

Dr. John H. Watson V
Thomas Place Hall
14 Swindon Road
Cheltenham
GL50 4AZ
jhamishwatson876@gmail.com

My dear Dr. Martin,

I'm writing to thank you ever so much for speaking to me about the propensity of human beings to react in anger to various social and psychological phenomena. I was very much enervated by your talk for the International Society of Retired Physicians and now feel that when treating anger in my patients, I look through a glass slightly "less darkly" and even feel that your ideas *nearly* justified the fortnight it took me to learn how to operate "Zoom." I even understand why my grandfather's dear departed friend, the great detective, was so often angry at him, and that is was usually not my grandfather's fault, nor even, necessarily, that nitwit Lestrade's.

But I digress.

As I promised you that evening last winter, I enclose the manuscripts that my grandfather, John H. Watson, IV, left me upon his unfortunate demise last November. I believe they are three of the "cases" that he investigated in the company of Mr. Sherlock Holmes, and to my knowledge they are not yet published. You will see that they each have the name of an author: my grandfather assures me that these writers – Rupiper, Mensen, and Ramirez – wrote the cases exactly as he narrated them from his memory of his grandfather, Dr. John Watson, Sr's, oral recollections – only I believe that Rupiper, Mensen, and Ramirez took *some* creative liberties, as their styles hardly sound identical.

I hope you'll enjoy these three adventures of Dr. John Watson, Sr., and Sherlock Holmes. I understand that if the denizens of Ouisconsin like them, too, I might be able to find a few more when I next visit my grandfather's former home in Belgravia.

In all sincerity,
Dr. John H. Watson V

The Adventure of the Missing Bullet

By Heather Rupiper

I confess I have hesitated to publish this account, for fear that the reader will come to the same conclusions as Scotland Yard once had. Some readers may already be familiar with portions of the case, as reported in the newspapers.

It was in the early days of spring, when all is wet and the sky is ever-grey and the wind roars without cease. Confined by the weather to our lodgings at Baker Street, Sherlock Holmes sat in his habitual chair, engrossed in an examination of the inner workings of a pocket watch, while I sat opposite him, reading the day's paper. The wind howled and groaned, but beneath all that calamity, there was another sound.

I lifted my attention to Holmes's frowning face. "Surely that wasn't the bell?" I asked. "At this hour?"

A moment later, there came the sound of footsteps in the hall, and then a knock at the door.

"A client?" I guessed.

"If it is, it is a most serious case." Still frowning, Holmes rose to answer the door.

On the other side stood the detective inspector Lestrade, his face a mask of grave seriousness. He glanced only briefly at Holmes and turned his attention most intently upon me.

"Gentlemen, I apologize for the hour of this intrusion," the inspector greeted us. "I must speak with Dr. Watson about a matter of criminal importance."

"Me?" I set the papers down, rising uncertainly. "I will attempt to offer what assistance I can, but surely Mr. Holmes is—"

"It is not a consultation, Doctor. Can you provide your whereabouts as of five o'clock this evening?"

"Why, I was here, inspector."

Lestrade's gaze slid to Holmes. "Can you vouch for this?"

Holmes's frown deepened. "I trust Watson's honesty without question. However, I was not home at the time, and cannot confirm with absolute certainty that he was present."

"Perhaps another can? Your landlady?"

"What is this about, inspector?" Holmes pressed. "Given the nature of our acquaintance, surely you can offer some insight into your intentions?"

"I am investigating the murder of Sergeant Peter Hurley." Lestrade reached into his coat and pulled two envelopes from his breast pocket. He handed them to Holmes. "He was found dead only two lanes over—strychnine poisoning." At this, Lestrade gave me a meaningful look. As a physician, it is true that strychnine was readily available to me, as a treatment for patients. But I have never permitted patients to ingest such a quantity as would cause illness, let alone death.

"Watson," Holmes said sharply, "You invited this Hurley to call upon you here?"

"I am certain that I did not. I do not know a Sergeant Peter Hurley."

"Are you certain of that, Doctor?" Lestrade said darkly. "It would be odd if you did not—considering you served together in the sixty-sixth regiment in Afghanistan. And especially considering that the both of you were present only last week at a reunion ball for your former regiment."

It was true that only the week before I had attended just such an event—but the name Peter Hurley meant nothing to me. The function had been well-attended, and I'd spent most of the evening reminiscing with men whose names and faces I *could* recall.

Before I could formulate a response, Holmes was holding one of the letters before my eyes. "The man was extorting you, Watson?" he demanded, offended and outraged. "Why did you not inform me? Dismantling these claims would have been but the work of a minute!"

"I could not have informed you, my dear friend, because I have no knowledge of anybody attempting to extort me. On what grounds could I even be—"

"Read," Holmes urged, pressing the letter into my hands.

It was indeed a letter accusing me of nefarious, but unnamed crimes against the Crown, during the campaign in Afghanistan.

“And this—this is your signature, yes?”

I accepted the other letter from Holmes. It was a type-written letter, signed at the bottom with my signature. Which was alarming, considering I could never have written a letter inviting Sergeant Hurley to visit me in London, because I had no recollection of the man whatsoever.

“I’d like you to come with me, Doctor,” Lestrade said briskly.

“Inspector,” Holmes said impatiently. “Do think about it. Watson is not a man of low intellect. If he were truly being extorted, he would not resort to a hasty murder that could so easily be connected back to him. And he most certainly would not fail to ask for my assistance in dealing with the extortioner.”

Lestrade hesitated.

“Allow me to examine all the details of the case,” Holmes pressed. “I will gladly assist in the investigation. Where is the body?”

In the end, Holmes’s relentlessness persuaded the inspector, and I was to remain a free man. At least for the moment.

As soon as Lestrade had left the premises, Holmes turned to me with a grave look. “At first glance, the evidence does not stack in your favor. If Scotland Yard decides to take you in after all, it will impact my investigation. I think, Watson, it would be best if you left London until I can close this case—or at the very least, provide evidence against your involvement.”

I confess, I was not wholly comforted by this suggestion. “You are suggesting that I *flee* a murder investigation?”

