

# Sherlock Holmes Monster Hunter Terror at Scotland Yard

**Michael Moreau**

Smashwords Edition

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## WHO IS SHERLOCK HOLMES?

Oh what little hope do those retched souls of London, those unfortunate enough to be of a certain variety, have that I should not find them and put an end to their damnable way of life?

My name is Sherlock Holmes, and I was born on the sixth day of January, eighteen hundred and fifty four. I find myself gifted with certain talents that result in me being a most feared and respected consulting detective. Then again, does that label properly define me any longer? I feel that it *did*, at least for a time, but in recent years perhaps not. For you see I spent some time assisting Scotland Yard with robberies and murders and all manner of incidents that resulted from the aberrant tendencies present in the human psyche.

Five years ago, however, on the day before Christmas no less, something occurred that would forever change the very nature of my interest in criminal goings-on. What had begun as a routine homicide investigation, if homicide could ever be called such a thing as routine, turned itself into a stark revelation. I shall spare you the long-winded account, suffice it to say that, much to my surprise, my deductions had been terribly wrong and I shall try to be as succinct as possible in my relation of the events.

The murder weapon, surely the mummified paw I had spied in the glass case in the sitting room; an old hunting trophy no doubt. Despite the fact that it bore no traces of blood it *did* match the wounds upon the victim's throat almost perfectly. Though the Yard's man had not detected so, it was obvious to me that she had been killed indoors but that the body had then been dragged into the garden; a clear attempt to make the death appear to be an animal attack. Of course any investigator worth his salt would have noted the darting eyes of the husband, Mr. Brody. There was a faint yet lingering scent of perfume, and not of the kind that sat in a bottle on his wife's vanity, upon his person. Lastly, there was the overturned photograph on the narrow table in the hallway.

Jealousy, surely. Adeline Brody had confronted her husband about an affair and the scene had turned violent. Even the often dim-witted Inspector Lestrade could see it, but someone in his precinct wished the matter over and done with. So it was much to my surprise when he came to me in the evening and asked for my help. He wished to further examine the residence whilst Mr. Brody was away at a business dinner.

In retrospect, these five years later, I now know that Lestrade had suspected corruption within the Yard itself and had, that night, the ulterior motive of finding a link to whomever had been manipulating case files and tampering with evidence. Regardless, as it often had done in the past, my curiosity would not allow me to let the matter rest. So to the man's house we went, under cover of darkness. There I expected to find some small, almost unnoticeable, detail that would validate my theory and once again set mine apart from the slower mind of the inspector.

What we discovered, however, was anything but subtle and I thank the heavens to this day that I was fortunate enough to have had the company of *any* armed Scotland Yard officer with me when I did find it.

Entering the home we found it to be dark, but I immediately got the impression that it was not empty. From somewhere nearby I could detect breathing. Not that of a man, mind you, but something deeper and more sinister. My hand went to steady him but as Lestrade lit his match we both caught sight of the beast. Showing unrestrained ferocity it came at the inspector. With a

scream from him the match fell to the floor and its light extinguished. Reaching for the curtains I pulled them open, letting in dim light from a partial moon, and there I saw it. Its attention turned fully to me. I braced myself against the writing desk nearest the window and fumbled for *anything* I could find to defend myself. My hand found something round, cold, and very heavy; a marble paperweight in the design of the globe. As the creature approached, breathing heavily and with eyes glaring at me through the darkness, I swung with all of the might I could force from my body and struck it aside the head. It reeled, but only momentarily, letting out a roar so deafening that surely those in neighboring houses had heard it. Again, it came for me, and for the first time in my life I found myself at a loss, no course of action I could conjure would save me from my fate.

Then I heard the shots. One, then another, and then yet another, all issued from a police service revolver. The beast fell at my feet and shortly thereafter the darkness illuminated, Lestrade's match finding a gas lamp. The inspector's face was bloodied; a series of deep lacerations across his face and neck. I hurried to his aid and found that despite his aim having been true he was terribly shaken, even more so than I. The two of us, Lestrade and I, had unwittingly stepped across a boundary between two worlds. One that we had not even known existed until that moment. For you see I had been wrong about the murder weapon. Indeed I had been wrong about Mr. Brody entirely. For, much to our surprise, the beast which was injured but not dead, the one that we brought back to Lestrade's basement and chained to a brick column, began to change before our very eyes.

The old woman, naked, hurt and cold, was terrified for her life. She began to speak. All of my assumptions had been incorrect. The perfume I had detected upon Seamus Brody at the scene of the crime had not been from a lover, but from this very woman, his *mother*. She told us that she had been enraged when her son had refused an arranged marriage and had instead wed Adeline. She had let the matter rest for some years but eventually had allowed her to anger boil over and had traveled from their ancestral home near Cork to confront her son. Seamus had tried to evict her from his home but in the midst of a vicious argument in the hallway both mother and son revealed themselves for what they truly were. Terrified, and in shock for having seen for the first time her husband's true nature, Adeline panicked. During the scuffle, believing that he was trying to *defend* his wife from his mother, Brody accidentally struck her with his claws, whereupon she fell into the old woman's arms and died.

Fearing a witch hunt the two then conspired to make her death look like the attack of a wild animal. The overturned photograph on the table? Simply a result of the commotion in the hallway. The mummified paw in the case? Not a hunting trophy, rather a family heirloom. It would seem that Mr. Brody and his mother were Bugbear, though I did not know that name at the time nor what it meant.

Knowing that she could not be loosed upon an unsuspecting population once again, and aware that no court of law would convict her, the inspector and I were left with the decision of what to do with the old lady. In the end there was truly only one choice, an exchange. Our morals for the knowledge that she would no longer be out there, posing a danger to others. Lestrade's revolver still had three shots. More than enough to end her, or so we thought. As the gun was brought to bear on her she transformed into her hideous bestial form once again, howled at us furiously. The shots silenced her, but only for a few moments. As we sat in the drawing room above, pouring tea and deciding as to where her body should be hidden, we heard a stirring again in the bowels of the inspector's home.

Another six shots from the revolver. Nothing. A knife into her heart. Nothing. Finally there was poison, and again, nothing. She would expire only to gasp for breath again some minutes later as we watched her wounds heal with astonishing speed. It was then, in desperation, that I discovered one of the reasons that I had always been so clever at apprehending sociopaths. It was that a part of me, some small part, only barely present, held those same tendencies. Lestrade attempted to hold back his sick, failed, as I seized the knife from the workbench and took to sawing the creature's head from its shoulders. As I worked, screaming at the beast in anger as I did so, the knife grew difficult to budge and eventually I could cut no more. The wound healed around the blade which, moments later as I backed away in horror, spat it out whereupon it fell to the floor with a clatter. I could *not* kill her.

Near the point of madness Lestrade insisted that we do something, *anything*, with her so that the nightmare could end. In a haste I took a cab to the home of Seamus Brody, confronted him, explained that I knew what he was but that I had a compatriot waiting for me and that if he dare attack me he would surely be outed. Much to my delight he seemed to wish his mother dead as much as I, and he revealed to me the secret to killing one of his kind. A sharpened stake of willow, plunged into a gland in the left side of the torso, just below the ribs, was the only way to end them permanently.

I could tell from the man's demeanor that he thought himself a good judge of character. He thought himself capable of reading other men. Of course I was not *just* any other man. Before the sun had set that very day the world was rid of not one, but two Bugbear, and mother and son went to rest together. The good inspector, no longer wishing any part in the madness, of course did not accompany me to Cork whereupon I paid a visit to the rest of the Brody clan.

## WHO HAS HE BECOME?

Surely the twist to this tale is that I myself became a monster; a murderer, cold blooded and methodical. Upon returning from Ireland that was something I contemplated upon for some time, even sinking into a deep depression that resulted in the temporary loss of my lodgings at 221B Baker Street and many a night lost in the haze of opium.

I concluded however, that I was *not* a monster, no matter how brutal my actions might have been. For it was in those opium dens that I came to a new realization. Indulging in the pleasures of morphine whilst sitting in the comfort of my apartment, like I had done so many times, I had missed out on one of the most enlightening aspects of an opiate addiction; that being the company of the types who frequent such establishments. Over games of cards I heard the most interesting tales, mostly from Chinamen, but also those of European and African heritage as well when they saw fit to sink themselves to such depravities.

Tales, for that is what I would have labeled them before my experiences with the Brody clan, of fantastical creatures, monsters if you will, from all corners of the Earth. They were happily spun for my amusement; now that I had stopped to listen. Never having understood the fascination with such things in days before I now found myself listening to them intently, absorbing everything that I could. From the Aswang of Filipino lore to the Zahhak of Persian mythos I heard them all, or so I had thought. Finding myself with a new passion, knowledge of the paranormal, I recuperated from that particularly harsh bout of ill spirits and dedicated myself to research.

I visited every library in London and, likely owing to my appearance and odor, both of which was reminiscent of that of a vagrant, found myself tossed out of most of them promptly.

It did not take long to realize that were I to be able to fully indulge my latest fascination I would have to appear to be a respectable member of society once again. No small amount of prostration was required on my part to convince Mr. Hudson to return to me my room. Still, he had been kind enough to retain most of my wardrobe even when the rest of my belongings had been sent to auction. In the following months I took on some cases, the types that I had in the past, so as to refill my coffers. All the while, however, I threw myself headlong into my research with every spare moment that I could find. I read every book on the subject of legendary beasts in every language that I was fluent in, that being English, French and, of course, Latin. There were some in Italian and German too, which meant that I simply had to take on the task of teaching myself those tongues as well.

I had no way of sorting which creatures might truly exist and which were simply legend and nothing more, let alone of knowing if I would ever chance to come across one in person again. The answer was given to me when I was investigating what seemed to be a fairly mundane issue, a case of stolen art. Imagine my surprise when my chief suspect, a Monsieur Louis Gillard, revealed himself to be nothing less than a Loup-Garou; a particularly vile, and coincidentally French, version of what an Englishman would call a werewolf. I still muse that had I encountered Gillard in my younger days, before spending night after night reading the materials that I had come to obsess over, that I would have found myself ill-equipped to end him and it would have instead been *my* obituary listed in the paper.

