyle

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The Adventure of the Bruce-Partington Plans

By

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle

In the third week of November, in the year 1895, a dense yellow fog

settled down upon London. From the Monday to the Thursday I doubt

whether it was ever possible from our windows in Baker Street to see

the loom of the opposite houses. The first day Holmes had spent in

cross-indexing his huge book of references. The second and third had

been patiently occupied upon a subject which he had recently made his

hobby--the music of the Middle Ages. But when, for the fourth time,

after pushing back our chairs from breakfast we saw the greasy, heavy

brown swirl still drifting past us and condensing in oily drops upon

the window-panes, my comrade's impatient and active nature could endure

this drab existence no longer. He paced restlessly about our

sitting-room in a fever of suppressed energy, biting his nails, tapping

the furniture, and chafing against inaction.

"Nothing of interest in the paper, Watson?" he said.

I was aware that by anything of interest, Holmes meant anything of

criminal interest. There was the news of a revolution, of a possible

war, and of an impending change of government; but these did not come

within the horizon of my companion. I could see nothing recorded in

the shape of crime which was not commonplace and futile. Holmes

groaned and resumed his restless meanderings.

"The London criminal is certainly a dull fellow," said he in the

querulous voice of the sportsman whose game has failed him. "Look out

this window, Watson. See how the figures loom up, are dimly seen, and

then blend once more into the cloud-bank. The thief or the murderer

could roam London on such a day as the tiger does the jungle, unseen

until he pounces, and then evident only to his victim."

"There have," said I, "been numerous petty thefts."

Holmes snorted his contempt.

"This great and sombre stage is set for something more worthy than

that," said he. "It is fortunate for this community that I am not a

criminal."

"It is, indeed!" said I heartily.

"Suppose that I were Brooks or Woodhouse, or any of the fifty men who

have good reason for taking my life, how long could I survive against

my own pursuit? A summons, a bogus appointment, and all would be over.

It is well they don't have days of fog in the Latin countries--the

countries of assassination. By Jove! here comes something at last to

break our dead monotony."

It was the maid with a telegram. Holmes tore it open and burst out

laughing.

"Well, well! What next?" said he. "Brother Mycroft is coming round."

"Why not?" I asked.

"Why not? It is as if you met a tram-car coming down a country lane.

Mycroft has his rails and he runs on them. His Pall Mall lodgings, the

Diogenes Club, Whitehall--that is his cycle. Once, and only once, he

has been here. What upheaval can possibly have derailed him?"

"Does he not explain?"

Holmes handed me his brother's telegram.

"Must see you over Cadogan West. Coming at once."

MYCROFT.

"Cadogan West? I have heard the name."

"It recalls nothing to my mind. But that Mycroft should break out in

this erratic fashion! A planet might as well leave its orbit. By the

way, do you know what Mycroft is?"

I had some vague recollection of an explanation at the time of the

Adventure of the Greek Interpreter.

"You told me that he had some small office under the British

government."

Holmes chuckled.

"I did not know you quite so well in those days. One has to be

discreet when one talks of high matters of state. You are right in

thinking that he is under the British government. You would also be right

in a sense if you said that occasionally he IS the British government."

"My dear Holmes!"

"I thought I might surprise you. Mycroft draws four hundred and fifty

pounds a year, remains a subordinate, has no ambitions of any kind,

will receive neither honour nor title, but remains the most

indispensable man in the country."

"But how?"

"Well, his position is unique. He has made it for himself. There has

never been anything like it before, nor will be again. He has the

tidiest and most orderly brain, with the greatest capacity for storing

facts, of any man living. The same great powers which I have turned to

the detection of crime he has used for this particular business. The

conclusions of every department are passed to him, and he is the

central exchange, the clearinghouse, which makes out the balance. All

other men are specialists, but his specialism is omniscience. We will

suppose that a minister needs information as to a point which involves

the Navy, India, Canada and the bimetallic question; he could get his

separate advices from various departments upon each, but only Mycroft

can focus them all, and say offhand how each factor would affect the

other. They began by using him as a short-cut, a convenience; now he

has made himself an essential. In that great brain of his everything

is pigeon-holed and can be handed out in an instant. Again and again

his word has decided the national policy. He lives in it. He thinks

of nothing else save when, as an intellectual exercise, he unbends if I

call upon him and ask him to advise me on one of my little problems.

But Jupiter is descending to-day. What on earth can it mean? Who is

Cadogan West, and what is he to Mycroft?"

"I have it," I cried, and plunged among the litter of papers upon the

sofa. "Yes, yes, here he is, sure enough! Cadogan West was the young

man who was found dead on the Underground on Tuesday morning."

Holmes sat up at attention, his pipe halfway to his lips.

"This must be serious, Watson. A death which has caused my brother to

alter his habits can be no ordinary one. What in the world can he have

to do with it? The case was featureless as I remember it. The young

man had apparently fallen out of the train and killed himself. He had

not been robbed, and there was no particular reason to suspect

violence. Is that not so?"

"There has been an inquest," said I, "and a good many fresh facts have

come out. Looked at more closely, I should certainly say that it was a

curious case."

"Judging by its effect upon my brother, I should think it must be a

most extraordinary one." He snuggled down in his armchair. "Now,

Watson, let us have the facts."

"The man's name was Arthur Cadogan West. He was twenty-seven years of

age, unmarried, and a clerk at Woolwich Arsenal."

"Government employ. Behold the link with Brother Mycroft!"

"He left Woolwich suddenly on Monday night. Was last seen by his

fiancee, Miss Violet Westbury, whom he left abruptly in the fog about

7:30 that evening. There was no quarrel between them and she can give

no motive for his action. The next thing heard of him was when his

dead body was discovered by a plate-layer named Mason, just outside

Aldgate Station on the Underground system in London."

"When?"

"The body was found at six on Tuesday morning. It was lying wide of

the metals upon the left hand of the track as one goes eastward, at a

point close to the station, where the line emerges from the tunnel in

which it runs. The head was badly crushed--an injury which might well

have been caused by a fall from the train. The body could only have

come on the line in that way. Had it been carried down from any

neighbouring street, it must have passed the station barriers, where a

collector is always standing. This point seems absolutely certain."