Coolly, without scruple, Holmes nodded. “For now. Whoever has truly done in Sergeant Hurley has taken great pains to frame you as the suspect. Your life could be in great danger. Take yourself somewhere quiet and remote, and send an unsigned note with your location when you are settled. I will contact you when it is safe to return.”

Per my friend's advice, that very night I packed a bag and caught a train to the Cornish coast. At Holmes's urging, I brought my service revolver, in the event that I should need to defend myself from the culprit who murdered Peter Hurley.

I took lodgings in a quiet, seaside inn, under the assumed name of Mr. Smith, and settled myself in for what I assumed would be a tedious wait. But I was not in residence even a full day when calamity arose. The next day, fretful and restless, I took myself for a very long stroll along the beach. And when I returned, late in the afternoon, I found myself face to face with the worst possible person I could have expected to see—Detective Lestrade.

“Dr. Watson,” he said grimly. “I’m afraid your friend can’t talk your way out of it this time. You’ll have to come with me.”

There was nothing for it. As I sat beside him on the train back to London, Lestrade explained the direness of my circumstances. Another former comrade-in-arms—another whose name was utterly unrecognizable to me—had turned up dead. His name was Charles Baines, and he’d been a corporal with the sixty-sixth regiment when I was also stationed with them in Afghanistan.

Like Hurley, Baines also bore a letter with my signature—a letter which I had nonetheless never actually written—inviting him to visit me in London. Alongside it, he carried a letter accusing me of sinister crimes against King and country, and demanding that I pay him an exorbitant sum for his silence on the matter. The cause of death was a gunshot wound whose size matched the caliber of the service pistol I often carried—the one I’d had on my person when Lestrade found me in Cornwall.

Lestrade had confiscated my firearm well before boarding the train, and he took it out now, opening the chamber and tipping the bullets into his palm.

“One,” he said crisply, setting the bullet upon the table in front of us. “Two.” A second bullet. And so on, until only five bullets were lined up before us. “Five bullets,” Lestrade said significantly. He laid my gun beside them. “Six chambers. What happened to the sixth bullet, Doctor?”

I have, from time to time, attempted to put myself into the investigative mind of Sherlock Holmes. And it was now, more than ever, that I wished I had his abilities. I turned over everything Lestrade had told me, trying to put the pieces together, to understand where the faults lay, and to tease out the secrets hidden beneath.

“You say the *wound* matched the caliber of my pistol. Not the bullet?”

“There was no bullet to recover,” Lestrade said.

“Did you examine the surroundings at the murder scene to locate the bullet?” The missing bullet could have been the pivotal evidence in exonerating me.

“There was no bullet at all,” Lestrade said.

“I’m afraid I don’t follow.”

“There was no exit wound. After you shot the man, doctor, you clearly used your expertise to remove the bullet in order to cover your trail.”

I couldn’t help but reiterate Holmes’s incredulity. “You think I am so dimwitted as to leave incriminating letters on the bodies, but would have taken the time to remove a bullet?”

“I think a panicked man acts hastily, and not always rationally.”

I subsided at that. I had witnessed the very same in my many adventures with Sherlock Holmes. I cast about for other refutations. “I could not have killed Baines,” I told Lestrade, “as I departed London immediately after you left Baker Street. Holmes can testify to that.”

“Baines was killed before Hurley,” Lestrade countered. “The night of the regiment’s reunion ball. You had plenty of time, Dr. Watson. And Holmes can’t testify to anything—as he hasn’t been seen by a soul, not even your landlady, after I left him alone with you last night.”

The gaol was cold and damp and exactly as cheerful as one would expect such a place to be. I was put into a cell with a man who appeared to be hardly more than a heap of rags. The unwashed odor and the reek of spirits on him were overpowering, and I kept as much distance between us as possible.

Hours passed, and at long last, I heard the sound of crisp footsteps approaching my cell. I stood and found myself facing a man I *did* recognize from Afghanistan. Colonel Richard Atwell stood on the other side of the bars, looking over me with cold distaste. Atwell had been the aide-de-camp to our regiment’s commanding officer, back in Afghanistan. I remembered him only as an extremely At his side, stood Lestrade, expectant.

“Yes,” Atwell growled upon seeing me. “That’s the man. By god, if I had only known how far he’d sink...”

“Sir?” I could think of no reason for the Colonel to be called upon to identify me—or remember anything that would make him disdain me so.

“You’re a disgrace,” Atwell told me bitingly. “And you will pay for what you’ve done.”

Behind me, my cellmate groaned and shifted. A pair of bright, black eyes peered from the disheveled heap of his body.

“Colonel Atwell?” the ragged man demanded.

The Colonel stiffened. “And you are, sir?”

“You don’t remember me?” the man asked, his voice little more than a hoarse whisper. “The army hospital in Maiwand?”

The colonel stiffened, his face going rigid and pale. “Who are you?” he demanded. “Identify yourself!”

“You don’t remember?” the ragged man reiterated. “You don’t remember the name Arthur Greaves?”

The colonel fell back with a gasp, nearly falling over Lestrade’s feet. The ragged man straightened to his full, unexpectedly tall, height. He tore away a wig and wiped at his face until his features resolved into a face I recognized—Sherlock Holmes. I stared, once again awed by Holmes’s mastery of disguise.

“Lestrade, you’ll want to arrest that man,” Holmes said calmly. “You’re standing next to the murderer of Peter Hurley, Charles Baines... and Arthur Greaves.”

Lestrade looked unconvinced—until he saw Atwell’s face.

“After Watson boarded the train to Cornwall,” Holmes explained, “I used a connection of his at the War Office to access records relating to the 66th regiment in the Anglo-Afghan War. It turns out that Peter Hurley and Charles Baines were hospitalized in the same ward, at the same time Watson had been, after the Battle of Maiwand.”

The colonel made a choked noise, but no words emerged.

“Colonel Atwell had also been hospitalized in the same ward at the time, along with Arthur Greaves. Of those men, Arthur Greaves was the only one to die in hospital—despite suffering the least life-threatening injuries. A little more digging revealed that

allegations had been insinuated against Atwell with the War Office—by none other than Arthur Greaves. These were serious criminal allegations that, if proven, would have put the colonel in a rather serious legal situation. But, quite conveniently, Greaves died in hospital before he could testify or provide evidence of these claims. Lost in the shuffle, the allegations against Atwell were never investigated.” Holmes paused. “Until Peter Hurley and Charles Baines—who never forgot what they saw that day—decided the time had come to confront you, isn’t that so, Colonel?”