Stumbling upon him in the dimly lit and crowded warehouse at the back of Granger & Son's Curios, a filthy little shop in Saffron Hill, he'd not appeared to me at first to be anything other than a moderately well-dressed young man. Why he chose to reveal himself to me, his *true* self that is, I to this day have no idea. Nevertheless, he did. With tufts of dark brown fur protruding from the collar and sleeves of his shirt, his face twisted into a cruel perversion that reminded one of both man *and* canid, he glared at me through glowing red eyes. That was of course the most disturbing feature of a Loup-Garou, the eyes. And at that moment a striking thought ran through my head. Of the volumes upon volumes of information regarding mythical beasts that I had assimilated into my storehouse of knowledge how much of it was *accurate*? How much pure legend? Half-truth? There was no way for me to be certain.

Luck, as it often does however, seemed to be with me that afternoon. As Gillard rushed toward me, streaks of light from holes in the distressed walls of the structure further illuminating his beastliness, I located to my immediate left a silver candelabra sitting atop a dusty armoire. Grasping it tightly I struck at his face, only narrowly avoiding his own flailing limbs as they clawed for my eyes. As he fell to the floor writhing in pain and clutching his right cheek I knew that at least *part* of what I had read was true. Were-creatures, it seemed, did indeed have an extreme allergic reaction to silver. Quickly I dismantled the object in my hands and, finding its most tapered end, I plunged it down into the Frenchman's heart, upon which he almost immediately stiffened and died, emitting only one wheezing growl as he expired.

That day, like before, I found myself with a body to dispose of. Not an activity that I was overly familiar with, having spent the vast majority of my adult life *catching* killers rather than *being* one. Again I doubted. The man *was* a monster, of that there was no doubt whatsoever, as he remained in his beastly form even after death, but a part of me could not refrain from wondering whether or not I had done the right thing.

Desperate to exonerate my actions I spent several weeks looking into the lives of not only Monsieur Gillard but also those of the Brody clan. For you see in my learnings I had come across not only information regarding the physical appearance, constitutions, and weakness of these hellions, but also of their habits, and like any human who chose to do harm to others they would have surely left behind clues. The guilt of Mr. Brody and his mother had been evident, but with his family, as with the Frenchman, I had no facts at my disposal save for the verity that they were *lusus naturae*...monsters.

Having learned from many an account that Bugbear were partial to the flesh of orphaned children, and London being never in short supply of raggamuffins, I decided to do some sleuthing around the property of the departed Mr. Brody. To my horror, but not my astonishment, located in a shallow pit in the Earth at the rear of the house were the skeletal remains of no less than four unfortunate young souls. The legends had held true, something that made me uneasy on my ride to Cork. If the Bugbear myth had been correct then what of the Loup-Garou? The information was less specific, but in many of the lore books it was said that he who drew the blood of the Loup-Garou was damned to become one himself for a period of one hundred and one days and nights. Not infrequently on that trip did I examine myself in the mirror for signs of any change. There was none.

Just as had been in London the ancestral home of the Brody's revealed a shallow pit, this one filled with the leavings of more meals than I wished to count, many of them dating back hundreds of years by the look of the artifacts that lay alongside them. That left only Monsieur Gillard, but he presented a problem. The lore relating to the Loup-Garou was vague in regards as to what exactly it was that they did. It was said that they, unlike the common Werewolf, were

capable not only of transforming their bodies at will as opposed to being chained to the lunar cycle, but that they retained full cognizance of their actions in their bestial form. That implied that Gillard may not have been driven to perform homicidal acts like the Bugbears had. He had attacked me in the warehouse, yes, but that was not particularly out of character for a criminal caught in the act.

The man had been residing in a boarding house, so I would find no pits dug into the back yard. cursory examination of his room, under the guise of being an inspector of the Scotland Yard, revealed nothing to me either. No mortal remains in the floorboards, no collections of teeth or body parts rendered into stew. It was only on my way out the building that I noticed a woman entering who, curiously, appeared to my eyes to be several years older than the photograph I had seen of her in the study. This would not have struck me as unusual had she not been wearing the same hat as she had in the photograph, a style that arrived only a year and a half before.

Then it hit me, a superficial connection in my mind. I recalled coming across a partial legend, only two paragraphs, that had described a wolf-like creature that suckled on the blood of the living while they slept at night; stealing from them their life so that it might extend its own. The passage had not been directly connected to the Loup-Garou but had instead come from an account written down by a visitor to one of the islands of the French West Indies. My mind flashed back to the landlady. A woman of some age, for sure, as she'd inherited the house from her departed husband, but the style of her dress was more akin to a lady in her fifties than one in her, as she appeared to be, late seventies.

Convincing the two women to allow me a medical examination was not one of the more simple things I had done in my life, but after some rather livid persuasion they consented. Marks upon the neck, barely visible and hidden within the hairline, told the tale. I had discovered the habits of the Loup-Garou and by my account he had made away with no less than a decade and a half of the older lady's life and perhaps five years or so of the younger's. The women believed their rather peculiar age progression to be the result of miasmas emanating from the tannery a few blocks distant and I had no intention of trying to change their minds. I left them bewildered, but with the assurance that no more of their years would be stolen from them in the dead of night.

That was the end of my self-doubt, at least as a daily occurrence. I had taken six lives and without fail every last one of them had been guilty of atrocities. The legends of monsters, full of dire warnings, appeared to not only be based in fact but also to hint at the existence of a completely mysterious side of reality that few were ever privy to understand. Being Sherlock Holmes I could not let that stand, for I harbor a sincere loathing of not knowing things.

That brings me to this very evening. Moments ago I stepped from a cab on a corner two blocks from my destination and, quieting the rattle of weapons concealed within my coat, made my way down the street to the home of one Edward J. Cokes; a middle aged man, never married, who ran of all things...a boarding house. I'd been following him for some weeks after reading a newspaper article about a Doctor John Watson and his investigation into the effects of industrial chemicals on the welfare of London's denizens. He'd cited in that article the residents of the very home that I now stood in front of, attempting to observe casually the occupant within. The good doctor had written on the premature greying of hair and wrinkling of skin afflicting the people who resided at Mr. Coke's boarding house, this time blaming the effects on a nearby glue factory.



I'm afraid not, good doctor. For I know *precisely* the force that is plaguing the people you examined. I don't blame you though. No man in the world is as familiar with what I hunt tonight as I. I can see it in the way he moves, I can *smell* it on him.

## DEADLY WOLF

Watching the well-dressed Mr. Cokes through the window of his dining room, the curtain of which he'd so callously left undrawn, I could not help but ponder upon the man. As he carefully arranged a place setting for one, himself, had he any idea that in the shadows outside of his home lurked the man, or I suppose to him I was in some fashion a *beast*, that would take his life on this very night? As had become my custom I had done exhaustive research on the fellow. His father had been an Englishman, a travelling salesman. His mother, a French lady's maid.

I found myself not privy to every detail of precisely how things worked within the world of unnatural creatures and I supposed that either, or perhaps even *both* parents could have been of the Loup-Garou variety, but the fact that the mother was French and that the father had passed away of natural causes at the relatively young age of only forty seven, indicated to me exactly from whom he had inherited his peculiar condition.

Cokes was also a perfectionist. His home and his personal appearance, as well as his criminal record, immaculate. I supposed that if one *were* to be a vicious creature that preyed upon ordinary folk that it should be only be prudent to try to present the most respectable of airs, so as to avoid suspicion. The neighborhood in which the house resided was not, after all, the cleanest nor safest in the city. Its surroundings had slowly given way to a more industrial character since it had been built; some one hundred years ago or more by the look of the place. Not the state of it mind you, as it was flawless and eloquently decorated, but it is the architecture that I speak of when I date the structure.

I watched as the man took his place at the empty table. I had studied the habits of those who boarded with Mr. Cokes and knew that Wednesday evening was the only night that all four of them would be absent until at least ten o'clock. It was only half past seven. That provided me with plenty of time to do what had to be done and to remove any evidence of the act before they returned. Being the charitable sort I had gone through the trouble of locating a copy of Cokes' last will and testament, a document which left the house and property to what I presumed to be a relative living in France. As luck would have it, however, the solicitor who'd drawn up the papers had since passed away of consumption, leaving me free to alter the document, and thereby bequeathing the estate instead to the victims of Mr. Cokes' crimes. A repayment for the time which he had stolen from them. It was only just, I felt.

There it was. A sip from the wine glass. I would permit him a few more moments to allow the beverage to relax his muscles and dull his wits before I made my move. I'd been very lucky with the first Loup-Garou I'd encountered. Experience over the last few years taught me not to be so self-assured. To date I had encountered, and in the course of events, killed, twenty three beasts of the night. Some I had taken by surprise, but with others I'd not been so fortunate. I now bore the scars, primarily on my back, flanks and arms to prove just how deadly a cornered monster could be. The fingers of my right hand slid into my overcoat, caressed the silver spike that hung there from one of the concealed leather harnesses that held my weapons. Gloved, so as not to leave behind any finger marks, my right hand closed around the grip.

Being a none too heavily populated area I had only minor trouble finding a moment when no one was walking by in which to make my move. Taking one last glance around to verify my solitude I pulled the weapon free, its blade resonating with a sound slightly akin to that of a

tuning fork, as it cleared my coat and touched the cool night air. In a dash I rushed forward, careful not to be seen through the open front window. Then, once I was standing on the front porch, I snuffed out the gas lamp that illuminated it before bringing my right boot up and kicking in the door. Wood splintered as the frame gave way and immediately the sound of a chair being slid back across the floor of the dining room could be heard coming from inside. Wasting not a single moment I burst through the entryway and confronted my quarry as he ran into the hall.

“Not another step Mr. Cokes!” I exclaimed, brandishing my weapon for him to see.

Being somewhat dark in the passage I believe my blade to have caught a glint of light, for his eyes darted directly to it.

