

TIME FOR
Sherlock Holmes

A NOVEL BY

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To the spirit of Arthur Conan Doyle

1

A Trip to Sussex

It has been, if I remember correctly, about sixty-five years since last I wrote about the adventures of my friend Mr. Sherlock Holmes. At that time, I told how he had retired to the Sussex countryside to raise and study bees and to await gracefully, if with his usual intellectual energy, the inevitable end of a long and eventful life. That this end has not yet come is but one of the remarkable facts my friend has at last given me his permission to tell to the public.

When Sherlock Holmes informed me, toward the end of his long and brilliant career as a consulting detective in London and its environs, of his intention to remove himself to the countryside and devote his declining years to the study of bees and to the compilation of a casebook which would at once illustrate and expound his justly famous methods of criminal detection, I in my turn informed him of my desire to spend the rest of my life in the city.

“Country air and country food are certainly better for one’s constitution, Holmes. I’ll grant you that. But old age is dull enough without adding the enforced dullness of the countryside. No, I think I shall prefer the bustle of London to the end.”

He shook his head and sighed. “Well, old friend, there may be more than ordinary health involved. But we shall see what we shall see.”

This conversation took place shortly before Holmes removed himself permanently from the city. In the years that followed, our contacts were perforce limited. The necessity of obtaining supplies having to do with the study of bees—supplies not available in rural areas, due to the abstruse nature of his scientific studies—occasionally brought Sherlock Holmes back to town, despite his recently acquired and frequently expressed aversion for London. Then, too, his work on a book about crime detection, a book which depended heavily upon his own past cases for the elucidation of various points, required that he consult my notebooks, which provide, if anything, an even more complete record of Sherlock Holmes’ career than do the notebooks of Mr. Sherlock Holmes himself.

The years passed, and on each of his trips to London, I observed how relentlessly and unceasingly Nature worked to destroy even so vigorous and active a man as Sherlock Holmes. On every visit, my old friend was thinner, more wrinkled, and his hair, if anything, even whiter than on the previous visit. That parallel changes were taking place in myself, I was well aware; but since I saw myself every morning in the shaving mirror, the steady, gradual effects of age were not so striking in my own case.

In the summer of 1925, when I was in my early seventies and my prognosis for myself was a gloomy one—indeed, I felt I had little chance of surviving until the following spring—I received a telephone call from Holmes. I had not heard from him for months, and I feared the worst, so you will understand my pleasure at hearing his well-remembered voice. (In spite of all the outward signs of the deterioration due to age, by the way, Sherlock Holmes' voice had remained as hale and firm and strong as ever.)

“Watson!” he greeted me cheerfully. “I have a duty for you, just as in the old days. There is a train leaving Paddington for Brighton in three hours. Get off at Hewisham, as usual. I'll have my man pick you up, and you should be at my rural retreat in time for tea.”

“Really, Holmes, this is too much,” I protested. “Considering my age and my condition, how can you expect me to gad about the countryside like—like—a young goat in the spring?”

“My dear old friend,” he replied gently, “it is precisely because of your age and condition that you must come. I shall expect you by tea time.” And before I could utter another word, he had hung up his telephone.

It has long struck me as more than a little curious that a single command from Sherlock Holmes has always been enough to set me off, against my better judgement, on expeditions both tedious and foolhardy. I followed his instructions to the letter, taking the specified train from Paddington Station and getting off at Hewisham, one of those small, insignificant villages still so common in England in those days and at which one could easily imagine the trains were reluctant to stop and impatient to leave. Indeed, I had scarcely alighted on the platform when my bag was rudely thrown from the train to land beside me and the train began to move again, quickly gathering speed as it fled south to Brighton.

I looked about and found myself in a pleasant enough spot, if a deserted one. The abundant greenery, clear skies, and clean air of the country afforded me a welcome change after the noise and smells of London. I breathed deeply, glad already that Holmes had persuaded me to come to this charming place. A voice suddenly interrupted my reverie.

“Doctor Watson, aren't ye? This way, this way.”

I turned to see a tall man in the dress of a farmer, a wide-brimmed, floppy hat shading his face from the sun. He seemed an interesting specimen of rural life, and I inspected him carefully. My steady gaze and lack of other response seemed to anger him.

“Come along, then, Doctor—if doctor ye be!” he snapped.