"Very good. The case is definite enough. The man, dead or alive,

either fell or was precipitated from a train. So much is clear to me.

Continue."

"The trains which traverse the lines of rail beside which the body was

found are those which run from west to east, some being purely

Metropolitan, and some from Willesden and outlying junctions. It can

be stated for certain that this young man, when he met his death, was

travelling in this direction at some late hour of the night, but at

what point he entered the train it is impossible to state."

"His ticket, of course, would show that."

"There was no ticket in his pockets."

"No ticket! Dear me, Watson, this is really very singular. According

to my experience it is not possible to reach the platform of a

Metropolitan train without exhibiting one's ticket. Presumably, then,

the young man had one. Was it taken from him in order to conceal the

station from which he came? It is possible. Or did he drop it in the

carriage? That is also possible. But the point is of curious

interest. I understand that there was no sign of robbery?"

"Apparently not. There is a list here of his possessions. His purse

contained two pounds fifteen. He had also a check-book on the Woolwich

branch of the Capital and Counties Bank. Through this his identity was

established. There were also two dress-circle tickets for the Woolwich

Theatre, dated for that very evening. Also a small packet of technical

papers."

Holmes gave an exclamation of satisfaction.

"There we have it at last, Watson! British government--Woolwich.

Arsenal--technical papers--Brother Mycroft, the chain is complete. But

here he comes, if I am not mistaken, to speak for himself."

A moment later the tall and portly form of Mycroft Holmes was ushered

into the room. Heavily built and massive, there was a suggestion of

uncouth physical inertia in the figure, but above this unwieldy frame

there was perched a head so masterful in its brow, so alert in its

steel-gray, deep-set eyes, so firm in its lips, and so subtle in its

play of expression, that after the first glance one forgot the gross

body and remembered only the dominant mind.

At his heels came our old friend Lestrade, of Scotland Yard--thin and

austere. The gravity of both their faces foretold some weighty quest.

The detective shook hands without a word. Mycroft Holmes struggled out

of his overcoat and subsided into an armchair.

"A most annoying business, Sherlock," said he. "I extremely dislike

altering my habits, but the powers that be would take no denial. In

the present state of Siam it is most awkward that I should be away from

the office. But it is a real crisis. I have never seen the Prime

Minister so upset. As to the Admiralty--it is buzzing like an

overturned bee-hive. Have you read up the case?"

"We have just done so. What were the technical papers?"

"Ah, there's the point! Fortunately, it has not come out. The press

would be furious if it did. The papers which this wretched youth had

in his pocket were the plans of the Bruce-Partington submarine."

Mycroft Holmes spoke with a solemnity which showed his sense of the

importance of the subject. His brother and I sat expectant.

"Surely you have heard of it? I thought everyone had heard of it."

"Only as a name."

"Its importance can hardly be exaggerated. It has been the most

jealously guarded of all government secrets. You may take it from me

that naval warfare becomes impossible within the radius of a

Bruce-Partington's operation. Two years ago a very large sum was

smuggled through the Estimates and was expended in acquiring a monopoly

of the invention. Every effort has been made to keep the secret. The

plans, which are exceedingly intricate, comprising some thirty separate

patents, each essential to the working of the whole, are kept in an

elaborate safe in a confidential office adjoining the arsenal, with

burglar-proof doors and windows. Under no conceivable circumstances

were the plans to be taken from the office. If the chief constructor

of the Navy desired to consult them, even he was forced to go to the

Woolwich office for the purpose. And yet here we find them in the

pocket of a dead junior clerk in the heart of London. From an official

point of view it's simply awful."

"But you have recovered them?"

"No, Sherlock, no! That's the pinch. We have not. Ten papers were

taken from Woolwich. There were seven in the pocket of Cadogan West.

The three most essential are gone--stolen, vanished. You must drop

everything, Sherlock. Never mind your usual petty puzzles of the

police-court. It's a vital international problem that you have to

solve. Why did Cadogan West take the papers, where are the missing

ones, how did he die, how came his body where it was found, how can the

evil be set right? Find an answer to all these questions, and you will

have done good service for your country."

"Why do you not solve it yourself, Mycroft? You can see as far as I."

"Possibly, Sherlock. But it is a question of getting details. Give me

your details, and from an armchair I will return you an excellent

expert opinion. But to run here and run there, to cross-question

railway guards, and lie on my face with a lens to my eye--it is not my

metier. No, you are the one man who can clear the matter up. If you

have a fancy to see your name in the next honours list--"

My friend smiled and shook his head.

"I play the game for the game's own sake," said he. "But the problem

certainly presents some points of interest, and I shall be very pleased

to look into it. Some more facts, please."

"I have jotted down the more essential ones upon this sheet of paper,

together with a few addresses which you will find of service. The

actual official guardian of the papers is the famous government expert,

Sir James Walter, whose decorations and sub-titles fill two lines of a

book of reference. He has grown gray in the service, is a gentleman, a

favoured guest in the most exalted houses, and, above all, a man whose

patriotism is beyond suspicion. He is one of two who have a key of the

safe. I may add that the papers were undoubtedly in the office during

working hours on Monday, and that Sir James left for London about three

o'clock taking his key with him. He was at the house of Admiral

Sinclair at Barclay Square during the whole of the evening when this

incident occurred."

"Has the fact been verified?"

"Yes; his brother, Colonel Valentine Walter, has testified to his

departure from Woolwich, and Admiral Sinclair to his arrival in London;

so Sir James is no longer a direct factor in the problem."

"Who was the other man with a key?"

"The senior clerk and draughtsman, Mr. Sidney Johnson. He is a man of

forty, married, with five children. He is a silent, morose man, but he

has, on the whole, an excellent record in the public service. He is

unpopular with his colleagues, but a hard worker. According to his own

account, corroborated only by the word of his wife, he was at home the

whole of Monday evening after office hours, and his key has never left

the watch-chain upon which it hangs."

"Tell us about Cadogan West."

"He has been ten years in the service and has done good work. He has

the reputation of being hot-headed and imperious, but a straight,

honest man. We have nothing against him. He was next Sidney Johnson

in the office. His duties brought him into daily, personal contact

with the plans. No one else had the handling of them."