“What do you want?” he implored, then lifted his gaze to meet mine, at which he jumped with quite visible alarm, “My God! What *are* you?!”

Seemingly terrified he turned for the back door, at the far end of the hallway, and took off in a sprint I would not have thought him capable of. I gave chase and managed, albeit barely, to catch him just before he reached it, sending us both crashing through its wood and glass and tumbling onto the paving stones in the garden at the back of the house. The blade dropped from my hand as I reached out to brace myself, lest my head be struck upon one of the stones. The fall stunned us both, but only for the slightest of intervals. I groped desperately for my weapon, in the general direction which I had seen it fall, when I heard the howl behind me and the painful sting of Mr. Cokes’ claws as they dug into the back of my right thigh. Pain is only a damage signal sent from the brain to alert one to injury, it could be blocked out. The dagger, I needed the dagger!

Finally my hand touched metal and with a jerking motion I spun around onto my back, swinging the blade as I went. The Loup-Garou anticipated my move, swatted the dagger away before it could plunge into his shoulder, and sent it clattering onto some hard surface many feet away. Staring up at his form, illuminated by the dim gas lamps of the garden, he was a genuinely terrifying visage to behold. The mild mannered landlord, now in his true form, sported fur as black as coal, eyes that glowed an intense reddish-orange, and he bore more scars than any Loup-Garou I had ever encountered. He was an old one.

Barely dodging the downward attack of his snarling muzzle, which I could only presume was destined for my throat, I managed to wriggle myself free and roll to the side, into the damp grass. I looked up but with a quick backhand he sent me spinning what was likely two or three yards, right into a birdbath, which collapsed as I struck it and covered me in icy cold water. He *was* old indeed; stronger than the others and quite intelligent to boot. He deftly dodged the fistful of pepper that I attempted to toss into his eyes and sensitive canine nose.

Pausing for only the slightest moment to roar at me, a sound that sent chills down my spine despite having heard such cries before on several occasions, he lunged forward again with paws swinging wildly. Thinking quickly I brought up the heavy bowl of the fallen bird bath. Chips of cement flew as his powerful claws struck its surface repeatedly. Pulling my left leg into my chest I then summoned my full strength and forced my boot up into his sternum. Cokes yowled and fell back several steps, providing me the opportunity to get to my feet.

Though I had never met another who shared my vocation I was struck by the thought that if this particular Loup-Garou had lived long enough that surely he had encountered other persons like myself at one time or another. There must have been those who’d wished to put his evil to an end. Or were the scars he bore instead from battles with others of his own kind? Or perhaps from other types of creatures altogether? Interesting, yes, but those were thoughts for another time. Of one thing I was virtually certain, he had never chanced upon another *quite* as clever as myself.

For, unbeknownst to him, holstered at my hip, lay a miniature crossbow that held a silver-tipped bolt.

In a flash I whipped my coat open. He sprang forward with jaw wide open for a killing blow but just in time my weapon came to bear and fired its projectile straight into his heart. I grunted as the entire heft of the beast, curiously more than that of any normal man, fell upon me. I managed to remain standing, but only just. His final breath issued into my ear and I rolled the corpse off of me. It produced a moist thud as it fell to the ground.

If they remained in their monstrous state after death, which most seemed to do, then why did no examples of them exist in museums? It could be posited that killing these types of creatures was simply a very difficult and rare occurrence, but then what of the lore? *Someone* had written down the methods with which to kill such things, so it had undoubtedly been done before. Then again I was not, myself, in the business of delivering these carcasses to the royal museum or the university. Had I stumbled upon something more than just the notion that our world was inhabited by strange beasts? Was there some code of conduct, honored amongst those who slay monsters, that I was unaware of? My thoughts were interrupted by the familiar ratcheting clicks of a service revolver.

## CURIOUS BADGER

“If I were you sir I would not move.” a voice from behind me advised, “Now drop the weapon, and don’t even consider going for the ones concealed in your coat.”

Having no idea as to who I was dealing with, save for the fact that he was formerly associated with the Army, I did as I was told.

“And whom might you be sir?” I asked.

“I hardly think that matters, considering the circumstances.”

“Perhaps you are right,” I agreed, “still you must be a gentleman of extraordinary constitution.”

“And precisely why is that?”

I smiled, though he could not see it with my back to him.

“You are aware that I am concealing more weapons within my coat and therefore are at least a moderately observant man. Being that you would have no doubt noticed the body lying at my feet. Most notably you would have observed the fact that it belongs to something so horrifying as to send the average man running in terror. Yet you remain.”

“It’s called a Loup-Garou.” the man spoke, “Though, considering how you dispatched him, I will assume that you already knew that.”

“How on Earth do you...” I began to ask as I turned slowly to face him, watched as his eyes went wide upon seeing my face.

“Not a step!” he shouted, obviously rattled. “You’re...you’re...” he stuttered through mustachioed lips.

“I’m...what?” I asked, calmly.

The man, wearing a bowler hat and a dark grey overcoat, looked away, appeared to be attempting to hide his fear.

“I can assure you man that I have no intent to...my God!” I exclaimed as I watched him shift in appearance before my very eyes. What was he? Something I’d never seen before, of that I was sure. Out of morbid curiosity I went to step forward.

“I will not warn you again!” he shouted, his head still turned to where I could only see part of his face.

“Are you a...a badger?!” I asked him with a slight chuckle. For the first time ever I’d not been instantly mortified by the sight of a were-beast.

“You can see me can’t you?” he asked, his voice betrayed a note of shame.

“Why yes, of course I can. It’s plainly evident.”

“To *you*, yes.”

Now what could *that* mean?

“I’m afraid I don’t catch your meaning my good man...or should I say *doctor*?”

“How do you...” he faced me for a brief moment, then remembered and turned his head, “How do you know that I am a physician?”

“Well it’s quite easy to deduce sir.” I pointed at his hat, “There is a visible bulge in your bowler, likely from a stethoscope. I’ve seen it with other men of your profession before.”

He seemed to pause in thought for a moment before turning his face back toward me just a bit, though he still attempted, futilely I might add, to hide behind the short brim of his hat by keeping his head down.

“You’re right. I’m not surprised by the sight of Mr. Cokes, though I must admit to a fair amount of alarm at having found him already slain by one of your kind.”

“My *kind*?” my face must have clearly demonstrated my confusion.

“You really do not know do you?” he asked, baffled.

“I’m afraid I have no idea of what you are referring to Doctor.”

“You’re a...” he paused, only slightly relaxing his grip on the pistol. “I’m not sure if there’s a word for it but you can see were-beasts can you not?”

I chuckled, “Well of course I can, once they take their bestial form at least.”

“No, you should be able to see them at *any* time.”

“Well I’m afraid that’s not the case sir.”

The strange little man seemed thoroughly puzzled.

“But I can...I can see you...for what you are. I *know* what you are and your kind can see through our human form. Even children know that.”

“You say you can see me for *what* I am. Would you care to elaborate...and also aim that pistol elsewhere if you don’t mind?”

He nodded, lowered the pistol, but only to waist level and kept it trained on me.

“That was not precisely what I meant sir.”

“You’ll forgive me if I take precautions. Your sort are not known for being very tolerant of...what I am.”

I only lifted an eyebrow, left it up to him to explain.

“Like I said I’m not even sure there’s a word for it, at least not in English. They’re quite rare, and I’ve never seen one of you in England before.”

I coughed, signaling that my patience was wearing thin.

“I reacted when I saw you because I was certain that you’d instantly know who and what I was, and to be quite honest I figured that you would try to take my life.”

“What is it about me that is so striking, save for the fact that I am obviously standing over the body of one of your fellow were-creatures.”

The doctor scoffed, “Though we may share a...condition... Mr. Cokes is *not* in any way, shape or form a *fellow* of mine. What I saw instantly, when you turned to face me, was the peculiar greenish aura that emanates from your eyes. It is a penetrating energy that *normally* allows men like you to see through to our true nature.”

Absolutely fascinating.

“So you are saying that, as we stand here, there is a visible green light pouring forth from my eye sockets?!”

“Yes, and if I must be quite honest it’s quite disturbing.”

“Well, you’ll forgive me for unsettling you but at the moment it is you who have me at the disadvantage sir.” I motioned to the service revolver. “And though you claim no kinship or comradery with the deceased I do find myself at the end of your barrel.”

The doctor eyed me for a moment silently then lowered the gun to his side.

“If you *must* know I came here tonight to do precisely what you have already done.”

My interest was piqued and it would have been visible to the stranger through the raising of my eyebrow. The man, or rather badger, reached into his pocket and pulled forth a small object

which he tossed in my direction. I caught it in my right hand and examined it in the faint glow of the gas lamps. Silver.

“I believe you will recognize that as a silver bullet, a tried and true method for dispatching lupinids.”

“Lupinids?” I queried.

“It’s what I call wolf-form creatures. I am a doctor after all, so you’ll have to forgive me for desiring to introduce a bit of scientific classification into the world of the unnatural.”

“Interesting, that.”

“What?”

“That you refer to such things as unnatural when you yourself are...” I gestured to him.

“Mr...?”

“Holmes. Sherlock Holmes.” I declared plainly.

“Mr. Holmes, you will find that I am not a man to be ashamed of who he is, but I am also no fool, and therefore in no denial regarding the behavior of many of the *homo monstrum* that inhabit this world.”

“*Homo monstrum*?” I asked.

“Yes.” he smiled, “There existed no collective term for the various sorts of non-human beings like myself. So being a man of science, I created one.”

“A bit straight-forward if I do say so myself.”

“Oh?” I watched as he wrinkled his badger nose at me, “And you would have created a more clever moniker I suppose?”

“Indeed.” was all that I said, my eyes dropping to the gun still held at his side, my arms still raised into the air.

“I’m sorry Mr. Holmes but I’ve heard too many tales of people...of those like you, who can ferret us out. In fact you’re kind are typically considered to being homicidal lunatics, so I shall choose not to holster my weapon just yet. Be appreciative of the fact that I am so docile an individual that I have not yet decided to shoot you simply to play it safe.”