The colonel’s jaw worked, but no sound emerged.

“And so, you realized that if you were ever going to escape your past, you had to eliminate every possible witness to your crimes. I’ll concede, it was clever of you to organize the reunion—it allowed you to bring all your quarries into one location, while providing a vast array of possible culprits for investigation. And by issuing the invitations and collecting responses, it allowed you to collect Watson’s signature so that you could imitate it for your final crime.”

“This is absurd,” the colonel managed to wheeze.

“But, you see,” Holmes continued, unperturbed. “In your efforts to manufacture the accusations against Watson, you made a grave error. While you replicated Watson’s signature nearly to perfection—you *traced* instead of developing your own imitation of the signature. Tracing, you see, leaves tell-tale qualities quite different from an authentic signature. If you look closely at the signatures, Lestrade, you’ll find the ink has pooled in places where Atwell paused while tracing. In an authentic sample of Watson’s signature, those pauses do not occur.”

“Absurd,” the colonel repeated hoarsely.

“But then there’s the question of the missing bullet,” Holmes mused. “I confess, this one rather confounded me for a day or two. My initial thought was that you must have somehow infiltrated our rooms at Baker Street, located Watson’s gun, and removed a single bullet from the chamber. But that isn’t what happened, is it, Atwell?”

The colonel could only stare back, pale and wordless.

“Watson, did Atwell have any particular requests when he issued the invitations for the reunion ball?”

Holmes’s deductions suddenly crystalized in my mind, and I looked to Atwell with sudden fury. “He requested that those of us who still possessed our old service pistols to bring them along, so that we might perhaps shoot targets and reminisce.”

“And you brought yours?”

“Yes. Though we never did any target shooting, did we Colonel?”

“No,” Holmes agreed. “Though I suspect the Colonel had the opportunity to hold yours—examine it? Perhaps going so far as to open the chamber and inspect it? The perfect time to slip a bullet out.”

It was at that moment, that Atwell chose to flee.

It was some hours later that Holmes and I were released from the cell—Atwell having been chased down by several police before he was subdued and apprehended. That night, we returned to our lodgings at Baker Street, none the worse for the wear, but decidedly unsettled. It wasn't until many months later, when Atwell was tried and condemned, and the case was closed by Scotland Yard, that I could rest easy in my freedom.

“Chimera”

By Mindy Mensen

After a nearly five year hiatus, without so much as a telegram to keep me from fearing the worst, my old friend Sherlock Holmes once again found his way to my doorstep — quite literally. I had bid my final patient good evening and was taking a much needed moment to collect my thoughts when my reverie was shattered by a panicked scream from the bottom of the stairwell. I quickly ran toward the disturbance, walking stick in hand just in case, only to see said patient leaning over a frightfully motionless body just inside the entryway. Male at first glance, though excessively lean, with pale, peaked features; I initially assumed it to be some poor cocaine addict having a very bad night. His oversized clothes were tattered and caked with dirt and dried blood and the bruising on and around his face was so severe that it nearly kept me from recognizing him, but the long, delicate fingers poking out from under the crumpled body confirmed what I had been dreading all these years.

“Dear God!” I exclaimed with a hint of repressed anger, “Holmes! What the devil have you gotten yourself into this time? Holmes!Damn you! You selfish bastard!Holmes, answer me!”

Fortunately, it only took a moment for my medical training to kick in, allowing me to push aside my personal feelings and examine my infuriating friend. With a touch of reluctance from my former patient, we were able to transport him back upstairs, gently enough, to where I could fully assess the damage that had been so viciously inflicted upon him. I had nursed him back to health after more than a few harrowing encounters during our adventures together, but this far exceeded any amount of injury I’d witnessed on a single body since my time in Afghanistan.

His eyes, normally sharp and piercing, were dark and hollow, as though he hadn’t slept in weeks. His thin, hawk-like nose, which had once given him an air of alertness, now bent a bit to the right and the remnants of dried blood left a sanguine stain just above his sun-scorched lips. His pale hands were crusted with an unusual reddish mud-like substance; knuckles cracked and bloody. Even his impressive height had somehow diminished in his absence; his proud, straight back now stooped like an old man’s and his already lean figure more closely resembled that of a skeleton, than a living, breathing human. I swear, only five years had passed since his initial disappearance, but the Sherlock Holmes that returned had aged at least twice that.

It took the better part of a week for my friend to regain consciousness, but despite his grievous injuries and the extent of damage from exposure alone, it was right back to business just as soon as his critically weakened constitution allowed for

it. From what I could ascertain by listening closely to his fevered musings, he had been on a covert mission under his brother's orders to search for a series of missing animals, but in typical Mycroft fashion, there was always an ulterior motive. In this case, it was to remove his meddling brother from the picture long enough to prevent any potential interference into a dangerously heated and rather delicate election campaign. One, I might add, into which Mycroft had placed dangerously high stakes, and per his usual egocentricity, never once took into account his own brother's safety or well-being.

Upon a bit of further investigation on my part, I confirmed that a series of very rare and valuable animals had indeed gone missing across the globe, but that tidbit of general information just barely scratched the surface. The tally began with a peculiarly coifed, giant eagle from the East Indies. Apparently, the majestic raptor had been worshipped with the greatest of reverence by a local sect of Hindu monks who believed it to be the reincarnation of one of their most sublime swamis. Next to vanish was a pair of sacred white lions from the Timbavati region of South Africa, followed by a handful of less notable wildlife over the next six months, before the trend of rarity and value picked back up in Holland with the disappearance of Prince Valentijn "Blackbolt", a towering Friesian stud, rumored to possess coat and feathering so luxurious, that he gleamed like ebon flames in the noontime sun. Following this last entry, the record ended abruptly, concluding that the animals had simply vanished without a trace – at least to the mundane senses of anyone other than my amazing friend, Sherlock Holmes, who knew without a shadow of a doubt that there had to be more to this mystery than just a simple collector of rare specimens.