"Who locked up the plans that night?"

"Mr. Sidney Johnson, the senior clerk."

"Well, it is surely perfectly clear who took them away. They are

actually found upon the person of this junior clerk, Cadogan West.

That seems final, does it not?"

"It does, Sherlock, and yet it leaves so much unexplained. In the

first place, why did he take them?"

"I presume they were of value?"

"He could have got several thousands for them very easily."

"Can you suggest any possible motive for taking the papers to London

except to sell them?"

"No, I cannot."

"Then we must take that as our working hypothesis. Young West took the

papers. Now this could only be done by having a false key--"

"Several false keys. He had to open the building and the room."

"He had, then, several false keys. He took the papers to London to

sell the secret, intending, no doubt, to have the plans themselves back

in the safe next morning before they were missed. While in London on

this treasonable mission he met his end."

"How?"

"We will suppose that he was travelling back to Woolwich when he was

killed and thrown out of the compartment."

"Aldgate, where the body was found, is considerably past the station

London Bridge, which would be his route to Woolwich."

"Many circumstances could be imagined under which he would pass London

Bridge. There was someone in the carriage, for example, with whom he

was having an absorbing interview. This interview led to a violent

scene in which he lost his life. Possibly he tried to leave the

carriage, fell out on the line, and so met his end. The other closed

the door. There was a thick fog, and nothing could be seen."

"No better explanation can be given with our present knowledge; and yet

consider, Sherlock, how much you leave untouched. We will suppose, for

argument's sake, that young Cadogan West HAD determined to convey these

papers to London. He would naturally have made an appointment with the

foreign agent and kept his evening clear. Instead of that he took two

tickets for the theatre, escorted his fiancee halfway there, and then

suddenly disappeared."

"A blind," said Lestrade, who had sat listening with some impatience to

the conversation.

"A very singular one. That is objection No. 1. Objection No. 2: We

will suppose that he reaches London and sees the foreign agent. He

must bring back the papers before morning or the loss will be

discovered. He took away ten. Only seven were in his pocket. What

had become of the other three? He certainly would not leave them of

his own free will. Then, again, where is the price of his treason?

Once would have expected to find a large sum of money in his pocket."

"It seems to me perfectly clear," said Lestrade. "I have no doubt at

all as to what occurred. He took the papers to sell them. He saw the

agent. They could not agree as to price. He started home again, but

the agent went with him. In the train the agent murdered him, took the

more essential papers, and threw his body from the carriage. That

would account for everything, would it not?"

"Why had he no ticket?"

"The ticket would have shown which station was nearest the agent's

house. Therefore he took it from the murdered man's pocket."

"Good, Lestrade, very good," said Holmes. "Your theory holds together.

But if this is true, then the case is at an end. On the one hand, the

traitor is dead. On the other, the plans of the Bruce-Partington

submarine are presumably already on the Continent. What is there for

us to do?"

"To act, Sherlock--to act!" cried Mycroft, springing to his feet. "All

my instincts are against this explanation. 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."

"Well, well!" said Holmes, shrugging his shoulders. "Come, Watson!

And you, Lestrade, could you favour us with your company for an hour or

two? We will begin our investigation by a visit to Aldgate Station.

Good-bye, Mycroft. I shall let you have a report before evening, but I

warn you in advance that you have little to expect."

An hour later Holmes, Lestrade and I stood upon the Underground

railroad at the point where it emerges from the tunnel immediately

before Aldgate Station. A courteous red-faced old gentleman

represented the railway company.

"This is where the young man's body lay," said he, indicating a spot

about three feet from the metals. "It could not have fallen from

above, for these, as you see, are all blank walls. Therefore, it could

only have come from a train, and that train, so far as we can trace it,

must have passed about midnight on Monday."

"Have the carriages been examined for any sign of violence?"

"There are no such signs, and no ticket has been found."

"No record of a door being found open?"

"None."

"We have had some fresh evidence this morning," said Lestrade. "A

passenger who passed Aldgate in an ordinary Metropolitan train about

11:40 on Monday night declares that he heard a heavy thud, as of a body

striking the line, just before the train reached the station. There

was dense fog, however, and nothing could be seen. He made no report

of it at the time. Why, whatever is the matter with Mr. Holmes?"

My friend was standing with an expression of strained intensity upon

his face, staring at the railway metals where they curved out of the

tunnel. Aldgate is a junction, and there was a network of points. On

these his eager, questioning eyes were fixed, and I saw on his keen,

alert face that tightening of the lips, that quiver of the nostrils,

and concentration of the heavy, tufted brows which I knew so well.

"Points," he muttered; "the points."

"What of it? What do you mean?"

"I suppose there are no great number of points on a system such as

this?"

"No; they are very few."

"And a curve, too. Points, and a curve. By Jove! if it were only so."

"What is it, Mr. Holmes? Have you a clue?"

"An idea--an indication, no more. But the case certainly grows in

interest. Unique, perfectly unique, and yet why not? I do not see any

indications of bleeding on the line."

"There were hardly any."

"But I understand that there was a considerable wound."

"The bone was crushed, but there was no great external injury."

"And yet one would have expected some bleeding. Would it be possible

for me to inspect the train which contained the passenger who heard the

thud of a fall in the fog?"

"I fear not, Mr. Holmes. The train has been broken up before now, and

the carriages redistributed."

"I can assure you, Mr. Holmes," said Lestrade, "that every carriage has

been carefully examined. I saw to it myself."

It was one of my friend's most obvious weaknesses that he was impatient

with less alert intelligences than his own.

"Very likely," said he, turning away. "As it happens, it was not the

carriages which I desired to examine. Watson, we have done all we can

here. We need not trouble you any further, Mr. Lestrade. I think our

investigations must now carry us to Woolwich."

At London Bridge, Holmes wrote a telegram to his brother, which he

handed to me before dispatching it. It ran thus:

See some light in the darkness, but it may possibly flicker out.

Meanwhile, please send by messenger, to await return at Baker Street, a

complete list of all foreign spies or international agents known to be

in England, with full address.

Sherlock.