Offended as I was by this boorish behaviour, I nonetheless held my tongue and, picking up my travelling bag, followed him to a small, horse-drawn wagon of a type one still saw quite frequently on farms in those days. The horse turned its head and favoured me with a long, hostile stare. Returning it, I climbed painfully into the wagon and seated myself between two bales of hay. Holmes' man climbed on at the front of the wagon, took up the reins, and cursed the horse into motion. Those were the last words I was to hear from him throughout the trip.

The drive from the station to the old farmhouse Sherlock Holmes had purchased took above an hour, and in all that time I was unable to elicit a single word from my unpleasant companion. He said not a further word to the horse, either: the beast seemed to know its way, following a faint but discernible track across quiet, rolling green meadows. After a time, I was obliged by the steady heat of the afternoon sunshine to remove my jacket, but my driver gave no

sign that the heat affected him in any way.

At last, to my great relief, we arrived in the yard in front of the old farmhouse where my friend now lived. The driver stopped the wagon, leaped down from it, and with still not a word, began to wander away.

“Here!” I shouted, my patience and politeness alike stretched to the breaking. “Here, my good man! Tell your master immediately of my arrival.”

He stood still, his back insolently toward me. “He already knows,” he grunted.

“Does he, indeed? Then where is he? Where *is* Sherlock Holmes?”

“Right here!” The man spun around, straightening his back and whipping off his hat as he did so, and I beheld the familiar features of Sherlock Holmes—the hawk nose, the penetrating eyes, the latter now twinkling merrily at the joke he had played on me.

“Holmes!” I cried, amazed at his skill and audacity. “All this time—the entire trip from the railway station—and I never suspected.”

He laughed in delight. “The old skills remain, my dear fellow. Forgive me for deceiving you, but you know my old love for such tricks. Now come into the house, and we’ll call for tea.” And he led the way, as straight of back and quick of step as ever, striding to the door quite as though he were a man fifty years younger than his actual age.

“Slower, Holmes,” I called out to him. “Remember old Watson, who has not the advantage of clean Sussex air to keep him young.”

He apologized and promised to control his impatience thenceforth. We strolled together into the house at a more leisurely pace.

2

The Secret of the Sussex Wine

It was a large, rambling old place, built more than fifty years earlier by a gentleman from South Africa who had, so Holmes informed me, later met his death in a most peculiar and awful manner in this very house. The house commanded a dramatic and beautiful view of the Channel, but because of the nearness of that great body of water, the site was subject to frequent mists and cold drizzle. It must have been a gloomy place indeed at the time of the first owner's death, but Holmes had bought his own electric generator and had had electric lights installed throughout the building. Thus it was cheerful enough that evening as we sat drinking tea in the well-lighted library after supper, a pleasant sea breeze coming through the window along with the droning hum of insect life and the fragrance of flowers.

"It's pleasant enough, Holmes. I must admit that."

He looked at me keenly. "A nice change from the noise and smells of a summer evening in London, Watson?"

"Indeed!" I laughed. "It's almost enough to make me wish to spend my remaining years—or months, perhaps—with you here in the country."

"And you would be welcome, of course. But . . . months, you said?" His normally unreadable face betrayed his distress.

I shrugged. "I fear so. But let us not discuss so dreary a topic as death. What luck with your bees?"

He pressed a button set into a small box on the table beside his chair. "I want you to taste something, Watson. Then I'll answer any questions you may have concerning my bees."

When Mrs. Hudson answered Holmes' electrical summons, he said to her, "A fresh bottle of *the wine* from the cellar for our guest, if you please, Mrs. Hudson." I raised my eyebrows at this strange emphasis upon those two words, but with the faintest of smiles he placed his finger upon his lips to forestall any questions. So we sat in silence for perhaps five minutes, until the housekeeper returned with a bottle of *the wine*.

I must confess that, while we waited, the generous portion I had eaten earlier combined with the warmth of the tea, the mild breeze, and the insects' hum to induce in me a pleasant drowsiness. I was awakened by the sound of the tray with the bottle upon it being placed on the table next to my companion's chair; Holmes was regarding me with a look of compassion and concern, an expression he quickly masked, when he realized I was awake, with a bright-eyed joviality. "Well, Watson!" he cried. "Here we have *the wine!* I'll be interested in your opinion of it."

I stifled a yawn. “Perhaps it would be more prudent of me to retire than to indulge in wine.”

“Nonsense, Watson. I’ll not have that. I must insist.”

“Oh, very well,” I said resignedly.