I took the opportunity to lower my hands, slowly, to my side. The doctor did not react.

“Ah yes but did you not, this very night, come here with the intent to kill Mr. Cokes? One might question your docility Dr...Watson, is it?”

“How do you know my name?” his brow furrowed and his nose twitched.

“Why by the article in the paper sir. You see, I had at first taken you for a fool when I’d chanced upon it, but now, realizing that you are...whatever it is that you are, I understand that you were instead simply telling the newspaper man what you thought he wanted to hear.” I eyed him suspiciously, “That does still leave two very interesting questions however.”

“Those being?”

“Why would you seek to hunt down these *homo monstrum*, as you call them, if you are indeed one yourself?”

He seemed put off by the question, offended. “There are a great many things you do not know about the world Mr. Holmes. I receive the impression that you have only just begun to unravel this thread, one that is much longer and more elaborate than you can possibly imagine. Certainly there are many who fit the stereotypes laid out in books, but there are some, myself included, who wish no ill will toward anyone.” he motioned toward the corpse of the Loup-Garou, “His kind are obviously of the former type rather than the latter.”

I smiled broadly. “So Dr. Watson what you are telling me is that you are a monster who hunts monsters?”

“No.” he shook his head, “I mind my own business. I only got involved with this because I was called upon by the residents of the house as part of my medical practice. When I realized the cause of their affliction I knew I had to do something, only because no one else ever would.”

“Could you not have simply instructed them to find lodgings elsewhere? Fed them the line that the glue factory was causing their condition?”

He shook his head, “Yes. In fact I did. Most of them were already in the process of searching for new lodgings. That would not, however, have stopped Cokes from finding new victims.”

“Indeed.” I nodded as I bit my lip in thought.

“You said there were *two* questions.” Watson reminded me.

“Ah, yes. As you should have been able to deduce by now I mean you no harm. Why is it that you’ve remained in your current state?”

At that he seemed to become guarded.

“You’ve proven no such thing. I know there are more weapons in your coat. What guarantee have I that you’ll do anything short of cut me down the moment I holster my weapon? Also...and this is rather embarrassing...I can’t seem to figure out how. I seem to be...stuck.”

“Well then, if it makes you more comfortable to retain the revolver then by all means do so. In the meantime we’d better hide this body and get you inside before someone sees you in this state.”



## TEA FOR TWO

“I must say,” Watson began, “the use of a crossbow is rather ingenious.”

“You have to admit that it’s considerably more stealthy than the report of a pistol. Very useful when undertaking matters one would rather the police not become involved in. Which reminds me, if you were planning to shoot Mr. Cokes then how precisely did you plan to remove the body before anyone came to investigate the sound of the gunshot? Even in this sparsely populated neighborhood surely *someone* would have heard it.”

Having stashed the body in the garden shed for the time being we were sitting at the dinner table of the very man I had killed only minutes before and I had poured each of us a cup of tea. Doctor Watson still appeared to me to be a badger, or something very similar, and in the brighter indoor lighting I must say that I found him anything but intimidating. Rather I would have described his appearance as something almost comical, had he not been sitting across from me with a revolver pointed at my chest. He absorbed my questions and then squinted his eyes, glaring at me.

“What is it?” I asked.

“There’s something different about you.”

“Yes you’ve already mentioned that.”

“No, I mean in here.”

He stood, half-turned to the window but made sure to keep his gun pointed in my general direction, then drew the curtain. As he turned back to me he grinned.

“Well I’ll be damned.”

“What is it?”

“Your eyes, they’re no longer glowing.”

“Curious.” I uttered.

“Curious indeed, and a possible explanation for why I’ve never seen any like you before.”

“How is that?” I asked.

“In this dining room, but *only* with the curtain drawn, the distinctive brilliance of your eyes vanishes. It had dimmed when we’d entered the house, but disappeared completely when I closed the curtain. I seldom go out at night you see, and when I do it is typically straight to the bedside of a sick individual...where the curtains are more often than not drawn. I’ll wager that I wouldn’t be able to see it in the daytime either. The moon, it must be the light of the moon!”

Whatever he was piecing together inside of his mind was apparently quite enlightening for it seemed to work him into a fervor. Then, as suddenly as it had happened before, he changed again, this time back into the mustachioed middle-aged man I had seen only briefly in the yard.

“It was *you!*” he exclaimed. “*You* were the reason I couldn’t change back. That explains why my ancestors were so terrified of your kind. Not only could you see them as they were, but you could *keep* them that way for all to see.”

“Whatever it was that I accomplished it was not with any conscious effort I can assure you.”

“No.” he said, his eyes growing distant, obviously lost in thought. “What if...” he began, “it is a skill, one that must be developed? One that until then is only instinctual and not completely reliable?”

It was an intriguing thought. Mr. Brody had not transformed when I had ambushed him during the middle of the day. The Bugbear in Ireland, and many of the creatures I had encountered since, had transformed at the sight of me, yet most of those times had been in the moonlight. There was, however, still Monsieur Gillard.

Perhaps it was as I had reasoned before, his metamorphosis was the terrified reaction of a criminal and nothing more. It's possible that he may have betrayed his identity to *anyone* who had stumbled upon him. Resorting to his monstrous form whenever he was cornered was not a terrible idea, for it enhanced both his speed and his strength. Had dumb luck and a bit of knowledge not been on my side he very well might have torn me limb from limb that day in the warehouse. At that time I was nowhere near the skilled fighter I now found myself to be.

"It makes sense..." the doctor continued, "when we are children the ability to control our form is very crude and deeply linked with our emotional state."

I had to admit that I found the notion quite fascinating. Still, there was the question of what to do with the doctor himself. He apparently had something of a conscience. After all, he'd come here to end a creature that was stealing the life from innocent people. He *could* be lying, but were he in league with Mr. Cokes there'd have been little reason for him not to shoot me on the spot, especially once he realized that I presented a unique threat to him. Still, perhaps he was studying me...

"Do you mind if I smoke doctor?"

He shook his head. "I suppose not, but what do you presume we do? Do we simply sit here all evening, waiting for the other to make a move?"

"You genuinely distrust me don't you Watson?" I asked, speaking from the corner of my mouth as I attempted to light my pipe.

"You will have to understand that I was instilled from childhood with a fear of *Versieht*."

"*Versieht*?" I asked, now properly curious.

"A mutilation of an old German phrase. Something like 'he who sees' I believe."

"Ah, *wer sieht*." I corrected him.

"You speak German?"

"I dabble." I smiled. "So tell me then, so that I might better understand, about who and what it is that you are Doctor Watson."

He shook his head in acknowledgement, but asked that I do the same once he had finished, to which I agreed. He took in a deep breath before beginning, the pistol dropping to the table, still within easy reach mere inches from his hand.

"I am what most would refer to as a Mor. The name is derived, I believe, from an ancient healing deity by the name of Moritasgus, worship by the Senones, an ancient Gaelic culture."

"Yes I know of the Senones Doctor." I had not, however, chanced to read anything pertaining to any god of antiquity by the name that he mentioned.

"Now bear with me," he continued despite my interruption, "for you see our history is not as well documented as that of the common populace."

"Fear not Watson, even the books that sit upon the shelves of the royal library itself this very moment are little more than vague representations of the truth, twisted into a version of reality that suited whomever wrote them."

"Are you quite finished?" the doctor asked, looking rather annoyed with me as I sat there with my smug expression and dirty overcoat. "I *will* say this for you Holmes, you have quite a love for the sound of your own voice."

Like a child who'd been caught with his hand in the cookie jar I looked away, then waved my hand. "Pray do continue."

"As I was saying. Our history is quite fragmentary, but I'll do the best that I can to explain to you what I *do* know. I know that our lineage is ancient, far more so than any history book, and that the Mors descend from more than one family. There were apparently quite a few of us at one point but in more recent centuries I think not so much. My speculation would be due to the dilution of bloodlines, as our kind slowly began to interbreed with *homo sapiens*."

He must have caught the look of surprise on my face, for he immediately followed up. "Yes, it's quite possible. As you can see from me now as I sit here before you I *am* a man. Whatever it is that makes me Mor is passed down through bloodlines, but apparently when they are mixed too much with ordinary humans the ability to transform fades. In fact from what I've seen less than sixty percent of children born to mixed couples retain their abilities. That number drops to less than twenty-five percent for the next generation without 'were' blood."

"Were?" I queried.

"Not knowing your history Mr. Holmes I cannot surmise precisely what you *do* and *do not* know about the unseen world, but there is much more to it than just us were-beasts."

"Indeed. I have had encounters with an Abere, a female lake spirit who lures men to their deaths. Also with a Hedley Kow, a..."

"A mischievous little sprite that torments men and women until they're driven completely mad and seek the solace of suicide. Yes, I've heard of them." Watson finished my thought. "Well then, where was I? Yes, you obviously know what a Loup-Garou is, and now you know what a Mor is. We are all were-beasts, humans by birth and little different from everyone else save for the ability to transform into an animal-like form. Typically it is by choice, but in some situations, such as the case of werewolves, it is tied to an outside force."

"The full moon." I said.

"Precisely."

"You say that it is inherited, but have you any data as to the origin of such types? Human and animal pairings? Random natural mutation?"

He shook his head, "I'm afraid not. As I said there is little in the way of records."

"Let me ask you this Watson." I said in a rather bleak tone, "From the few moments I have known you, usually more than enough for me to get a read on a man's character, I deduce you to be a mostly decent man. Are the others of your kind so?"

"Well, as you've seen with Mr. Cokes..." he began, but I silenced him.

"I do not mean were-beasts in general Doctor John Watson." my voice boomed across the table, "I mean *your* kind. Mors. Tell me of them. Had I met an individual *other* than yourself would I have been inclined to kill him? If you have such a fear of 'Versieht', as you call them, I cannot help but believe that your kind have good reason to harbor such anxiety."

He took a breath, refusing for a moment to fix his gaze to mine, instead choosing to fumble with the revolver. Not in any aggressive sense, but simply as a nervous tick.