"That should be helpful, Watson," he remarked as we took our seats in

the Woolwich train. "We certainly owe Brother Mycroft a debt for

having introduced us to what promises to be a really very remarkable

case."

His eager face still wore that expression of intense and high-strung

energy, which showed me that some novel and suggestive circumstance had

opened up a stimulating line of thought. 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 since the

morning. He was a different man from the limp and lounging figure in

the mouse-coloured dressing-gown who had prowled so restlessly only a

few hours before round the fog-girt room.

"There is material here. There is scope," said he. "I am dull indeed

not to have understood its possibilities."

"Even now they are dark to me."

"The end is dark to me also, but I have hold of one idea which may lead

us far. The man met his death elsewhere, and his body was on the ROOF

of a carriage."

"On the roof!"

"Remarkable, is it not? But consider the facts. Is it a coincidence

that it is found at the very point where the train pitches and sways as

it comes round on the points? Is not that the place where an object

upon the roof might be expected to fall off? The points would affect

no object inside the train. Either the body fell from the roof, or a

very curious coincidence has occurred. But now consider the question

of the blood. Of course, there was no bleeding on the line if the body

had bled elsewhere. Each fact is suggestive in itself. Together they

have a cumulative force."

"And the ticket, too!" I cried.

"Exactly. We could not explain the absence of a ticket. This would

explain it. Everything fits together."

"But suppose it were so, we are still as far as ever from unravelling

the mystery of his death. Indeed, it becomes not simpler but stranger."

"Perhaps," said Holmes, thoughtfully, "perhaps." He relapsed into a

silent reverie, which lasted until the slow train drew up at last in

Woolwich Station. There he called a cab and drew Mycroft's paper from

his pocket.

"We have quite a little round of afternoon calls to make," said he. "I

think that Sir James Walter claims our first attention."

The house of the famous official was a fine villa with green lawns

stretching down to the Thames. As we reached it the fog was lifting,

and a thin, watery sunshine was breaking through. A butler answered

our ring.

"Sir James, sir!" said he with solemn face. "Sir James died this

morning."

"Good heavens!" cried Holmes in amazement. "How did he die?"

"Perhaps you would care to step in, sir, and see his brother, Colonel

Valentine?"

"Yes, we had best do so."

We were ushered into a dim-lit drawing-room, where an instant later we

were joined by a very tall, handsome, light-beared man of fifty, the

younger brother of the dead scientist. His wild eyes, stained cheeks,

and unkempt hair all spoke of the sudden blow which had fallen upon the

household. He was hardly articulate as he spoke of it.

"It was this horrible scandal," said he. "My brother, Sir James, was a

man of very sensitive honour, and he could not survive such an affair.

It broke his heart. He was always so proud of the efficiency of his

department, and this was a crushing blow."

"We had hoped that he might have given us some indications which would

have helped us to clear the matter up."

"I assure you that it was all a mystery to him as it is to you and to

all of us. He had already put all his knowledge at the disposal of the

police. Naturally he had no doubt that Cadogan West was guilty. But

all the rest was inconceivable."

"You cannot throw any new light upon the affair?"

"I know nothing myself save what I have read or heard. I have no

desire to be discourteous, but you can understand, Mr. Holmes, that we

are much disturbed at present, and I must ask you to hasten this

interview to an end."

"This is indeed an unexpected development," said my friend when we had

regained the cab. "I wonder if the death was natural, or whether the

poor old fellow killed himself! If the latter, may it be taken as some

sign of self-reproach for duty neglected? We must leave that question

to the future. Now we shall turn to the Cadogan Wests."

A small but well-kept house in the outskirts of the town sheltered the

bereaved mother. The old lady was too dazed with grief to be of any

use to us, but at her side was a white-faced young lady, who introduced

herself as Miss Violet Westbury, the fiancee of the dead man, and the

last to see him upon that fatal night.

"I cannot explain it, Mr. Holmes," she said. "I have not shut an eye

since the tragedy, thinking, thinking, thinking, night and day, what

the true meaning of it can be. 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."

"But the facts, Miss Westbury?"

"Yes, yes; I admit I cannot explain them."

"Was he in any want of money?"

"No; his needs were very simple and his salary ample. He had saved a

few hundreds, and we were to marry at the New Year."

"No signs of any mental excitement? Come, Miss Westbury, be absolutely

frank with us."

The quick eye of my companion had noted some change in her manner. She

coloured and hesitated.

"Yes," she said at last, "I had a feeling that there was something on

his mind."

"For long?"

"Only for the last week or so. He was thoughtful and worried. Once I

pressed him about it. He admitted that there was something, and that

it was concerned with his official life. 'It is too serious for me to

speak about, even to you,' said he. I could get nothing more."

Holmes looked grave.

"Go on, Miss Westbury. Even if it seems to tell against him, go on.

We cannot say what it may lead to."

"Indeed, I have nothing more to tell. Once or twice it seemed to me

that he was on the point of telling me something. He spoke one evening

of the importance of the secret, and I have some recollection that he

said that no doubt foreign spies would pay a great deal to have it."

My friend's face grew graver still.

"Anything else?"

"He said that we were slack about such matters--that it would be easy

for a traitor to get the plans."

"Was it only recently that he made such remarks?"

"Yes, quite recently."

"Now tell us of that last evening."

"We were to go to the theatre. The fog was so thick that a cab was

useless. We walked, and our way took us close to the office. Suddenly

he darted away into the fog."

"Without a word?"

"He gave an exclamation; that was all. I waited but he never returned.

Then I walked home. Next morning, after the office opened, they came

to inquire. About twelve o'clock we heard the terrible news. Oh, Mr.

Holmes, if you could only, only save his honour! It was so much to

him."

Holmes shook his head sadly.

"Come, Watson," said he, "our ways lie elsewhere. Our next station

must be the office from which the papers were taken.

"It was black enough before against this young man, but our inquiries

make it blacker," he remarked as the cab lumbered off. "His coming

marriage gives a motive for the crime. He naturally wanted money. The

idea was in his head, since he spoke about it. He nearly made the girl

an accomplice in the treason by telling her his plans. It is all very

bad."