So he continued on, from one country to the next, relying on local rumors and tavern gossip to stay on the seemingly endless trail, but it wasn't until that last year abroad, while following the proverbial breadcrumbs clear across the Fertile Crescent in search of a prized Saluki, affectionately nicknamed, "the Silver Pearl", in her native Turkey, that the thief suddenly grew weary of stealing animals and proceeded to full-fledged kidnapping. Holmes had been right all along. There was more to this case than the authorities were willing to believe. This most recent victim was a young Polynesian woman from the tiny island of Moorea – Nohealani Manu, or "the beautiful bird from Heaven" as she was known throughout the region. She was the youngest living descendent of an ancient line of proud chieftains, but stories detailing her ethereal beauty and compassion for her people, especially children, had managed to travel all the way here to the mainland, oftentimes describing her with a reverence akin to Helen of Troy or Cleopatra.

During intermittent bouts of consciousness following his return, Holmes tried explaining to me that the record was incorrect, that there were clues – clues he alone had gleaned – but since they didn't seem to connect cohesively with the missing

animals, the authorities quickly grew impatient and abandoned the case, forcing him to pursue the truth on his own, a truth that was much more sinister than anyone could have imagined.

“The clues were right there...” sputtered a weak voice from across the room catching me off guard, “as clear as mud, or... as red...”

There were a few more incoherent vocalizations following that last bit about “red”, but nothing I could make heads or tails out of. After such a comment, I simply assumed that my ailing friend must have been mumbling in his sleep again, as he had consistently since his return, but there was an urgency in this particular senseless rant that made me feel inclined to draw that train of thought out further, in any way necessary – so contrary to my better judgement I decided I would try to egg him on.

“What nonsense are you going on about Holmes?” I mocked, attempting to provoke him into a more coherent explanation. “Even my six year old niece knows that mud is brown, not red.”

I waited a few minutes for the expected, confrontational response, but to no avail. He had already slipped too far back into his own mind, so my only available course of action was to wait patiently for another opening where I might attempt to irritate him back into consciousness. To my dismay, I was forced to wait nearly a day and a half more before Holmes came to his senses enough to speak, and again I met his cryptic utterings with an attitude intended to annoy him enough to keep him talking. This time he was going on about a “clay-shaper” followed by some very intense ramblings of “stones weeping” concluding with a repeat as to how “the clues had been clear as mud.” Not wanting to risk losing this window, I began firing off a barrage of insults meant to target his ego directly, growing more intense until I finally felt his piercing gaze meet my worried one for the first time since before he left.

“Thank the stars, you’re finally awake!” I cried, though the built up anger from being left to sit and worry all these years prevented me from stopping there. “You egomaniacal, callous bastard! What were you thinking? Taking off on some globe trekking mission without so much as a telegram to keep me from fearing the worst! What have you got to say for yourself Holmes?”

Slowly my tongue-lashed friend acknowledged me and attempted to prop himself into a more upright position, though it was obvious that the effort alone was still quite painful, as he winced and slouched back down into the cushions.

“My dear Dr. Watson,” he imparted slowly, “it would seem you missed me.”

“What?” I huffed back avoiding his gaze. “What would give you such an absurd idea? In fact, I rather enjoyed the peace and quiet during your absence.”

“No need to lie,” Holmes stated matter-of-factly, at last sounding like himself again. “I noted the excessive wear on both heels and left front sole of your shoe, as well as the scuffs near the front door and window where you turned as you paced the room. I can also see that you’ve been reading the same book since I returned, but several of the page corners have been folded and unfolded multiple times, as you were forced to start over due to the obvious distraction of my worrisome condition. And finally, as a doctor and husband, your degree of empathy would never have allowed you to verbally attack me in such a manner, unless you truly thought it was the only way to rouse me from my torpid state.

“Fine Holmes,” I sulked, “You’re correct as usual, but I’m still confounded as to why you never let me know you were leaving, though in retrospect, I suppose that was Mycroft’s idea.”

“Indeed Watson, although I assumed you would have come to that conclusion once you first learned of my departure. Regardless, onto the real business at hand. Unfortunately, the last several days have left me a bit foggy, though I’m certain I must have sent you some clues during that time. Do you recall anything I may have said while I was otherwise incoherent? Perhaps I repeated something, a tell-tale sign of utmost importance.

I thought for a moment, then recalled his initial outburst two days prior.

“Clear as mud!”, I exclaimed. “You uttered that twice. You also mentioned “red” in conjunction with the first comment, and something about a “clay-shaper”.

The perplexed look on my friend’s face only lasted a moment before he hastily lurched to a bolt-upright position, and consequentially proceeded to cry out with the pain of his many broken ribs, slumping back down with a moan.

It was blatantly obvious that this entire situation was wearing heavily on his damaged physical state, but he refused to relent to his battered body and continued to struggle in a manner, I was certain, would only succeed in causing further injury, yet I felt powerless to prevent it. Not surprisingly, and in typical, stubborn Holmes fashion, he somehow staggered to his feet and attempted to make his way to where I was already rising to aid him at that very moment when his compromised balance inevitably gave out. Catching him mid-fall, I directed him, not so gently, back to the sofa where he had been trapped in the confines of his own mind for well over a week now. Fighting against me with all his might, despite the fact that any additional injury

to his body may well have killed him, I held him still as best I could and administered a mild sedative to quiet him.

“No! Watson! I mustn’t waste any more time sleeping...”

His pleas dwindled off as the sedative began to take effect, but his single-minded stubbornness would not be silenced so easily.

“No! Watson!” he insisted as he fought to maintain consciousness, “You must understand! It is imperative that we delay no further... the Clay Shaper... He’s mad I tell you! The stones will weep in a matter of days, and we are running out of time! We must leave tonight! At once!”

It wasn’t like my friend to carry on so cryptically, though in hindsight, I’m sure the sedative I gave him didn’t help, seeing as how our prior conversation before he overexerted himself had been fairly clear and concise. However, given his extended time abroad and his predisposition to understand the nature of things that would have otherwise eluded any other intelligent human being, I concluded that the situation must indeed be dire. Therefore, against my better judgement, as both his doctor and his friend, I waited for the last traces of the sedative to fade from his system and prepared for one more daring adventure. Fortunately, Mary was away visiting family for the remainder of the week and things were dreadfully quiet at my practice, so I was free to accompany Holmes wherever it was we were needed. By 20:00, my friend and I were already aboard a carriage enroute to the train station, but I had been left in the dark as to our final destination – a feeble attempt to get even with me for the sedative I suppose.