“Good, good.” He extracted the cork and poured two generous glassfuls. Since the bottle was of a dark green glass, only then could I see that the wine was of a deep golden color, between that of honey and golden syrup. I noticed also that Holmes was looking at the wine with what I could only regard as an unhealthy fascination. I was tempted to ask him whether this precious wine of his contained some extra ingredient—cocaine, perhaps—but I forebore, knowing that he had, after my years of gentle pressure and both friendly and professional counsel, turned away from the use of the addictive substance.

When he handed me my glass, I sniffed it, and its sweet, almost sickening odor finally told me what this mysterious wine was. “Why, this is mead!” I exclaimed.

“Indeed it is. Fermented and bottled on this very farm, from honey produced by my own bees. Drink up, Watson!”

“After demanding of me that I behave like a young goat in the spring,” I grumbled, “you now wish me to be a Viking.” However, I drank first a mouthful of the mead and then the rest of the glass. “By George!” I exclaimed. “Holmes, this is quite good! However, it *is* a bit sweet for my palate, and I should not care to drink it with any regularity.”

Wearing an ambiguous expression that I hoped indicated amusement but which I feared denoted hurt feelings instead, he murmured, “On that score, Watson, we shall see what we shall see.”

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I slept more soundly that night than I had done in years and woke greatly refreshed. “Holmes,” I said to him over breakfast, “country air is indeed beneficial. I feel positively ten years younger.”

“That much!” he marvelled. Then he bent his penetrating gaze upon me. “An improved prognosis, Doctor?”

“It’s surely too soon for that,” I replied shortly, sobered by thoughts of the future. The rest of the meal passed in silence.

But during the succeeding days, my health continued to improve dramatically. I fancied I could taste food better, smell the many smells of the countryside (not all pleasant!) more keenly, and hear the sounds of insects and animals far more clearly than I had been able to in years. One evening, while Holmes and I were sitting down to our evening tea, accompanied by the inevitable glass of Holmes’ honey wine, I mentioned as much to him. “I’m forced to conclude,” I finished, between reflective sips of the sweet, amber wine, “that London air, water, and food do indeed contain noxious substances that age one prematurely, and that I would be well advised to remove myself to the country, to increase the number of years remaining to me.”

I swallowed the remaining mead quickly and poured myself another glass, ignoring Holmes’ amused glance. He had insisted on my drinking a generous glass of the honey wine every evening. At first, I had acceded only to humor him and to atone for any insult I might

unintentionally have given him on my first evening, when my opinion of the mead had been perhaps too frankly expressed, but I had in time become quite addicted to my evening glass—and often two or three glasses—of it.

“I notice, Watson, that you now speak of remaining years, not months.” When I was seated once more with my mead and my tea, he continued in a quiet, reflective tone, “While it is certainly true that London air and London water are foul while both are pure here in the country, and while it is also true that country living will prolong one’s life when compared with city living, nonetheless it is also a fact that each man is allotted only a certain span. Healthy living will enable him to come nearer to attaining that span of years than will unhealthy living, but the span itself is not increased. Only *the intervention of Man* can do that.”

This odd speech left me quite puzzled, but before I could comment, Holmes spoke again, in a voice that rang out in the quiet of the evening. “That wine you are drinking so eagerly—that wine, Watson, that is somewhat too sweet for your urbane palate—is rejuvenating every cell in your body, just as it has made and kept both me and my housekeeper, Mrs. Hudson, young!”

Silence reigned for a few moments following this extraordinary outburst. *Good heavens!* I thought. *He has gone mad!* The brilliant analytical mind had at last succumbed to senility. Knowing from my years of medical practice how carefully one must deal with a man in the throes of severe delusion, I seized upon the very last of his words and said cautiously, although not without a tremor in my voice, “Surely this middle-aged housekeeper of yours is not the Mrs. Hudson of Baker Street, but rather her daughter?”

His eyes blazing fiercely, Holmes declared, “She is indeed the Mrs. Hudson you knew so long ago in Baker Street. Nor is she middle-aged: like me, she is physically young but disguised to appear old, so as not to arouse suspicion and superstitious hostility amongst the villagers and to avoid shocking you while you were still in a weakened condition.”

I opened my mouth, intending to offer some soothing words, but before I could speak, he continued in a calmer tone. “I realize I cannot expect you to believe me without proof, Watson, so to prove that I am neither insane nor senile, I want you to perform a detailed and complete physical examination upon me. I have taken the liberty of having your own medical instruments brought here from London; along with the equipment I have here for my own biological work, they should enable you to satisfy yourself that what I say is the simple truth.”