"But surely, Holmes, character goes for something? Then, again, why

should he leave the girl in the street and dart away to commit a

felony?"

"Exactly! There are certainly objections. But it is a formidable case

which they have to meet."

Mr. Sidney Johnson, the senior clerk, met us at the office and received

us with that respect which my companion's card always commanded. He

was a thin, gruff, bespectacled man of middle age, his cheeks haggard,

and his hands twitching from the nervous strain to which he had been

subjected.

"It is bad, Mr. Holmes, very bad! Have you heard of the death of the

chief?"

"We have just come from his house."

"The place is disorganized. The chief dead, Cadogan West dead, our

papers stolen. And yet, when we closed our door on Monday evening, we

were as efficient an office as any in the government service. Good

God, it's dreadful to think of! That West, of all men, should have

done such a thing!"

"You are sure of his guilt, then?"

"I can see no other way out of it. And yet I would have trusted him as

I trust myself."

"At what hour was the office closed on Monday?"

"At five."

"Did you close it?"

"I am always the last man out."

"Where were the plans?"

"In that safe. I put them there myself."

"Is there no watchman to the building?"

"There is, but he has other departments to look after as well. He is an

old soldier and a most trustworthy man. He saw nothing that evening.

Of course the fog was very thick."

"Suppose that Cadogan West wished to make his way into the building

after hours; he would need three keys, would he not, before he could

reach the papers?"

"Yes, he would. The key of the outer door, the key of the office, and

the key of the safe."

"Only Sir James Walter and you had those keys?"

"I had no keys of the doors--only of the safe."

"Was Sir James a man who was orderly in his habits?"

"Yes, I think he was. I know that so far as those three keys are

concerned he kept them on the same ring. I have often seen them there."

"And that ring went with him to London?"

"He said so."

"And your key never left your possession?"

"Never."

"Then West, if he is the culprit, must have had a duplicate. And yet

none was found upon his body. One other point: if a clerk in this

office desired to sell the plans, would it not be simpler to copy the

plans for himself than to take the originals, as was actually done?"

"It would take considerable technical knowledge to copy the plans in an

effective way."

"But I suppose either Sir James, or you, or West has that technical

knowledge?"

"No doubt we had, but I beg you won't try to drag me into the matter,

Mr. Holmes. What is the use of our speculating in this way when the

original plans were actually found on West?"

"Well, it is certainly singular that he should run the risk of taking

originals if he could safely have taken copies, which would have

equally served his turn."

"Singular, no doubt--and yet he did so."

"Every inquiry in this case reveals something inexplicable. Now there

are three papers still missing. They are, as I understand, the vital

ones."

"Yes, that is so."

"Do you mean to say that anyone holding these three papers, and without

the seven others, could construct a Bruce-Partington submarine?"

"I reported to that effect to the Admiralty. But to-day I have been

over the drawings again, and I am not so sure of it. The double valves

with the automatic self-adjusting slots are drawn in one of the papers

which have been returned. Until the foreigners had invented that for

themselves they could not make the boat. Of course they might soon get

over the difficulty."

"But the three missing drawings are the most important?"

"Undoubtedly."

"I think, with your permission, I will now take a stroll round the

premises. I do not recall any other question which I desired to ask."

He examined the lock of the safe, the door of the room, and finally the

iron shutters of the window. It was only when we were on the lawn

outside that his interest was strongly excited. There was a laurel bush

outside the window, and several of the branches bore signs of having

been twisted or snapped. He examined them carefully with his lens, and

then some dim and vague marks upon the earth beneath. Finally he asked

the chief clerk to close the iron shutters, and he pointed out to me

that they hardly met in the centre, and that it would be possible for

anyone outside to see what was going on within the room.

"The indications are ruined by three days' delay. They may mean

something or nothing. Well, Watson, I do not think that Woolwich can

help us further. It is a small crop which we have gathered. Let us see

if we can do better in London."

Yet we added one more sheaf to our harvest before we left Woolwich

Station. The clerk in the ticket office was able to say with

confidence that he saw Cadogan West--whom he knew well by sight--upon

the Monday night, and that he went to London by the 8:15 to London

Bridge. He was alone and took a single third-class ticket. The clerk

was struck at the time by his excited and nervous manner. So shaky was

he that he could hardly pick up his change, and the clerk had helped

him with it. A reference to the timetable showed that the 8:15 was the

first train which it was possible for West to take after he had left

the lady about 7:30.

"Let us reconstruct, Watson," said Holmes after half an hour of

silence. "I am not aware that in all our joint researches we have ever

had a case which was more difficult to get at. Every fresh advance

which we make only reveals a fresh ridge beyond. And yet we have surely

made some appreciable progress.

"The effect of our inquiries at Woolwich has in the main been against

young Cadogan West; but the indications at the window would lend

themselves to a more favourable hypothesis. Let us suppose, for

example, that he had been approached by some foreign agent. It might

have been done under such pledges as would have prevented him from

speaking of it, and yet would have affected his thoughts in the

direction indicated by his remarks to his fiancee. Very good. We will

now suppose that as he went to the theatre with the young lady he

suddenly, in the fog, caught a glimpse of this same agent going in the

direction of the office. He was an impetuous man, quick in his

decisions. Everything gave way to his duty. He followed the man,

reached the window, saw the abstraction of the documents, and pursued

the thief. In this way we get over the objection that no one would

take originals when he could make copies. This outsider had to take

originals. So far it holds together."

"What is the next step?"

"Then we come into difficulties. One would imagine that under such

circumstances the first act of young Cadogan West would be to seize the

villain and raise the alarm. Why did he not do so? Could it have been

an official superior who took the papers? That would explain West's

conduct. Or could the chief have given West the slip in the fog, and

West started at once to London to head him off from his own rooms,

presuming that he knew where the rooms were? The call must have been

very pressing, since he left his girl standing in the fog and made no

effort to communicate with her. Our scent runs cold here, and there is

a vast gap between either hypothesis and the laying of West's body,

with seven papers in his pocket, on the roof of a Metropolitan train.

My instinct now is to work from the other end. If Mycroft has given us

the list of addresses we may be able to pick our man and follow two

tracks instead of one."