“Not entirely,” came my friend’s uncannily timed response, as if he were reading my very thoughts. “I don’t fault you for your actions back at Baker Street, as causing further injury to myself would have been most inconvenient. At this particular moment however, I’m simply not positive as to precisely where we need to go. But fear not Watson, I’ll most assuredly know by the time we reach the station.”

“Blast it all Holmes! How can we be sure the train will even be going in the right direction if you don’t yet know the destination?” I admonished.

“Elementary my dear Watson”, replied Holmes calmly, “The train station itself holds the clue to our next stop. Now, I suppose since we have a bit of time before we arrive, you would like some clarification as to what sort of villain we must imminently face?”

“That would be helpful”, I replied dryly. “Even on the battlefield, I typically had a clearer idea of what to expect, than on the vast majority of adventures with you, and this one seems particularly ominous, considering the state I found you in.”

“Very well Watson. As you likely discovered after my premature return, my brother sent me out on, what he incorrectly assumed, to be no more than an extensive wild goose chase. However, following the unfortunate events regarding that Scottish Baron fellow; MacDougall (or Mac Dubhghaill as those drunken highlanders would say in their old, pagan tongue), I unwillingly owed Mycroft a favor, so I had little choice but to investigate the matter. The Philippine eagle was my first mark, though it wasn't until I learned of the missing lions, that I began to put the pieces together, given my profound interest in ancient Greek and Roman mythos. At each new location, the authorities I was tasked to work with quickly lost interest, displaying a predisposition to, what they considered, more important matters than searching for missing pets and sentimental symbols. It didn't help that the clues left at each site were far too complex for them to comprehend, although to me they were, as you claim I stated more than once, clear as mud. It was easier for them to simply relay that there was no valid evidence to warrant further investigation, leaving me to my own devices.

“Alright Holmes”, I questioned, “but you have yet to explain the significance of that *clear as mud* reference to which you keep alluding. Was there truly some sort of transparent substance that led to your conclusions, or was that only an expression?”

“Both of course”, my friend replied with a twinge of that once familiar mischief reflecting across his peaked face. “The clues were indeed as clear as mud, though in this case, the substance in question was a fine, red clay – the type used by sculptors to create effigies and pottery, but able to solidify in the sun, preventing the need for kilns or ovens and allowing a sculptor, to create much larger pieces. Pieces I would discover later, that were large enough to encase living creatures.”

“Good God Holmes! What are you saying?” I exclaimed in horror.

But with that, our carriage came to an abrupt halt at the outermost perimeter of the station grounds where I quickly realized that there was some sort of delay on the nearest set of tracks. The holdup consisted of several large, burly men struggling to load dozens of cloth-wrapped blocks onto the rearmost baggage car, along with another half dozen or so even larger wooden crates, outfitted with vertical lines of small, uniform holes that spanned the entire surface of each.

“Well, we had best get a move on Watson”, said Holmes, “our train is already here, and time is not our ally this night.”

“But Holmes”, I asked, “isn’t that the famed Orient Express, one of the most expensive, luxury sleeper liners in all of Europe? How can we hope to acquire reservations for tonight, let alone pay for them?”

“Why, that’s the easy part my dear Watson, I saw to it that we had standing reservations for any evening this week before I left Istanbul. As luck would have it, my imminent recovery just happened to kick in on the very same night that the villainous sculptor staged a return to his gallery to begin the creation of his most sinister masterpiece – *Chimera*.

It only took me a moment before I recognized that word. I recalled stumbling across it one rainy afternoon while perusing a masterfully illustrated compendium of Greek Mythology from my friend’s extensive occult collection. A “chimera” was a dreadful beast; a fire-breathing female monster with a lion's head, a goat's body, and a serpent's tail, but I couldn’t understand what on earth it had to do with this case. Soon after however, once my friend clued me in to the mystery behind the monster, the sheer wickedness of it nearly turned the blood to ice in my veins.

For three full days we traveled nonstop, from one city to the next, and each day my friend grew increasingly restless. During the night he would mumble in his sleep, about the vile, “clay shaper”, some sort of a “caged bird” and the “weeping stones”, followed by panicked outbursts of “chimera” before he would awake in a cold sweat, only to pass back out from exhaustion. In truth, we should never have embarked on such a journey until he had regained a good deal more of his strength, but as usual, once Holmes got caught up in such intense tangents, there was just no deterring him. For the time being, all I could do was ride along and keep watch over my friend, making sure this time to take notes of any “clues” he sent me from inside his mind. Finally, by midafternoon on the third day he seemed to have regained enough strength to more thoroughly fill me in on the confusing details of this case. I presented him with the notes I had taken and sat back quietly, waiting for him to translate the unintelligible gibberish.

“Good show my dear Doctor”, Holmes beamed upon looking over the notes I had handed him. “I do believe I adequately addressed the idea of the clay-shaper as our current adversary. As for the caged bird, the young woman he has taken is called “Nohealani”, a name of Hawaiian origin which translates as “Beauty from Heaven”, followed by the family name “Manu”, which means bird, hence the name given to her by her native peoples, “The beautiful bird from Heaven”. However, if the maniacal sculptor is truly planning what I fear, he intends to turn the young woman, who I’m sure you’re already aware, is well known for her selfless work with impoverished children, into one of his “living statues”, that she might watch over his departed

daughter for all eternity. Should that come to pass, the “beautiful bird” would become “caged” in a tomb of clay and stone if we fail in our mission.

“So, if that poor girl is trapped inside a tomb of clay, the stone could truly weep!” The sheer horror of that revelation left me speechless for the remainder of the evening as my thoughts were fully consumed by the direness of the situation.

Finally, on the fourth day we had made our way to the ancient city of Budapest, and it was here that Holmes insisted we disembark with no apparent rhyme or reason. Fearing for his mental health as well as his physical well-being after such a trying journey, I asked in as disarming a manner as I could muster, if he was sure this was the correct location, and I can assure you, I would not be so foolish as to make that mistake again!