"Moritasgus, as I've said before, was a deity of healing. More often than not members of my kind choose to be doctors, nurses, or aboriginal practitioners. It is in our nature..."

"But?"

"Our skills, you see, are innate. We have a natural ability to sort of...well, 'smell', the cause of a malady and therefore find an appropriate treatment for it. This makes us prized in the field of health care, but just like any man there are those of us who can become vain, greedy. It is not

unheard of for one of us to let the power go to his head and begin to withhold treatment until rewarded most handsomely for his efforts.”

“Extortion?” I asked.

“Yes, I’m afraid so. Some of my kind have had men sign away their entire fortunes in order to secure treatment for those whom they love.”

“Interesting, surely, but I highly doubt that would be enough an offense to cause Mors to instill their children with terror at the sight of a Versieht. There’s more isn’t there?”

He sighed. “Unfortunately, yes.” he put up a hand, “Now keep in mind, this was mostly in ancient times, as I said there aren’t that many of us left these days.”

I nodded.

“Extortion was one thing, but there are others that have done much worse. Like I said, our abilities can make us vain, arrogant...there are those who’ve decided it was their place to play God, to...” he fell silent, it was obvious that whatever he was about to say deeply disturbed him.

“Please Doctor, do continue. I swear to try my very best not to judge you off of the actions of others.”

He bit his lower lip, composed himself, then spoke. “I understand Mr. Holmes, and it is not for my own reputation that I have trouble speaking of this. It is...a stain...that we all carry.” he looked up, and without warning returned to his badger-like state, his haunting yellow eyes locked with mine, “They took the lives of those they could not save, those whom they felt were too far gone, and gave it to others they felt they could save.”

“You can do that, steal life like the Loup-Garou?” I sat forward in my chair.

“No.” he shook his furry head, “We have a gland, located here...” he showed me the area just below his palm, “that secretes a hormone capable of somehow exciting human and animal tissue, causing it to heal more rapidly. They used it as a means to remove the healthy organs of terminally ill patients and place them into the bodies of those they wished to save.”

“All for exorbitant fees I’m sure?”

“In some cases yes, in others no. That’s beside the point!” he shouted, “They used their ability to keep an organ alive momentarily outside of the human body in order to meddle with things that they had no business meddling with. It was not their place to decide who lived and who died! I see it all of the time in medicine, there are those I am certain will die, and they do not, those who I am certain will live, and yet they pass away. How could *they* have felt so sure?!”

I sat back into my seat, puffed on my pipe, thought for a moment. “Have you considered the possibility that those individuals...as you said it was mostly long ago, were of a bloodline more pure than your own and indeed did possess that ability? The one to determine with absolute certainty whether or not a patient was going to live or die?”

I could see that he was stunned. For the first time both of his hands left the vicinity of the revolver. He straightened his tie and rubbed at his chin.

“I had not.” he admitted after some time. “Though regardless, I find the entire idea morally repugnant.”

“As do I.” I smiled.

He paused for another few moments, the room in total silence save for the puffing at my pipe.

“May I ask you something Mr. Holmes?”

“Of course Watson.” I replied cordially.

“I cannot help but wonder if there is a thought that has occurred to *you*, as it has only just occurred to me. We know full-well that there are millions upon millions of people in this world,

most of which are ordinary and mundane human beings. I do not fall into that category, for obvious reasons, but I believe it is possible that neither do you. I know almost nothing of them so I cannot say, but what if the Versieht are simply another form of my *homo monstrum*?"

His question struck me like a blow to the chest. I dropped the pipe from my mouth, fumbling in an attempt to catch it before it fell to the table, and managed it but only just. From his expression I knew that Watson had taken notice of the rattling sounds coming from my coat.

"Three glass tubes, medical grade, two blades made of different metals, one extra bolt for your crossbow, a lead-weighted leather blackjack, and a single tincture of chloroform." he commented smugly, his badger face morphing into a smile.

I scoffed. "Very good, but you could have glimpsed them through my open coat as I turned to face you in the garden." he *was* wrong about one thing, the tincture was not of chloroform but rather of laudanum. Some habits die hard. "Regardless," I said as I began to button my coat, "your previous question makes one thing very clear to me."

"Oh, and what would that be Holmes?"

"You've no need to have me run on about my past. You obviously have a better grasp on who I am than even I myself do."

"Holmes!" he snarled, a bit of badger growl present in his tone.

Exasperated I sighed and spat out, "Very well. I'm the son of a barrister from Chigwell and a shipping heiress from Theydon Bois who died in childbirth. My father is a narcissist and my mother's family vowed to make sure that neither my older brother Mycroft nor I ever saw a dime of their fortune. I was educated at Cambridge, where I studied law and criminology for two terms before dropping out, fed up with the fact that I was far more brilliant than any of my professors. I live in a boarding house on Baker Street where I practiced my craft for some years before stumbling into the seedy underbelly of the night that is the world of your so-called *homo monstrum*. I am independently wealthy, having three years ago crossed paths with a Korrigan who was using his abilities to win bets at horse races. I let him live, despite threatening his life should he fail to cease his activities, but took the opportunity to confiscate a few of his predictions to fund my monster hunting ventures for many years to come." I sat back and kicked my feet up onto the table, "Is that enough Watson? Or shall I delve into a list of women with which I've enjoyed sexual congress over the last..."

"That," Watson blurted, putting his hand up to stop me, "shall be quite enough." finally he tucked away the revolver that had spent the last ten or so minutes pointed in my direction.

"Well then," I grinned, "where shall we go from here?"

Watson closed his eyes in concentration, then shifted back into his human form. "I will be honest with you Holmes, you fascinate me."

My cocky smile drew a look of derision.

"As a doctor, and someone who's spent his entire life trying to understand all of this, to finally meet a living and breathing Versieht...I *must* study you." he paused, catching sight of my hesitation, "Not in any perverse or intrusive way, of course, but I'd be interested in some type of, well...friendship...I suppose you would call it."

"One monster...and I suppose possibly a second one, partnering up to kill other monsters?" I posited, "Sounds awfully depraved if you ask me."

"Oh do be serious Holmes. I'm a doctor. This business of prowling about in the night to lop of the heads, or whatever it is you do, of unsuspecting creatures is not for me. Our desires happened to coincide this one time but I've little taste for blood. I experienced enough death in the Army and am on familiar terms with it in my practice."

I thought for a moment. “Your knowledge of these matters, likely more than my own, at least in some areas, could be very useful. A truth that I cannot deny.”

With that I pushed the chair back with a loud scrape against the floor and came to my feet. My movements were so sudden that Watson nearly went for his revolver, expecting betrayal from the *Versieht* I supposed.

“Come Watson.” I declared, “We’ve got a body to dispose of.”

## BADGER FOR BREAKFAST

“There is just one more thing I might ask of you Holmes, though it will seem quite irregular.”

Those had been the words the cunning little badger had used as we’d lowered the body of the deceased Loup-Garou into the vat of acid we’d found at the conveniently located glue factory down the street from Mr. Cokes’ home.

“Tonight was a hell of a night for me. I decide to kill a man in cold blood, I meet a Versieht in person, and the missus thought to evict me from my own home. I don’t suppose you know of any place I could stay for the night?”

Sitting at breakfast the words still rung in my head. I’d brought a were-beast back to 221B Baker St. A timid one mind you, but a were-beast nonetheless. I’d slept with my silver dagger in hand, not knowing if that was the proper weapon to use against a Mor but I’d not wished to arouse his suspicion by digging through my books at half-past midnight. Now I found myself staring across the breakfast table at him as Mr. Hudson came in with the serving tray. The old man’s mess of reddish hair with white streaks rested above a frazzled set of pale eyebrows and an ever-present smile.

“I hope you don’t mind the cooking of a Scotsman.” I commented as he approached. He gave me a dismissive wave and simply nodded at the newcomer.

“Goodness Holmes,” Watson nearly choked on the water he was drinking, “do you make a habit of sharing your prejudices so freely?” he then turned to Mr. Hudson, “Besides, the food smells absolutely delightful.”

“I thought you said he was a doctor Mr. Holmes. What’s he doing here in borrowed pajamas?” the landlord asked in his characteristically thick Scottish accent.

The embarrassment spread across my new friend’s face. There he sat with a napkin tucked into the neckline of his sleepwear as Mr. Hudson began to place items onto the table. Normally it was custom to fully dress before taking breakfast, but seeing as how we’d had a late night and slept until well after ten I felt the need for strong coffee before mustering the energy to get myself through that particular ritual. Watson had not disagreed with me. Looking at him now, a middle-aged man with graying hair and neatly kept moustache, I could not help but picture him as the Mor, the badger, that I knew him to be.

Had I allowed my common sense to leave me? Surely the man that sat across from me at the table could not be trusted based simply on his demeanor. It was my life’s work to *hunt* creatures such as he, not invite them over for scones. I tried to hide my contemplation behind the routine act of preparing my tea. Doctor John Watson could possibly provide me with much information that I found myself lacking, both on the subject of unnatural creatures and also on the apparent peculiarity of my own existence. Being a remarkably astute observer, however, my guest evidently was able to read even the slightest hint of emotion on my face.

“I cannot help but wonder,” he began, “what it is that you are contemplating at the moment Holmes. That tea is getting an awful lot of attention from you.”

“Why my dear Watson I have no idea to what you are referring.” I said as matter-of-factly as I could manage, never once taking my eyes from the table.

“Interesting...” Watson said, then paused as Mr. Hudson set his plate down in front of him, “just a moment ago I glimpsed what I could only describe as fascination, which was then replaced, the moment that I caught sight of it, by a seemingly disinterested reverie.”

“Well, anyone with proper upbringing knows that it is not terribly polite to stare.”

Watson chuckled, “It’s not every day that one takes tea with a badg...”

He halted in mid-sentence, his eyes shifted to Mr. Hudson. I smiled, then passed him the cream.

“Fear not Watson. You may speak freely in the presence of Mr. Hudson. He has, over the course of the last few years, been privy to information that would send any man with a lesser constitution to the asylum.”