Surely enough, a note awaited us at Baker Street. A government

messenger had brought it post-haste. Holmes glanced at it and threw it

over to me.

There are numerous small fry, but few who would handle so big an

affair. The only men worth considering are Adolph Mayer, of 13 Great

George Street, Westminster; Louis La Rothiere, of Campden Mansions,

Notting Hill; and Hugo Oberstein, 13 Caulfield Gardens, Kensington.

The latter was known to be in town on Monday and is now reported as

having left. Glad to hear you have seen some light. The Cabinet

awaits your final report with the utmost anxiety. Urgent

representations have arrived from the very highest quarter. The whole

force of the State is at your back if you should need it.

Mycroft.

"I'm afraid," said Holmes, smiling, "that all the queen's horses and

all the queen's men cannot avail in this matter." He had spread out

his big map of London and leaned eagerly over it. "Well, well," said he

presently with an exclamation of satisfaction, "things are turning a

little in our direction at last. Why, Watson, I do honestly believe

that we are going to pull it off, after all." He slapped me on the

shoulder with a sudden burst of hilarity. "I am going out now. It is

only a reconnaissance. I will do nothing serious without my trusted

comrade and biographer at my elbow. Do you stay here, and the odds are

that you will see me again in an hour or two. If time hangs heavy get

foolscap and a pen, and begin your narrative of how we saved the State."

I felt some reflection of his elation in my own mind, for I knew well

that he would not depart so far from his usual austerity of demeanour

unless there was good cause for exultation. All the long November

evening I waited, filled with impatience for his return. At last,

shortly after nine o'clock, there arrived a messenger with a note:

Am dining at Goldini's Restaurant, Gloucester Road, Kensington. Please

come at once and join me there. Bring with you a jemmy, a dark

lantern, a chisel, and a revolver.

S.H.

It was a nice equipment for a respectable citizen to carry through the

dim, fog-draped streets. I stowed them all discreetly away in my

overcoat and drove straight to the address given. There sat my friend

at a little round table near the door of the garish Italian restaurant.

"Have you had something to eat? Then join me in a coffee and curacao.

Try one of the proprietor's cigars. They are less poisonous than one

would expect. Have you the tools?"

"They are here, in my overcoat."

"Excellent. Let me give you a short sketch of what I have done, with

some indication of what we are about to do. Now it must be evident to

you, Watson, that this young man's body was PLACED on the roof of the

train. That was clear from the instant that I determined the fact that

it was from the roof, and not from a carriage, that he had fallen."

"Could it not have been dropped from a bridge?"

"I should say it was impossible. If you examine the roofs you will

find that they are slightly rounded, and there is no railing round

them. Therefore, we can say for certain that young Cadogan West was

placed on it."

"How could he be placed there?"

"That was the question which we had to answer. There is only one

possible way. You are aware that the Underground runs clear of tunnels

at some points in the West End. I had a vague memory that as I have

travelled by it I have occasionally seen windows just above my head.

Now, suppose that a train halted under such a window, would there be

any difficulty in laying a body upon the roof?"

"It seems most improbable."

"We must fall back upon the old axiom that when all other contingencies

fail, whatever remains, however improbable, must be the truth. Here

all other contingencies HAVE failed. When I found that the leading

international agent, who had just left London, lived in a row of houses

which abutted upon the Underground, I was so pleased that you were a

little astonished at my sudden frivolity."

"Oh, that was it, was it?"

"Yes, that was it. Mr. Hugo Oberstein, of 13 Caulfield Gardens, had

become my objective. I began my operations at Gloucester Road Station,

where a very helpful official walked with me along the track and

allowed me to satisfy myself not only that the back-stair windows of

Caulfield Gardens open on the line but the even more essential fact

that, owing to the intersection of one of the larger railways, the

Underground trains are frequently held motionless for some minutes at

that very spot."

"Splendid, Holmes! You have got it!"

"So far--so far, Watson. We advance, but the goal is afar. Well,

having seen the back of Caulfield Gardens, I visited the front and

satisfied myself that the bird was indeed flown. It is a considerable

house, unfurnished, so far as I could judge, in the upper rooms.

Oberstein lived there with a single valet, who was probably a

confederate entirely in his confidence. We must bear in mind that

Oberstein has gone to the Continent to dispose of his booty, but not

with any idea of flight; for he had no reason to fear a warrant, and

the idea of an amateur domiciliary visit would certainly never occur to

him. Yet that is precisely what we are about to make."

"Could we not get a warrant and legalize it?"

"Hardly on the evidence."

"What can we hope to do?"

"We cannot tell what correspondence may be there."

"I don't like it, Holmes."

"My dear fellow, you shall keep watch in the street. I'll do the

criminal part. It's not a time to stick at trifles. Think of

Mycroft's note, of the Admiralty, the Cabinet, the exalted person who

waits for news. We are bound to go."

My answer was to rise from the table.

"You are right, Holmes. We are bound to go."

He sprang up and shook me by the hand.

"I knew you would not shrink at the last," said he, and for a moment I

saw something in his eyes which was nearer to tenderness than I had

ever seen. The next instant he was his masterful, practical self once

more.

"It is nearly half a mile, but there is no hurry. Let us walk," said

he. "Don't drop the instruments, I beg. Your arrest as a suspicious

character would be a most unfortunate complication."

Caulfield Gardens was one of those lines of flat-faced pillared, and

porticoed houses which are so prominent a product of the middle

Victorian epoch in the West End of London. Next door there appeared to

be a children's party, for the merry buzz of young voices and the

clatter of a piano resounded through the night. The fog still hung

about and screened us with its friendly shade. Holmes had lit his

lantern and flashed it upon the massive door.

"This is a serious proposition," said he. "It is certainly bolted as

well as locked. We would do better in the area. There is an excellent

archway down yonder in case a too zealous policeman should intrude.

Give me a hand, Watson, and I'll do the same for you."

A minute later we were both in the area. Hardly had we reached the

dark shadows before the step of the policeman was heard in the fog

above. As its soft rhythm died away, Holmes set to work upon the lower

door. I saw him stoop and strain until with a sharp crash it flew

open. We sprang through into the dark passage, closing the area door

behind us. Holmes led the way up the curving, uncarpeted stair. His

little fan of yellow light shone upon a low window.