As always, Sherlock Holmes was proved correct. After a careful examination, I was forced to admit that he appeared, physically, to be in his mid to late twenties. I next examined myself, insofar as that was possible, and was both astounded and delighted to discover that, after only one week of daily ingestion of the miraculous wine, the aging process had reversed itself in me and I was detectably younger and healthier than I had been a week earlier. How could I doubt any longer the extraordinary assertions of my friend? After all those years of unravelling the twisted misdeeds of men, that great analytical mind had at last succeeded in unravelling one of the most profound mysteries of Nature! Sherlock Holmes had discovered the true Elixir of Youth. And he now offered me a full share of it, provided that I agreed, first, to move down permanently from London, and second, never to share our secret with anyone else.

“To the first condition, I was almost ready to agree even before you told me of the secret of the wine, Holmes. But your second proviso—! Why not share this wonderful discovery with the world?”

But on this point he was immovable. “The world, Watson,” he said firmly, “is an ass.” He went on in a sombre tone, “After the terrible war we have just seen, the world will have to attain a far higher level of reason and social maturity than it has ever yet displayed before I will even consider giving it my secret. Were I to share this knowledge now, the results, I am convinced, would be social upheaval on a catastrophic scale, and that second Great War, which I am convinced is coming in at most another fifteen years, would be even more calamitous than it will in fact prove to be.

“I have shared my secret with Mrs. Hudson,” he continued, “simply because she is a superb housekeeper and I lacked the patience to train another; also, she can be trusted to keep the knowledge to herself. I offer now to share it with you because of our old and fruitful friendship and because I trust *your* ability to keep a secret as well. Oh, and I have included Mycroft in my secret, of course, for obvious reasons. But I will share it with no one else.”

When further argument proved ineffectual against his determination to keep his rejuvenation secret from the world, I at last gave in and acceded to his second condition as I already had to the first. Although I reopened the matter upon occasion in later years, I had no more success in changing his mind than during the conversation just described; indeed, from one decade to the next Sherlock Holmes would insist that mankind continued to deteriorate rather than to improve.

The extent of his withdrawal from both his fellow men and all memory of his previous life can be demonstrated by one incident I recall vividly. Holmes and I were walking in the nearby countryside one day when we happened to pass a large, handsome house, the front gates of which bore the name *Windlesham*. Beyond the gates, a pleasant spread of lawns and trees was visible. A tall, powerfully built man of late middle age stood upon the lawn, gazing about him in pride of ownership. He noticed us passing by and, with an expression of bluff good-fellowship, started toward us as if to begin a conversation. But Sherlock Holmes hurried me on, despite my expressed intention to meet the owner of the imposing place and request a tour of the grounds. I thought Holmes’ manner inexplicably rude, and I told him so in a most frank and forthright manner.

“That fellow,” he replied testily, “is a writer of detective stories. You should have realised by now that I do not desire any contact in any form whatsoever with my old profession, with those who practice it or with those who are so foolish as to attract the attention of those who practice it, or even with those who make a living by chronicling the adventures of fictitious practitioners of it.”

“But surely,” I said timidly, “the man must write other things as well?”

“Historical romances and spiritualist treatises,” he said scornfully. “And those are even more frivolous than stories about made-up detectives!” And with that, he strode along, puffing furiously at his pipe and rebuffing my further attempts at conversation.

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And so the decades passed and the world roiled and rumbled about us, changing in a variety of ways I could never had predicted, while we three, in our little enclave on the Channel, lived on unchanging. I had long ceased taking the London papers, even though the *Times* had

once been such a major part of my day, and the only sign of change in the outside world of which I was aware was the way, year by year, the aeroplanes passing overhead and the ships gliding up and down the Channel in the distance increased in size and how the use of sail diminished and eventually disappeared on all but the smallest boats. Conversation, reading, bees, and scientific investigations occupied the time of Doctor John Watson and Mr. Sherlock Holmes as the decades slipped by and the outside world went largely unheeded. Then came that terrible crime that penetrated even our shell, pulling us back willy-nilly into the turbulent activities of the rest of mankind and marking the true beginning of my tale.

3

A Death in Downing Street

“Good heavens!” Sherlock Holmes exclaimed.