“Oh?” he asked, his curiosity obviously piqued. “Let’s have it then.”

Mr. Hudson responded, “I can’t tell you the things I’ve seen with this here madman or how many times I’ve had to get on me hands and knees to clean up monster blood from the carpet.”

“Hyperbole of course.” I remarked, “I would never be so careless as to leave behind bloody shoe prints. Having spent several years assisting the Yard with homicides I know better than to make so amateur of a mistake.”

“You see that Mr. Watson?” the landlord asked, “Calling me a liar he does.”

“Absolutely not Mr. Hudson, but you do tend to exaggerate.”

“Well,” he said to the doctor, “maybe not the rug, but you should see some of his laundry! Oh well, he’s paid up his rent ten years in advance, I suppose I can’t complain.”

At that Watson enjoyed a good chuckle at my expense.

“Ah, yes. Thank you Mr. Hudson.” I said to him plainly, “That will be all.”

He gesticulated at the doctor, “You keep any eye on this one you hear? He’s a whole lot of trouble.”

“That I will do sir, and thank you for the breakfast.”

He nodded and with that turned for the exit carrying the empty serving trays. Watson held his tongue for a few moments after the landlord left, waiting until the sound of his footsteps upon the stairs could be heard before breaking the silence.

“Tell me Holmes, what is it about the makeup of your character that requires you to hold others at such a distance? Are you the same way with your family?”

Family? A sudden realization came to me. If that which made the doctor a Mor by birth was hereditary then was it possible that my brother Mycroft was a Versieht as well? What of our parents? Surely at least one of them had been. Then again I had no information on which to form a true hypothesis. Perhaps whatever it was that defined me as Versieht had nothing at all to do with bloodlines. There was even the possibility, though I could not see motive for it, that my new badger friend had simply made the entire thing up.

“I thought you to be a physician Watson, I had no idea that you were also an analyst.” I cracked a grin and turned to him, “Would you like me to begin with how I feel about my father?”

Watson waved away my sarcasm. “Do you see? That’s precisely what I am talking about Holmes. You wield your wit like a sword, and it keeps others at bay.”

“Indeed.” I smiled.

“And that’s exactly as you’d have it, isn’t it?”

“Absolutely Watson. Attachments can be a rather serious impediment, to any man, but more so with one engaged in my particular...endeavors.”

“Yet you have quite easily built a rapport with me, and we’ve only just met.”



“You seem to have little trouble with verbal sparring yourself Watson. Perhaps that is why I like you.”

“Words of compliment?” he scoffed, “Why Holmes I’m flattered.”

Just then there came the sound of a police whistle from the street below, followed shortly by the clattering of hooves and a commotion from the crowd. The doctor went to stand but I reached out a hand to stay him.

“That would be an officer of the law attempting to arrest a man who was selling stolen goods from the back of his cart, and failing miserably at the undertaking I might add.”

“Oh?” Watson asked, giving me a look of disbelief. “And how, may I ask, did you deduce that?”

“I didn’t.” I said, sipped my tea, then continued. “I spied the man from my window this morning immediately after I awoke. His name is John Edward Casey and he is a known thief. When I saw him accosting passers-by, attempting to show them items from the back of his wagon, I merely presumed that they were stolen and had Mr. Hudson give one of the neighborhood ragamuffins five pence to go and fetch a constable.”

“Does nothing escape your attention Holmes?”

“Very little does.” I confirmed for him. “Though I must say, like any man my powers of observation are affected by environmental factors. I wonder...” I paused only briefly before continuing, “if you would allow me to once again see you in your bestial state.” I motioned to the windows, “Now that there is daylight in which I might better observe you.”

The good doctor bowed his head in the affirmative, choosing not to speak since his mouth was full of scone. He washed it down with a sip of tea and then removed the napkin from the neck of his pajamas and placed it beside the plate which sat in front of him on the table.

“My what big eyes you have Grandma.” he said to me rather sarcastically then, with a quiver that seemed to begin at the nape of his neck and run down his entire body, he shook and his true self was revealed.

“The better to see you with.” I remarked, finishing the line from the fairy tale. I placed my own napkin on the table and leaned in for a closer look. “Absolutely astonishing.” I said. “And you are able to hold this form as long as you wish?”

“Yes.” he said through badger lips, the silvery-gray fur of his cheeks ruffling as he spoke. “Once one has developed the proper skill it takes no effort at all to maintain either human or animal form.”

“And the transformation itself?” I asked, moving my head slightly from side to side, inspecting every inch of his face.

“Quite simple really, it takes only a modicum of concentration.”

“I meant...is it painful?”

“That’s not how I’d describe it, no. It is...unsettling, until one becomes accustomed to it. For me, now, it is only a very brief moment of discomfort.”

“Just a moment.” I said, then got up and ran to my desk where I seized up my glass. He seemed not to mind very much as I proceeded to use it to inspect the hair follicles and underlying skin upon the top of his head.

“I hope you’ll tolerate just a moment longer of this scrutiny.” I said, almost under my breath. “But it is for the good of science.”

He jumped with a start as I plucked free one of the hairs from his head, growled slightly.

“Sorry Watson. I’ve just never gotten to examine one of you so close while...”

He cut me off, “While still alive?”

His words gave me pause and I pulled the glass away from him. Searching for the correct words I hesitated, then looked him in the eye. "I'm terribly sorry Doctor. My manners have apparently taken leave of me. Not only do I study you like some sort of lab animal but I forget that to you *I* must be the monster. Please forgive me."

He waved me away. "Stop being so melodramatic Holmes. I can certainly understand curiosity, as I have my own about you. As for the other matter, don't forget that I myself would have killed Cokes had you not gotten to him first. He may have been a fellow were-beast but I can tell you that there is no love lost between Loup-Garou and Mor."

I sat back at the table, intrigued. "Something I had not considered." I said, staring off into the distance, then turning to look at the doctor. "That even amongst the world of monsters there would be a tribal mentality. I mean yes, I had considered that certain types of beasts might dislike one another or even fight on occasion, but I'd not thought of it in the context of cultural differences."

"Because you did not think of us a *people*. Am I right?"

I bit my lip in thought, hesitant to answer, but he was correct. "Very true Watson. I can say that until meeting you I'd not..."

My attention turned to the stairs, or rather the sound of Mr. Hudson coming up them quickly. Men's shoes, size eight, and the barely detectable oddity of his gait; the result of a carriage accident when he had been but a child. While the pattern of his steps were characteristic of the man the way in which he flung open the door was not. Giving so much thought to what could possibly be so urgent neither I, nor Watson, took into account the fact that the good doctor was still in his bestial state.

"By God!" Mr. Hudson screamed as his eyes immediately went to the badger seated at the table.

"Mr. Hudson, Mr. Hudson!" I exclaimed, rising from my chair to meet him, "It's quite all right Mr. Hudson."

Holding his hand over his heart and breathing heavily he managed to hit me several times with a rolled up piece of paper that he had in his hand. Watson immediately rose from where he was sitting to apologize.

"Is that what you're after Mr. Holmes, to give an old chap a heart attack?" he snapped.

"I'm so terribly sorry Mr. Hudson, I had not expected that you would return so soon." I said, trying to calm him.

"Please don't be afraid sir, it's only me." I heard Watson trying to explain.

"I know that it's you Doctor, I'm not a fool. You still scared the daylights out of me." the Scotsman panted.

"Holmes you said he was privy to information about..."

"Yes," he cut Watson off, "I know all about the monsters and such, but you'll forgive me if I had a start. I've just never come upstairs to find Mr. Holmes having *breakfast* with one before."

I cracked a smile, tried not to laugh. He caught site of it, cracked a half-smile of his own, then hit me with the piece of paper one last time before wagging a finger at me.

"Mr. Hudson?" I asked, "What is that in your hand?"

"It's what I was coming up here to deliver to you before you nearly frightened me into an early grave you daft bastard." the landlord said in his scratchy tone.

"Let me see it." I demanded, reaching for it with one hand while leaning to grab my spectacles from a nearby table with the other.

“The man who delivered it said it was extremely urgent. That’s why I rushed up here in such a hurry.”

“Let us see.” I began, then letter aloud:

*Dear Mr. Sherlock Holmes,*

*It is with the utmost haste that I ask for you to come and meet with me. I have reason to believe that there is corruption within the halls of Scotland Yard of the variety that I cannot speak of to anyone save you. I believe there to be a very real danger not only to the citizens of London but possibly even to the crown itself. This matter requires your full and immediate attention. You know where to find me.*

“Signed, Gregory Lestrade.”

“The inspector?” Mr. Hudson asked.

“Yes, one and the same.” I turned to face the doctor, “Come Watson, we must get dressed, we’ve not a moment to lose.”

“Holmes I’m a doctor not a detective.”

“You wanted to study me, well here’s your chance to see me in action. Come now!” already headed for my room I stopped in place, spun to face him, then wagged my finger at his face.

“Oh, and do take that off Watson, you look quite ridiculous.”

## CAB RIDE

Our cab driver, who smelled of spirits and would surely be on report to his employer, had taken us down Northumberland Avenue but I'd instructed him not to turn down Great Scotland Yard and instead to go on to Whitehall Place, as I detested using the Metropolitan Police Station's public entrance and preferred instead to go around to the back. There I would no doubt find some constable whom I could have summoned Mr. Lestrade. If the matter that he wished to discuss was indeed so urgent it was probably also quite secretive, and would be better spoken of after he'd joined Watson and I in the cab, instead of in his office where the possibility of eavesdropping was more likely.

"I should like to draw some of your blood." Watson blurted out, having spent the last few minutes in silence staring out of the window. He looked at me, raised his eyebrows questioningly. "Only if you are open to the notion of course. It would be for science."

"Certainly. I can find no logical reason to refuse." I would, however, demand that he wait until later in the day and then only after I'd had time for a proper meal. I'd taken a small amount of morphine the night before to ease me into sleep, and some cocaine earlier in the evening to sharpen my wits before confronting Mr. Cokes. I had no wish for him to uncover my habits any time soon.