"Here we are, Watson--this must be the one." He threw it open, and as

he did so there was a low, harsh murmur, growing steadily into a loud

roar as a train dashed past us in the darkness. Holmes swept his light

along the window-sill. It was thickly coated with soot from the

passing engines, but the black surface was blurred and rubbed in places.

"You can see where they rested the body. Halloa, Watson! what is this?

There can be no doubt that it is a blood mark." He was pointing to

faint discolourations along the woodwork of the window. "Here it is on

the stone of the stair also. The demonstration is complete. Let us

stay here until a train stops."

We had not long to wait. The very next train roared from the tunnel as

before, but slowed in the open, and then, with a creaking of brakes,

pulled up immediately beneath us. It was not four feet from the

window-ledge to the roof of the carriages. Holmes softly closed the

window.

"So far we are justified," said he. "What do you think of it, Watson?"

"A masterpiece. You have never risen to a greater height."

"I cannot agree with you there. From the moment that I conceived the

idea of the body being upon the roof, which surely was not a very

abstruse one, all the rest was inevitable. If it were not for the

grave interests involved the affair up to this point would be

insignificant. Our difficulties are still before us. But perhaps we

may find something here which may help us."

We had ascended the kitchen stair and entered the suite of rooms upon

the first floor. One was a dining-room, severely furnished and

containing nothing of interest. A second was a bedroom, which also

drew blank. The remaining room appeared more promising, and my

companion settled down to a systematic examination. It was littered

with books and papers, and was evidently used as a study. Swiftly and

methodically Holmes turned over the contents of drawer after drawer and

cupboard after cupboard, but no gleam of success came to brighten his

austere face. At the end of an hour he was no further than when he

started.

"The cunning dog has covered his tracks," said he. "He has left

nothing to incriminate him. His dangerous correspondence has been

destroyed or removed. This is our last chance."

It was a small tin cash-box which stood upon the writing-desk. Holmes

pried it open with his chisel. Several rolls of paper were within,

covered with figures and calculations, without any note to show to what

they referred. The recurring words, "water pressure" and "pressure to

the square inch" suggested some possible relation to a submarine.

Holmes tossed them all impatiently aside. There only remained an

envelope with some small newspaper slips inside it. He shook them out

on the table, and at once I saw by his eager face that his hopes had

been raised.

"What's this, Watson? Eh? What's this? Record of a series of

messages in the advertisements of a paper. Daily Telegraph agony

column by the print and paper. Right-hand top corner of a page. No

dates--but messages arrange themselves. This must be the first:

"Hoped to hear sooner. Terms agreed to. Write fully to address given

on card.

"Pierrot.

"Next comes:

"Too complex for description. Must have full report, Stuff awaits you

when goods delivered.

"Pierrot.

"Then comes:

"Matter presses. Must withdraw offer unless contract completed. Make

appointment by letter. Will confirm by advertisement.

"Pierrot.

"Finally:

"Monday night after nine. Two taps. Only ourselves. Do not be so

suspicious. Payment in hard cash when goods delivered.

"Pierrot.

"A fairly complete record, Watson! If we could only get at the man at

the other end!" He sat lost in thought, tapping his fingers on the

table. Finally he sprang to his feet.

"Well, perhaps it won't be so difficult, after all. There is nothing

more to be done here, Watson. I think we might drive round to the

offices of the Daily Telegraph, and so bring a good day's work to a

conclusion."

Mycroft Holmes and Lestrade had come round by appointment after

breakfast next day and Sherlock Holmes had recounted to them our

proceedings of the day before. The professional shook his head over

our confessed burglary.

"We can't do these things in the force, Mr. Holmes," said he. "No

wonder you get results that are beyond us. But some of these days

you'll go too far, and you'll find yourself and your friend in trouble."

"For England, home and beauty--eh, Watson? Martyrs on the altar of our

country. But what do you think of it, Mycroft?"

"Excellent, Sherlock! Admirable! But what use will you make of it?"

Holmes picked up the Daily Telegraph which lay upon the table.

"Have you seen Pierrot's advertisement to-day?"

"What? Another one?"

"Yes, here it is:

"To-night. Same hour. Same place. Two taps. Most vitally important.

Your own safety at stake.

"Pierrot.

"By George!" cried Lestrade. "If he answers that we've got him!"

"That was my idea when I put it in. I think if you could both make it

convenient to come with us about eight o'clock to Caulfield Gardens we

might possibly get a little nearer to a solution."

One of the most remarkable characteristics of Sherlock Holmes was his

power of throwing his brain out of action and switching all his

thoughts on to lighter things whenever he had convinced himself that he

could no longer work to advantage. I remember that during the whole of

that memorable day he lost himself in a monograph which he had

undertaken upon the Polyphonic Motets of Lassus. For my own part I had

none of this power of detachment, and the day, in consequence, appeared

to be interminable. The great national importance of the issue, the

suspense in high quarters, the direct nature of the experiment which we

were trying--all combined to work upon my nerve. It was a relief to me

when at last, after a light dinner, we set out upon our expedition.

Lestrade and Mycroft met us by appointment at the outside of Gloucester

Road Station. The area door of Oberstein's house had been left open

the night before, and it was necessary for me, as Mycroft Holmes

absolutely and indignantly declined to climb the railings, to pass in

and open the hall door. By nine o'clock we were all seated in the

study, waiting patiently for our man.

An hour passed and yet another. When eleven struck, the measured beat

of the great church clock seemed to sound the dirge of our hopes.

Lestrade and Mycroft were fidgeting in their seats and looking twice a

minute at their watches. Holmes sat silent and composed, his eyelids

half shut, but every sense on the alert. He raised his head with a

sudden jerk.

"He is coming," said he.

There had been a furtive step past the door. Now it returned. We heard

a shuffling sound outside, and then two sharp taps with the knocker.

Holmes rose, motioning us to remain seated. The gas in the hall was a

mere point of light. He opened the outer door, and then as a dark

figure slipped past him he closed and fastened it. "This way!" we

heard him say, and a moment later our man stood before us. Holmes had

followed him closely, and as the man turned with a cry of surprise and

alarm he caught him by the collar and threw him back into the room.