It was shortly after breakfast on a mild summer day in the early 1990s, and we were sitting in the library, reading. I was engrossed in a book, and I will admit to you what in those days I would have tried to conceal from my companion, that it was an historical romance, one of the products of the fertile imagination of that neighbor of ours upon whom Holmes had showered such contempt during our walk. And a fine, ringing tale it was, replete with bowmen and medieval rulers both evil and noble. Holmes was studying a small local newspaper, the *Daily Mirror*, published in Hewisham. He steadfastly refused to read the London papers, insisting that they recalled to him in a particularly unpleasant way that hurried and eventful metropolitan life he so wished to forget. The Hewisham *Daily Mirror* concerned itself in the main with local doings—pig farming, fishermen’s catches, and cricket matches—and allocated but a single page at the very back of the journal to news of London and the rest of the world. Meager as it was, the news in the *Daily Mirror* had at least the virtue of timeliness.

At Holmes’ exclamation, I looked up from my book to find that he was staring at his newspaper with a horrified expression on his normally impassive face. He read hurriedly to the end of the item that had so upset him, and only then did he meet my gaze. “Watson,” he said in a voice scarcely above a whisper, “the Prime Minister has been murdered in a locked room!”

“Good heavens!” I exclaimed in my turn.

“You may well say so,” he agreed. “Listen.” He began to read aloud from the newspaper.

“The Prime Minister was found this morning when her private secretary, unable to open the door to the Prime Minister’s office and obtaining no response to his vigorous knocking, summoned the police. When the police had broken down the door and discovered the Prime Minister slumped over her desk, they at first believed she had suffered a stroke. It has since been disclosed, however, that she had been shot at close quarters.’

“It goes on to say that her secretary, a young man named Wilford, was the last person to see her alive. That was yesterday evening, the third of June, when Mrs. Chalmers told him she had some urgent work to do and did not wish to be disturbed. She entered her office, locking her door behind her. Somewhat later, Wilford, who was working late himself in his adjoining office, thought he heard Mrs. Chalmers’ voice, raised as if in anger. He then knocked at her door and enquired whether she needed help, but she replied that she did not, so he thought no more of the incident. Shortly after this, Willford went home. It was not until he returned to work at Number Ten Downing Street this morning and obtained no response to his knocks upon the locked door

that he at last became alarmed.”

He threw the paper to the floor in anger and rose to pace over to the window, where he stood staring out over the rolling fields to the broad blue waters of the Channel, sparkling in the sunlight. “One would think, Watson,” he said in a tone of disgust, “that Britain’s Prime Minister would be more securely guarded, and that her whereabouts and state of health would at all times be known to the appropriate security officials.” After a pause, he muttered, “There are certain elements to this case, however, that intrigue me.”

Meanwhile, I had cast my book aside and recovered Holmes’ paper from the floor. I quickly scanned the news item, gazing with interest at the accompanying photograph of the Prime Minister, taken some years earlier, after her party had first come to power. She stared at me from the newspaper, a grey-haired lady of early middle age, with the black skin of the West Indies and a thin, determined face; an iron-willed woman possessed of a penetrating intelligence not unlike Sherlock Holmes’ own. How curious to reflect that, in terms of years alone, she could have been my great-granddaughter! By a strange twist of fate, the photograph had been taken in the very office at Number 10 Downing Street where the Prime Minister had been found murdered that morning.

The paper was suddenly snatched from my hand. I looked up in some annoyance to find Holmes staring at the photograph in fascination. He turned to a small table by the window, opened a drawer and rummaged about in it. Finally he found what he was looking for—a small magnifying glass—and with it he studied the newspaper photograph intently. “How remarkable and suggestive!” he exclaimed. “Watson, a terrible foreboding has seized me. We must travel to London immediately.”

“London!” I said in astonishment. “Holmes, we haven’t been to London in well over fifty years. What reason could we possibly have for going there now?”

“If I told you my suspicions now, you would think me mad,” he said gravely.

If it were not for Holmes’ longstanding insistence on cutting himself off from the outside world, we would have had a television set in the house, or at the very least a wireless, and we would have received the news from London all the sooner. In a similar vein, Holmes now insisted that, despite the unexplained urgency of our trip to London, we should take the train rather than fly.

However, when we arrived in that great, noisy metropolis late in the afternoon of the same day, I discovered that Holmes had not been quite so cut off from the outside world for all those years as I had supposed. We took a taxicab from the railway station to the huge, gleaming white building that housed the headquarters of the Metropolitan Police. (The headquarters had only recently been moved to this new building, which as yet had no name. City wags had already taken to calling it “New New Scotland Yard.”) It was immediately obvious to me that Holmes was remarkably familiar with the building and that he had some particular destination in mind. We soon found ourselves in a small office containing a large desk, behind which sat a very large man whom I recognised instantly.