“Am I sure?” hissed Holmes in as menacing a manner as I had ever witnessed from my flustered friend. “Am I sure?! Of course I’m sure Watson! Are you still so naïve to believe I would drag us halfway across the continent on a whim? Am I sure.....” he continued to mumble under his breath as he retrieved his things and carefully exited the car with myself close behind.

“Chimera”.

“What was that?” I asked.

“Chimera”, he repeated, looking deep in thought.

“Yes Holmes”, I responded, “I caught that much, but you still haven’t explained specifically what its significance is on this particular mission.”

“Everything”, he replied sullenly, “but if we don’t reach the convent soon, it won’t matter. Their time is nearly up”.

“Convent?” I questioned, “My dear Holmes, as always, I am more than willing to follow you to whatever end, especially with innocent lives at stake, but please understand that I cannot help you if you refuse to clarify!”

“Chimera”, my friend repeated once again, with a twinge of disgust in his voice. The creature itself is known to you, but the word holds more than one meaning, yes?”

“I suppose so”, I replied. “Most words with ancient origins as Greek and Latin typically do, but I still fail to see the connection”.

By this time Holmes had flagged down a carriage, requesting expedited travel to Margaret Island, once known as Rabbit Island and resting place to the ruins of the once great Dominican Convent, then offered the driver twice the normal fare if he would forego any subsequent stops.

“It’s true”, continued Holmes, “in mythology, the chimera is a fearsome beast made up of three separate creatures, but in biological terms, it refers to an organism created from a mixture of genetically different tissues, formed by various scientific processes, such as grafting or mutation. This villain – is like no other I’ve ever encountered. Once a gifted artist and sculptor named Markus Valerian, his paintings were stunning, but it was his hauntingly beautiful sculptures of mythical creatures and fantastic beasts that made him famous. So lifelike were his creations that others grew jealous. They lied, saying that he used black magic to trap living souls in the stone; that that was the reason they seemed so alive – when in reality, he was just one of a very few who was truly gifted. However, when a story is passed along to enough weak-minded people, the truth is eventually lost and replaced by fear, which in turn can make people do horrible things – unforgivable things... and so it came to pass, that one night under the guise of fear, an angry mob overtook the young sculptor in his garden. Two men held him while he was forced to watch as his beautiful creations were smashed to bits and his late wife’s lovingly tended gardens were reduced to ash. As the hateful mob made their way to the last, tiny statue at the center of the garden, Markus became like a man possessed, screaming, and fighting back against his attackers with “inhuman strength”. He charged after the men as they advanced, killing at least two of them in the process before throwing himself onto the tiny stone child, as if it were alive and begging for “her” to be spared. Not yet satisfied with the destruction they had caused, the leader laughed with disdain at the poor man sobbing at his feet and threw his torch down on top of him, only hesitating long enough to assure that the flames caught. Fearing that the growing blaze would destroy the only thing left in the world that he cared about, Markus held the marble child high up in his arms while the flames lapped against his skin and burned his flesh, until he finally reached the blessed waters of the great stone fountain at the old convent. The flames were quenched but the anger and hatred burned inside him until he was consumed by it, for in his valiant attempt to save that priceless statue, the very piece he had created in loving memory of his young daughter, who only survived to the age of four, and whose mother had died in childbirth, he had also lost the only thing that allowed him to cope with such heartbreaking loss; his hands were so badly burned that he would never sculpt again.”

Then it finally hit me! I knew this story. Betrayed by his own people and mad with grief, the sculptor secretly purchased the grounds of the ruined convent and swore to fill its vast gardens with companions for his daughter to replace those that

had been destroyed, so that she need never be alone again. That was when the sheer horror of the situation finally clicked in my frantic mind.

“Dear God, Holmes! What exactly has been done?” I gasped.

“I surmise”, said Holmes, “that with such grievous injuries to his hands preventing him from creating as he once did, and his entire perception of humanity, blinded by sorrow and hatred for all that was stolen from him, the once great sculptor discovered that by entombing living creatures in clay and stone, he was once again able to bring the same, awe-inspiring degree of life to his creations as he once did. But if my calculations are correct, we are already too late to save most of the creatures that were first abducted, however, if we can reach him within the hour, there may still be hope for the rest.”

After what seemed like days in the back of that carriage, pondering over such a heart-wrenching tale of hatred and despair, I found myself at a complete loss once the driver relayed to us that we had finally arrived. I looked to my friend for guidance, but his unusually distant stare gave me no comfort this time.

“My dear Watson”, Holmes said quietly, “I think, that at this fateful juncture, it would be in our best interest, and for the sake of the lives at stake, to do it your way this time.”

“My way?” I asked, confused by the connotation. “What way would that be?”

“Why, the only way you knew before we met – like soldiers.” Holmes replied stoically.

Nodding solemnly to my friend, we made our way toward the labyrinthine gardens, “Like soldiers then.” I replied.

The closer we drew to the courtyard’s center, the more unsettling the scenery became. First, we passed a pair of crouching griffons, poised as if to guard the entrance. But as I studied the majestic beasts, with their powerful lion’s bodies and beautiful eagle’s wings and heads, my stomach turned as the reality of the situation finally hit me. Sadly, we would not be returning the eagle or the lions to their homes if we even survived this harrowing mission. Next, I believe, was the graceful Saluki, though she now wore a lion’s mane as a thick, silky coat and possessed multiple tails, ringed at the tips like a fox. Among the lush foliage and bright flowers, dark stains tainted the green grass, and I could swear I heard whimpering as we passed the unfortunate fox-dog. Throughout the garden, eerily lifelike statues watched us everywhere we went, from mouse-sized fairies to a breathtakingly beautiful, black

hippocampus that still struggled to free its back legs from the dark clay tail that was slowly solidifying around them. It was then that we saw her; the young woman, who had been stolen from her warm island home so far away from this chilling place. She was tied to a tall, thin post in the very center of the garden, forcibly keeping her limp form upright. I wanted to look away, but I couldn't. Even in this garden of death, her beauty was beyond words. Her gentle, brown arms reached up to the sky, as if to cradle the sun itself, and her slender legs ended with gracefully pointed toes that gave the illusion of dancing on air. Disturbingly, through all this, she seemed oblivious to her plight, allowing herself to be manipulated, like a child posing a doll. Meanwhile, a set of intricate, stained-glass wings were being carefully positioned behind her; most likely with the intent to incorporate them into her immortal death shroud. The final, dramatic touch lay in the crown of arching, silver antlers that adorned her serene forehead. We had to act now, or all would be for naught, yet I found myself paralyzed in the midst of this living nightmare, until I remembered my friend's last words, "Like soldiers."