Before our prisoner had recovered his balance the door was shut and

Holmes standing with his back against it. The man glared round him,

staggered, and fell senseless upon the floor. With the shock, his

broad-brimmed hat flew from his head, his cravat slipped down from his

lips, and there were the long light beard and the soft, handsome

delicate features of Colonel Valentine Walter.

Holmes gave a whistle of surprise.

"You can write me down an ass this time, Watson," said he. "This was

not the bird that I was looking for."

"Who is he?" asked Mycroft eagerly.

"The younger brother of the late Sir James Walter, the head of the

Submarine Department. Yes, yes; I see the fall of the cards. He is

coming to. I think that you had best leave his examination to me."

We had carried the prostrate body to the sofa. Now our prisoner sat

up, looked round him with a horror-stricken face, and passed his hand

over his forehead, like one who cannot believe his own senses.

"What is this?" he asked. "I came here to visit Mr. Oberstein."

"Everything is known, Colonel Walter," said Holmes. "How an English

gentleman could behave in such a manner is beyond my comprehension.

But your whole correspondence and relations with Oberstein are within

our knowledge. So also are the circumstances connected with the death

of young Cadogan West. Let me advise you to gain at least the small

credit for repentance and confession, since there are still some

details which we can only learn from your lips."

The man groaned and sank his face in his hands. We waited, but he was

silent.

"I can assure you," said Holmes, "that every essential is already

known. We know that you were pressed for money; that you took an

impress of the keys which your brother held; and that you entered into

a correspondence with Oberstein, who answered your letters through the

advertisement columns of the Daily Telegraph. We are aware that you

went down to the office in the fog on Monday night, but that you were

seen and followed by young Cadogan West, who had probably some previous

reason to suspect you. He saw your theft, but could not give the

alarm, as it was just possible that you were taking the papers to your

brother in London. Leaving all his private concerns, like the good

citizen that he was, he followed you closely in the fog and kept at

your heels until you reached this very house. There he intervened, and

then it was, Colonel Walter, that to treason you added the more

terrible crime of murder."

"I did not! I did not! Before God I swear that I did not!" cried our

wretched prisoner.

"Tell us, then, how Cadogan West met his end before you laid him upon

the roof of a railway carriage."

"I will. I swear to you that I will. I did the rest. I confess it.

It was just as you say. A Stock Exchange debt had to be paid. I

needed the money badly. Oberstein offered me five thousand. It was to

save myself from ruin. But as to murder, I am as innocent as you."

"What happened, then?"

"He had his suspicions before, and he followed me as you describe. I

never knew it until I was at the very door. It was thick fog, and one

could not see three yards. I had given two taps and Oberstein had come

to the door. The young man rushed up and demanded to know what we were

about to do with the papers. Oberstein had a short life-preserver. He

always carried it with him. As West forced his way after us into the

house Oberstein struck him on the head. The blow was a fatal one. He

was dead within five minutes. There he lay in the hall, and we were at

our wit's end what to do. Then Oberstein had this idea about the

trains which halted under his back window. But first he examined the

papers which I had brought. He said that three of them were essential,

and that he must keep them. 'You cannot keep them,' said I. 'There

will be a dreadful row at Woolwich if they are not returned.' 'I must

keep them,' said he, 'for they are so technical that it is impossible

in the time to make copies.' 'Then they must all go back together

to-night,' said I. He thought for a little, and then he cried out that

he had it. 'Three I will keep,' said he. 'The others we will stuff

into the pocket of this young man. When he is found the whole business

will assuredly be put to his account.' I could see no other way out of

it, so we did as he suggested. We waited half an hour at the window

before a train stopped. It was so thick that nothing could be seen,

and we had no difficulty in lowering West's body on to the train. That

was the end of the matter so far as I was concerned."

"And your brother?"

"He said nothing, but he had caught me once with his keys, and I think

that he suspected. I read in his eyes that he suspected. As you know,

he never held up his head again."

There was silence in the room. It was broken by Mycroft Holmes.

"Can you not make reparation? It would ease your conscience, and

possibly your punishment."

"What reparation can I make?"

"Where is Oberstein with the papers?"

"I do not know."

"Did he give you no address?"

"He said that letters to the Hotel du Louvre, Paris, would eventually

reach him."

"Then reparation is still within your power," said Sherlock Holmes.

"I will do anything I can. I owe this fellow no particular good-will.

He has been my ruin and my downfall."

"Here are paper and pen. Sit at this desk and write to my dictation.

Direct the envelope to the address given. That is right. Now the

letter:

"Dear Sir:

"With regard to our transaction, you will no doubt have observed by now

that one essential detail is missing. I have a tracing which will make

it complete. This has involved me in extra trouble, however, and I

must ask you for a further advance of five hundred pounds. I will not

trust it to the post, nor will I take anything but gold or notes. I

would come to you abroad, but it would excite remark if I left the

country at present. Therefore I shall expect to meet you in the

smoking-room of the Charing Cross Hotel at noon on Saturday. Remember

that only English notes, or gold, will be taken.

"That will do very well. I shall be very much surprised if it does not

fetch our man."

And it did! It is a matter of history--that secret history of a nation

which is often so much more intimate and interesting than its public

chronicles--that Oberstein, eager to complete the coup of his lifetime,

came to the lure and was safely engulfed for fifteen years in a British

prison. In his trunk were found the invaluable Bruce-Partington plans,

which he had put up for auction in all the naval centres of Europe.

Colonel Walter died in prison towards the end of the second year of his

sentence. As to Holmes, he returned refreshed to his monograph upon

the Polyphonic Motets of Lassus, which has since been printed for

private circulation, and is said by experts to be the last word upon

the subject. Some weeks afterwards I learned incidentally that my

friend spent a day at Windsor, whence he returned with a remarkably

fine emerald tie-pin. When I 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. He said no more; but I fancy that I could guess at that

lady's august name, and I have little doubt that the emerald pin will

forever recall to my friend's memory the adventure of the

Bruce-Partington plans.

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