He rose ponderously from his chair and extended a mammoth hand. “Sherlock!” he exclaimed in delight. “After all these years! But I did believe that this case was possessed of those bizarre, *outré* elements so beloved by you in the past, and that you might as a result emerge from your rural retreat.”

“Indeed, Mycroft,” Sherlock Holmes laughed, for the man in the office was none other than Holmes’ older brother, “you were correct, as always.” He turned to me. “Watson, you will recall my telling you that Mycroft was one of the three persons to whom I had disclosed the secret of my wine. You will also remember my telling you long ago of the major rôle Mycroft has long played behind the scenes in the British government.”

I nodded. Mycroft Holmes had always eschewed any high office that might have brought him to public attention. Nonetheless, despite his lack of high official title, Mycroft had been a cornerstone of government policy and action. I could readily understand that, with the advantage of that Elixir of Youth discovered by his younger brother, Mycroft must over the years have cemented his position and increased his influence in the government all the more. From what Sherlock Holmes had told me of his older brother, I had long ago learned to respect Mycroft’s intellect and importance; however, on the few occasions when I had chanced to meet him, I had always found that I did not care for the man personally. What he had to do with the present case, the assassination of the Prime Minister, I could not imagine. Sherlock Holmes quickly illuminated this point.

“Mycroft,” he explained, “has for some years worked in close cooperation with that special branch of the Metropolitan Police whose duty it is to safeguard the Prime Minister. It is as a consequence of that assignment that he has an office in this building. You can see, I hope, why Mycroft, of all people, can tell us what is known in this case.”

Mycroft had seated himself again while his brother spoke. Now he sighed gustily and said, “I fear not much *is* known.” He gave us a short account of the case, which differed only in minor detail from the article carried in the Hewisham *Daily Mirror* that morning. “I must confess myself thoroughly stymied,” he concluded.

“You have no hypotheses at all, then?” Sherlock Holmes asked in the most innocent tone imaginable.

Mycroft was clearly deeply wounded. “Good gracious, Sherlock! Of course I have an hypothesis. However, the hypothesis itself partakes of elements which are most bizarre and *outré*, so much so that I have hesitated to mention it to anyone. This in spite of that old maxim of mine I have long urged you to take to heart, that one must adopt that hypothesis, no matter how improbable, that remains after all the impossible hypotheses have been eliminated.”

“Ah, yes,” said Sherlock Holmes shortly, “*your* maxim. I assume that, since the body was found, the carpet in the office has been trampled fiat by many a policeman’s large feet.”

Mycroft nodded. “I was one of the first on the scene, however.”

“Ah! Commendable foresight and vigor in one normally so lethargic, my dear Mycroft. Did you find two parallel grooves . . . ?”

“Yes!” Mycroft cried in delight. “In the carpet near the desk.”

“Perhaps four feet apart and five long?”

“Approximately.” Mycroft looked pleased. “Then you think it plausible after all, Sherlock?”

“Oh, indeed. What of the third book from the left, on the fourth shelf from the bottom, in the bookcase behind the desk?”

Mycroft smote his desk with the palm of his hand. “Good heavens! I forgot to look. Sherlock, sometimes I suspect that that wine of yours, even while it preserves the body so

miraculously, allows the mind to decay! How *could* I have forgotten such a detail as the book?"

"Never mind, Mycroft," Sherlock Holmes said soothingly. "You may be immortal, but you are still human and therefore imperfect. Can you arrange for Watson and me to examine the scene of the murder?"

Mycroft of course acquiesced immediately to this request, and he arranged the matter with a quick telephone call to a subordinate stationed in the Prime Minister's residence. Soon afterwards, Holmes and I were in a taxicab *en route* to Downing Street.

Holmes puffed on his pipe and gazed out of the window beside him at the greatly changed streets of London. I, meanwhile, pondered the impact the assassination would have upon this city and the nation it governed. History had not been kind to England during the many decades of my seclusion in Sussex; the murder of Mrs. Chalmers was but the latest of many cruel blows. "It is indeed a tragedy," I said with a sigh.

"Tragedy?" Holmes remarked, turning from the window. "Hardly a tragedy, Watson. This is the first time in all my life that *I* have perceived a detail that *Mycroft* had overlooked. No, no," he said in smug self-satisfaction, turning back to the window, "it is a triumph I have longed for since boyhood."