And so the final battle began. Like waking from a dream, I remembered myself and charged toward the heart of the garden, where the heavenly bird would soon sing her last if I didn't act, but where had my friend gone? Just then, a disturbance from within the thick fog caught my attention. Suddenly, I heard the excited barking of a dog and saw Holmes approaching with the many-tailed Saluki, though still partially caked in slimy red clay, whimpering at his side in anticipation. Meanwhile, thundering hooves kicked up sprays of sanguine water, as the fiery Friesian escaped from the depths to trample his captor. The frenzy grew louder, as it was joined by shrieking feathers and balls of fur until the whole garden came alive with rage. Then, as suddenly as it began, all fell silent and my amazing friend stood beside me as calmly as if we were meeting for brunch on a Sunday morning. Once the dust finally cleared, I wasted no time in assisting the young woman down from her would-be tomb and examined her thoroughly to ensure that no permanent damage had been done. As luck would have it, her languid state was nothing more than the product of an opium-induced haze that Markus had somehow manipulated her into using.

And so ends another adventure, our most trying yet I think, but what's important, is that in the end the beautiful bird was rescued and delivered safely home, along with the loyal "Silver Pearl" and the fiery black Friesian who, along with the other "living statues", had each dealt out their own, feral vengeance, putting an end to the cruelty and freeing the poor sculptor from his endless torment. Oddly, his body was never recovered, but folk tales that have since been passed down through the ancient forests and stone cathedrals of Eastern Europe speak of a lonely stone child with gossamer wings, in a secret garden somewhere on the grounds of the ruined

convent. She does not move, nor does she breathe, but a single tear streams eternally down her ivory cheek and blood red flowers bloom where they fall.

The Ruined Canvas

By Indigo Ramirez

1.

“Artists keep such odd hours,” mused the hotel clerk as he watched the young woman trudge upstairs with her luggage. He squinted at the clock and clicked his tongue at the folly of young people. Of course, the artist didn’t notice him. Helena Jacobs was wondering how she was supposed to pack everything by morning.

Once inside her suite, she dropped her bags unceremoniously and sunk into a nearby armchair. A quick glance at the easels told her they were ready to be stored. Rising with a groan from her seat, Helena shuffled towards the table. A heavy knock at the door made her whirl, hair standing on end. A second later, she was across the room and leaning towards the peephole, smiling with glee as she swung the door open and flung her arms around the person waiting there. “God, you scared me.” Eyes shining, she clasped their hand tightly within her own. “I’m sorry you’ve caught me early, but you can stay while I gather my things.”

The young woman huffed in mock irritation as she turned towards the table and began to fuss with papers and boxes, loading the canvases one after another into a hay-filled trunk. “One day I’ll learn to start packing early.” Fingers on her arm made her pause and before she could turn around, whispered words fell against her ear. The color left her tawny skin and dripped around the thing that was slid between her ribs. Helena sagged over the table, blood seeping into the canvases before she crumpled to the floor.

At six am, a concierge knocked on Helena’s door. “Ms. Jacobs? Your cab is waiting, would you like some help with your bags?” Silence. He rapped his knuckles on the door one more time, then strode down the hall to inform the cabby their patron was not answering. At six-thirty, the concierge returned and knocked again. Ms. Jacobs did not answer her name the first, second, or fifth time he called her. At six forty-five, hotel management unlocked her door. They all saw her at once and the concierge screamed before he fell into the doorway and bounced back into the hallway. The manager stepped over him and strode hastily down the hall, waving away worried guests and reassuring them, “There’s nothing to worry about, please stay in your rooms while we handle the situation.” She almost took one step down the stairs, but the shrill cry of “Murder!” from the risen concierge made her start to run.

2.

Inspector Lestrade stood over the body, rolling his pencil between his fingers as he suggested to no one in particular, "It was probably a suicide." A snort behind him told him that backup had arrived and he flipped his notepad open, glancing over his shoulder at the pair crossing the threshold. Sherlock cast a condescending look at the rest of the police force present in the suite before devoting his attention to the body sprawled on the floor. "Inspector, tell me what you know."

Inspector Lestrade tipped his head to Dr. Watson before launching into the facts. "She was Helena Jacobs. We found her with her fingers wrapped around this dagger in her heart, the physician says she died around midnight." Inspector Lestrade watched as Sherlock crouched to inspect the body, then rose to study the evidence laid on the table. The man continued to read his notes, trying not to watch as Sherlock began holding the bloodstained paintings up to the gaslights. "Twenty-five years of age, single, has a sister in America. She was employed at Christie's Auction house, she was one of their art appraisers. Looks like she was trying to make it in the art world, but debts were stacking up. She had an address in Paris written in her notebook, along with a couple of names and numbers. Tiffany Heath and Meline Fontaine. Friends of hers I'm assuming. I'm sure that they could have helped her, it didn't need to end like this." Sherlock laid the last painting down, removing his gloves and putting them in his coat. "Like what, Lestrade? You act as though she could have stopped her own murder." The inspector sputtered for a moment before whispering, "Murder?" The consulting detective smiled as if humoring a small child, "Correct, dear Lestrade."