"I would have thought you to be more excited about the possibility of discovering whether or not there are any abnormalities in your physiology, ones that account for what you now know yourself to be."

"You expected me to quickly volunteer, not simply acquiesce." I grumbled, "is that correct?"

The doctor fidgeted in his seat, moved slightly so as to better face me. "Granted I've known you only a remarkably short time but you seem to be a man who is unrelentingly inquisitive. Surely you wish to know what separates you from ordinary men."

"Save for my superior intellect?" I smirked, "I should think it to be the fact that my eyes have a peculiar habit of luminescing under the light of the moon."

"Oh stop being facetious Holmes. I have..." he ceased in mid-sentence then leaned in so as to speak more surreptitiously; as if the half-drunken driver could have heard anything we spoke of over the clatter of the horses' hooves against the pavement. "I have been conducting laboratory research into the matter of what makes were-beasts and other *homo monstrum* who and what they are."

"And?" my curiosity was roused.

"Well further tests are in order, hence my request, but I believe there just might be a chemical signature present in the blood of individuals such as myself...or ourselves, depending upon what the results of the test are. Until now I've only had chance to take a couple of blood samples save for my own."

"And if your findings indicate that I am in essence only a variation of what you are?"

"I should think that would be up to you Holmes. If your reputation is to be believed you had little compunction about catching ordinary human criminals when that was what you believed yourself to be."

“*Catch*, Watson, that is the key word.” I remarked, “I did not take it upon myself to behead them or shoot them with poison darts and dispose of their bodies via submersion in vats of industrial chemicals.”

“Yes...but you know as well as I do that you can’t simply turn these types of matters over to the police.”

“Indeed.” I muttered, staring out of the window blankly.

“Which is why I felt my only option in dealing with Mr. Cokes was to eliminate him myself. It was not something that I desired, but I could not know what I knew about him and simply let his crimes go unchecked. Besides, you said yourself that you haven’t had to kill *every* monster that you’ve come across. There was the Korrigan, remember?”

I said nothing, which to my clever new companion was every bit as good as an admission of guilt.

“Holmes you didn’t? You said that you’d let him be with only a warning.”

“At first Watson, at first. Some months later I caught him using his abilities to foretell the deaths of wealthy widow women; comforting them into their graves and then leaving their families with nothing.”

“So you killed him?” Watson seemed shocked.

“It is what I do, remember?” I snapped, “I slit his throat using a blade laced with hemlock, the only way to guarantee a Korrigan’s death, then burned his remains in the forest.”

“His behavior was quite despicable, but do you truly think him to have been worthy of death?”

“In his belongings I found a diary that contained the descriptions and addresses of nearly a dozen children. Do you know what Korrigans do with children Watson? They replace them with changelings, the original child taken away for some nefarious purpose that one can only postulate about.”

He thought for a moment. “That *is* awful, I will grant you that. But you did not know of the diary at the time you ended his life.”

“Are we really to have this conversation? I hunt and kill things, things very similar to you I might add. If you are uncomfortable with that fact then I suggest we end this partnership as it is unlikely to be a very fruitful one.”

“As much as I find your blatant lack of tact distasteful I do believe your actions to be mostly well intentioned. That coupled with the fact that I, a man who has pledged to do no harm, took it upon himself to murder a criminal, means that I do not find myself in a position to judge you Holmes.” his words had been harsh, and we sat quietly for a moment before he spoke again.

“Besides, perhaps some of my more well developed manners will rub off on you.”

At that I fought back a smile and let out a single laugh.

“I must ask.” the doctor began, “Have you ever taken the time to thoroughly examine one of the corpses?”

“Yes, yes Doctor. You’ll find the results in my library in a volume entitled ‘Post-Mortem Analysis of *Lusus Naturae*’. Regardless, this conversation is at an end.” I pointed out of the window. “The Yard is just ahead.”

## A CHANGE OF ADDRESS

“Holmes? Sherlock Holmes?” a man dressed in a uniform of the constabulary called out as we stepped from the cab. He and two of his fellow officers were standing near the rear entrance to the building. He was remarkably tall, red-headed, aged somewhere in his mid-twenties, and wore mutton chops that were most unflattering. As distinctive as he was I did not recognize him.

“Yes.” I said as I walked toward them with Watson a few steps behind me, having stopped to instruct the driver to wait for us. “And whom might you be?”

“Constable Hightower.”

An apt moniker for such a statuesque young man.

“We’ve not met before have we Constable?”

“No sir.” he replied, “But everyone around the yard knows about the infamous Mr. Holmes.”

“Including the details of my physical appearance it would seem.”

“Aye, there’s a couple of photographs of you hanging on the wall, clippings from some newspaper articles.”

Just then the door swung open and a man stepped out, eying the lads sharply. He was well dressed and with dark hair which was only just beginning to show the greying at the temples that, along with the wrinkles at the corners of his eyes and folds upon his forehead, told me that he was some forty-five to fifty years of age. His suit was finely tailored, a deep brown with pinstripes, and his hair neatly brushed back with the aid of some form of cream. He pulled at his clothing and stood in such a fashion that it was apparent to me that he was unaccustomed to such attire. He was about to attend an important meeting with someone that he wished to make an impression upon.

“If you lads don’t get back to...” he noticed Watson and myself standing there and promptly shifted his attention to us. “Why if it isn’t Sherlock Holmes, the ‘consulting detective’.” he spoke the words with disdain in his mouth.

This man I did not know either.

“Haven’t seen you around here in what...five years or so? Finally decided to leave the police work to the real coppers have you?”

“I’m sorry sir but have we met?” I asked, attempting to mirror his contempt whilst masking it thinly behind a façade of gentlemanly manners.

He angrily motioned for the men to return to their duties. They extinguished their cigarettes and hesitantly did as they were instructed. He watched them go, shook his head, and then turned back to Watson and I.

“Chief Inspector Wilks.” he said, putting out a hand to shake mine. “And no, we’ve not met, though I’m thoroughly aware of your exploits.”

I ignored his gesture, instead introducing him to Doctor Watson who chose to accept his greeting. I kept my hands resting firmly atop my walking stick. He looked down at them, barely managed to keep a look of anger from his face.

“I need to speak with Detective Inspector Lestrade immediately sir. I was wondering if you would be so good as to tell him that I am here.”

The man afforded himself a chuckle at our, or rather *my*, expense.

“Do you mean to tell me that the legendary Sherlock Holmes doesn’t know?”

“Know what?”

“That Lestrade isn’t with the Yard any longer, hasn’t been going on five years now. Hell, he resigned not long after you stopped poking your head around here.” he leaned in a bit, “If you want my personal opinion I think that sorry sap couldn’t cut it without an amateur such as yourself solving his cases for him.”

“Ah!” I exclaimed, turning to Watson to show a smile. “You see, the chief inspector recognizes my talent after all.”

“Hardly.” came his tepid reply. “Still, I’ll give you credit for being a fair sight smarter than that Lestrade chap.”

“*Hardly* an accomplishment.” I jested, “Speaking of whom, do you know where I might find him?”

As I finished the sentence I noticed Wilks’ eye lift from mine, to something in the street.

“Holmes!” I heard a familiar voice call out.

“That’d be him right now Mr. Holmes.” the chief inspector said, pointing to a cab that had just pulled up behind ours.

“Your Inspector Lestrade?” Watson asked.

“Precisely.” and with that I walked away, leaving Wilks where he stood, giving him not so much as a wave or a tip of the hat. There was something about the man that I instinctively disliked, and he apparently felt the same way about me. From behind I heard the good doctor apologize on my behalf and then his steps striking the pavement as he hurried to catch me up.

“That was a bit rude would you not say?”

“Only repaid in kind Watson. The chief inspector should learn to watch his tongue. Ah, Mr. Lestrade!” I belted out as I approached the cab, lifting my walking stick into the air.

For an instant only I caught the reflection of Chief Inspector Wilks in the glass of the window, his gaze still fixed upon my back. Had I truly angered the man? What was it that subconsciously caused the two of us to be pre-disposed to dislike one another? I decided that it was of little consequence. I’d not known of him personally, nor had I ever met him in the past, but I *did* recall newspaper articles about a new chief inspector at Scotland Yard. The subtly detectable emotions I’d sensed on his men as he’d come outdoors to chide them told me that they feared him but that they did not respect him. A crass fellow, I could not blame them.

The window of the cab lowered, and out poked the instantly recognizable visage of Gregory Lestrade, the fabric of his bowler hat catching the morning mist. His scars, reminders of our encounter with the Bugbear, were more noticeable than I had remembered, having last seen him up close only shortly after his wounds had healed and they had formed.

“Gentlemen, please get in.” was all that he said.

I let my new friend enter the coach first and then promptly followed him, wishing to get out of the weather which was beginning to work its way up from a mist to a full on rainstorm. We took our seats across from Lestrade, who called out to the driver to get the carriage moving again.

“Blast!” Watson exclaimed. “I neglected to pay our cab driver.”

“Hold!” Lestrade called to his own driver.

I fumbled in my waistcoat pocket and pulled free a bill that should have more than covered what we owed the man. Clutching my hat as the wind began to pick up a bit I popped the door open, leaned out, and handed him the money before ducking back into the comfort of Lestrade’s carriage.

“Now then.” I said as we lurched back into motion. “You wished to see me did you not.”

The former Scotland Yard detective wore his hat low, utilizing its small brim to cover as much of the scars that ran from his eyebrow down to the mid-point of his cheek as was possible. I noticed him glance to the man seated at my right, then back to me questioningly.

“Yes I most certainly did Mr. Holmes, however I must admit that I did not expect you to bring company.”

“Ah yes. How very rude of me.” I said, leaning forward and putting on a cordial smile. “Gregory Lestrade this is Doctor John Watson. He is assisting me in an investigation.”

The two men exchanged pleasantries. Lestrade looked much harder, much colder than when I’d seen him last. I supposed, however, no more so than I appeared to him. He returned his hard stare to me.

“Is there somewhere we can drop off the good doctor?” he asked, glancing back and forth between the two of us who were seated across from him.