Later that morning, Sherlock and Watson arrived at Christie's Auction House, Helena's former place of employment. Once inside, they were greeted by a pleasant-looking woman who introduced herself as, "Ms. Heath, how can I assist you?" Watson admired the ornate lobby while Sherlock explained, "My name is Sherlock Holmes and this is my assistant Dr. John Watson. I'm here investigating Ms. Helena Jacobs. May I speak to her employer, Ms. Heath?" Ms. Heath tilted her head a little and glanced between the two men before lowering her voice. "Is Helena alright? Why are you investigating her?" Watson stepped forward and answered quietly, "Ms. Jacobs was found dead in her hotel this morning." Ms. Heath paled, red lip shaking for a moment before she could compose herself. "I am very sorry to hear that. Helena was well-loved by everyone here." She rose from her desk, smoothing a wrinkle in her skirt before leading them down the hall. "Mr. Tennet, I'm sorry to interrupt but this can't wait. This is Sherlock Holmes and Dr. John Watson, they're here investigating Helena." Ms. Heath covered her hand with her mouth, holding in a sob as she rushed back to her desk. Joseph Tennet was left with little choice but to wave the two men inside, rising to shut the door behind them and make apologies for his dramatic receptionist. "Sorry about her, she's been a tad hysterical this morning. Is this about the thefts?" Upon seeing their blank expressions, Mr. Tennet continued, "We'd

received a complaint from someone in the office that Ms. Jacobs had been lifting petty change and also,” he tugged at his collar and continued in a quieter tone, “she’d been bringing undesirable company.” Dr. Watson leaned in closer and queried, “Was she involved with a young man, perhaps?” Mr. Tennet shook his head vigorously, color creeping into his sallow face. “Worse,” he groaned into his handkerchief, “A young woman, a former client of hers I believe.” Sherlock leaned back in his chair, glancing over to Watson who was red up to his ears. He sighed and returned his gaze back to Tennet. “It hardly makes a difference; when did the money go missing?”

Mr. Tennet shrugged his shoulders and began to rifle through his desk drawers, staring intently at the mess of receipts. “I noticed some notes missing earlier this week, as did some of my associates. It was very troubling. Her and that woman. Our clients started to notice, they didn’t like it. We have a reputation to uphold here, we can’t have a lesbian bringing down the establishment.” Watson’s fingers curled against his palm as he answered, “So, Helena had to go. Was killing her necessary?” Mr. Tennet fell backward in his chair, eyes bugging out of his skull. “Ms. Jacobs is dead? That’s why you’re here?” Sherlock nodded gravely, “She was discovered earlier this morning. Thank you for your time, Mr. Tennet.” As they left the office of the speechless man, they nearly collided with Ms. Heath who was carrying a stack of files. She mumbled an apology and rushed past them down the hall into the next office.

Upon their arrival at 221B Baker. St., Mrs. Hudson greets them and says there’s a young Frenchwoman in mourning waiting in their living room. Sherlock and Watson enter their quarters and bow to the young woman before taking their seats. Sherlock immediately invited her to tell them about her relationship with Helena. The woman gasped in shock and Watson began to apologize profusely. She shook her head a little and murmured, "No, that's right, it's why I'm here."

3.

“My name is Meline Fontaine, I am— was a close friend of Helena. We met at an auction and Helena showed me around. She was so charming, although I wasn’t sure if she was more interested in me or my antiques. Helena was so enthusiastic about everything, she approached everything headfirst. I started bringing little pieces for her to appraise while she was on her lunch break, just to have an excuse to see her. Then one day, Helena greeted me with the news that she had found a patron in France who was a huge fan of her paintings. Helena had only shown her work at a few exhibitions and the chances of landing a patron were incredibly slim. Ever since then, it was all Helena would talk about, until last week. I had barely taken a step into the building

when Helena ran up to meet me in the lobby and said rather breathlessly that she wanted me to come with her to France. I begged time to think about it and left before Helena could say more. I hadn't visited Helena since that day and only heard of her death when I went to her hotel." Meline's body was racked by a sob and she struggled to regain her composure long enough to ask, "Is there anything else I can do for you, Mr. Holmes?" Sherlock shook his head and rose from his seat, offering her his arm as he led her from the room. "You have given me everything I need to bring Helena's killer to justice." Once he saw that Mrs. Hudson was escorting her down the stairs, Sherlock returned and shut the door to their quarters.

Watson puffed a bit and checked a loose thread on his sleeve, "Well, that solves the mystery of Helena's young lady friend. What is not clear to me, Sherlock, is why she would steal from her employer and not put the money towards her debts? It doesn't make any sense."

Sherlock nodded his agreement, tapping his fingers against his cheek. "Exactly, Watson, Considering her work was the most important thing in her life and she was excited to move to France, why would she start stealing? It was a very clumsy set-up," muttered Sherlock. "Considering her preference for women, France would be far more friendly than England. If Helena had been stealing petty change she could have put it towards her debts. Not to mention if she was about to reach her life's goal she wouldn't kill herself out of guilt on the eve of escape." Watson shrugged his shoulders and lit his pipe, leaning back into his favorite chair. "She would have had a hard time of it, either way, it's such a shame she didn't get to be happy."

Sherlock huffed, laying his gloves on the table beside him. "It's a shame Tiffany Heath's jealousy cut her life short." Watson went slack-jawed, sitting bolt upright and about to launch into a flurry of questions before a raised hand from Sherlock stopped him. "Let me explain, dear Watson," the detective smiled, watching Watson roll back into his seat before continuing.

"Helena was a charismatic, selfish kind of person. She didn't understand why Meline was startled by a sudden proposal. She also did not understand that the receptionist was in love with her – yes, Watson, let me explain. Ms. Heath would watch Helena and Meline go back and forth on their lunch dates. She would be forced to listen to Helena gush about her fascinating new friend. She probably took the petty change from Mr. Tennet's office and suggested it was Helena. Of course, Mr. Tennet was in no hurry to fire her, until it came out that Helena was a lesbian. My guess is that Tiffany began to regret drawing attention to the woman she loved and did her best to keep Helena's attention off the accusations, but that only meant that Helena spent even more time talking to her about Meline. It became unbearable, so she made a plan to separate the two lovers: send Helena a letter claiming to be a French patron who

wanted her to join his studio. Helena accepted with no further thought, she didn't have much foresight. Imagine Tiffany's shock when Helena announced in the lobby that she wanted to take Meline to France. Granted, Meline didn't answer but Helena had, accidentally, made her point in a rather callous way. She had her heart set on Meline. This would not do. All Tiffany had to do was come to see Helena before she left for the station. Of course, Helena was happy to have company and once she turned her back on her visitor, the receptionist killed her. If she couldn't have Helena, then nobody would." Watson stared down at his shoes, raising his gaze to Sherlock's face when the man called for his attention. "People are so very irrational, Watson," Sherlock said with a sigh, leaning over to pick up the phone to dial the inspector. "Falling in love can be a mistake."