“Come now Lestrade, whatever it is that you have to say can surely be said in the company of the doctor. He has my utmost confidence.”

Was that true? Likely not. I did, for some reason I could not explain, implicitly trust Watson, at least as much as I trusted anyone. Still, I’d known him for only a short while. Regardless, as Mr. Hudson was already in the process of clearing out the other room for him, the one which I’d already rented myself so as to better keep prying eyes out of my business, we’d soon be sharing living quarters. I’d better learn to trust him, and quickly.

Lestrade hesitated, “It has something to do with the last case that you and I worked together. Surely you can see how the doctor would not wish to get involved in such a matter.”

Interesting. The little I had seen of him after the Bugbear incident he’d wanted absolutely nothing to do with matters of the sort. Though I’d never explicitly told him so I had no doubt that he’d become aware of my status as a monster hunter.

“Well then I’m afraid you’d be wrong Mr. Lestrade. For you see the good Dr. Watson here has already found himself entangled in similar matters with myself as recently as last night.”

“Oh?” Lestrade queried.

“Show him Watson.” I said, never letting my eyes leave the detective. After a moment’s pause I turned to face the doctor.

“Do you really think that wise?” he asked, obviously quite uncertain.

“Go on Doctor. I think it should clear the air so that we might get on with whatever mystery it is that Lestrade has for us.”

“It’s not just a carnival act you know Holmes?”

“You said that it didn’t hurt.”

“Yes but that’s beside the point. If I go about town...”

Lestrade cut us both off. “Gentlemen. What in the bloody hell is going on here?”

Watson sighed, drew the shade of the window beside him, took a deep breath, then transformed. Acting off of pure instinct Lestrade’s hand went to his coat, no doubt for a revolver which he kept concealed there, but it paused before withdrawing the weapon. His eyes, filled with what I could only describe as sheer terror, darted over to me but only ever so briefly, as he apparently wished to keep them trained on Dr. Watson.

“He’s...he’s a...” the detective gasped for his words.

“A monster. Yes.” I spoke plainly, then raised my walking stick to his hand and pushed it gently away from the gun. It was an act which he seemed to not even pay heed to, his gaze so intently fixed on my furry companion.

“Incredible.” the softly spoken words barely escaped Lestrade’s mouth.



“Isn’t it?” I declared, “How he manages to keep such a coat so voluminous and luxuriously shiny is beyond me.”

Watson shook off the transformation, tufts of thick fur disappearing into the collar and sleeves of his shirt as he did so.

“Alright.” he declared. “I think that’s enough gawking for today Holmes.”

My jest had been designed to put the detective into a more relaxed humor, not to rile the doctor’s.

“My apologies Watson.”

He nodded forgiveness. I’d not considered that my repeatedly asking him to metamorphose into his bestial form would make him feel a bit like a curiosity, less a man and more something to be studied.

“So now you see Lestrade, that not only is the good doctor aware of the things which we may speak of, but that he might even be able to provide a unique insight of his own.”

The detective shook his head nervously then sat up in his seat and attempted to collect himself.

“So Doctor you’re a...what precisely? A were-badger?”

“The correct term would be Mor, though Mr. Holmes seems fond of the moniker you just used.” he turned to me, “Don’t worry Holmes, I find it more descriptive than insulting.”

“You’ll forgive me for asking Dr. Watson but how precisely does this work?” the detective asked of him, “You *do* know what Mr. Holmes does don’t you? Do you help him hunt down other...” he hesitated to use the term, “monsters?”

I spoke for Watson, “Actually we’ve not yet worked out that dynamic. We’ve only just made each others’ acquaintance yesterday. Though if it will reassure you any I met the doctor here while attempting to hunt down a vile creature that he himself was trying to rid the world of. It would seem that not all of them mean any ill towards mankind.”

I left out the part that I might, myself, be some sort of variation from the norm and that the doctor wished to study me every bit as much as I wished to study and learn from him.

“Besides, he’s remarkably clever and may very well be able to assist me in the matter you wished to speak to me about. Which, though we’ve gotten a bit sidetracked, I believe we should attend to.”

“Yes.” he nodded, still throwing an occasional uncertain glance towards the doctor. “Well, we’ll be at my office in a few moments. We can discuss it over glasses of brandy. Speaking of cleverness, however, I feel that I must ask to what has become of your own Mr. Holmes.”

“Oh?” I asked, attempting to mask my contempt of the statement.

“Yes, the old Holmes would have known not to go looking for me at Scotland Yard.”

I let forth a hefty chuckle. “Believe it or not sir I’ve much more pressing matters to attend to than tracking the whereabouts and life details of bumbling Scotland Yard detectives; especially one whom I have not seen in years and that I had to rescue from his own incompetence on many occasions.”

Lestrade didn’t even blink at my insults, as he was quite accustomed to them during the time in which we were more familiar with one another.

“Still, you must not have held out that much faith in my abilities, seeing as how you realized your mistake in not attaching an address to your letter and came to find me at the yard. Or was it that you had a man on me?” I rubbed my chin in thought before speaking frankly, “Yes, surely that is the case. You had someone following me and he came to tell you that I was headed for Scotland Yard and not your new office.”

“Perhaps.”

“Well let me dissuade any of your doubts as to my abilities Mr. Lestrade...or should I say Detective Lestrade?” I glanced over him, drew in a deep breath before continuing, “You have not spent these years unemployed. Instead you are gainfully employed, for a prestigious firm no less, one who’s building has recently undergone some renovation. You’ve also suffered some injury to your left hip, have developed something of a drinking problem, and your father has passed away.”

The detective nodded. “How?”

“Elementary my dear Lestrade. Knowing your educational background and lack of family connections I find it highly unlikely that you would have been able to procure gainful employment in any field other than detection. Since the suit that you wear, right down to the necktie, is of a fine quality, though not the finest, and of the latest fashion, you are most obviously not destitute. There is also the carriage that we ride in now,” I waved my hands around, “it is of a fine build and there was a small maker’s badge on the outside that said ‘Made for Thomas Stilton.’ From there it is hardly a difficult leap to reason that it belongs to your employer, none other than the owner of the Stilton Agency, a private detective firm. There is also the slight hint of plaster residue on the tip of your left shoe, a sign that renovations are occurring at your place of business.”

Lestrade looked impressed. “Please go on.”

“Since departing the yard I’ve seen you adjust your position in your seat no less than four times, always leaning so as to put weight onto your right hip. That coupled with the fact that you now carry a walking stick, and one heavy enough to be truly supportive, not just decorative, tells me that you sustained an injury, possibly a gunshot, to your left hip. As to the drinking problem? After passing over the last bump in the street I was able to detect the minute sloshing sound of whisky inside a flask. There is also a slight tremble to your hands and a thinning of hair around what is visible of your temples that signifies a heavy drinking habit.”

“And my father?” he asked.

“Watson, would you care to take this one?”

The doctor smiled, paused a moment to give the detective a thorough visual examination. “Your watch Detective.” he said as he pointed to it, “It seems to have quite a bit of age to it, and the coin hanging from its chain is engraved with H. Lestrade, not G. Lestrade. I can then only infer that it is not a piece that you wore when you and Mr. Holmes last knew each other, causing him to deduce that it has since been passed down to you through inheritance.”

He blinked, looking from Watson back to myself, his hands bobbling around atop the heavy walking stick that he held between his legs as the carriage went down a cobblestone street onto which it had turned.

“Perhaps you’re right Holmes. Your new colleague might just be able to help us with this problem after all.”

## SOMEONE'S BEEN BUSY

To say that I received a few stares as we walked through the lobby of the Stilton building would be a gross understatement. It seemed that the men working for the private detective agency had all read of my exploits with Scotland Yard. Marching straight for the stairs, wishing to avoid a fuss, we were stopped cold by a young lad with short cropped reddish hair and an eager grin.

"Mr. Sherlock Holmes." he said as he extended a hand for me to shake. It was a statement, not a question. He obviously knew precisely who I was. "It is an honor sir, a real honor to meet you."

I reached out a gloved hand, accepted his greeting. "Thank you young man." I said, then considered that he was likely less than five or six years my junior, though his youthful energy seemed in stark contrast to the heaviness that weighed upon my nearly thirty two years.

"The lads and I here at Stilton have read up on every case you ever assisted with Mr. Holmes. I must say that you are nothing short of a living legend sir."

Behind him, at the row of desks near the front windows, I began to notice heads lifting from their work, eying the interchange.

"A quick escape would be best lest we find ourselves overrun with the compliments and questions of youthful investigators." I thought to myself, then aloud to the red haired young man, "I'm sorry Mr...?"

"Roth sir, Graham Roth." he blurted, still shaking my hand exuberantly. I looked down at it, withdrew it and placed it atop my walking stick.

"Well Detective Roth it was a pleasure to meet you but I'm afraid that our business is urgent and therefore we must take our leave."

"Oh," he said disappointedly, "of course sir." The fellow stammered excitedly as he took two steps backward, then stepped forward once again. "Sorry Mr. Holmes it's just that you're sort of a celebrity around here and no matter how much we pester poor Mr. Lestrade he seems reluctant to tell us about..."

A loud clearing of the throat from the aforementioned senior detective caught the young man's attention and he quickly stepped back again. He smiled and waved us on. Moments later, making our way up the stairs between the second and third floors of the building, I broke the silence.

"An eager young chap would you not say Watson?"

"Ah yes. The hallmark of inexperience to be sure, but I'm certain that in time it'll be tempered into focused energy under your expert tutelage Detective."

Lestrade scoffed. "Hardly. The boy's not even an inspector. He's the nephew of my brother's wife. He runs errands for the agency, does a little snooping for us from time to time, nothing more."

"Should I presume that his employment here then is owed to a good reference from you Lestrade?" I asked him.

"No. Quite the opposite I must admit. It was Graham who introduced me to Mr. Stilton."

"Very interesting. I hope you don't mind if I ask, did you come to the agency straightaway after the yard?"

He paused on one of the stairs, turned to look down at Watson and myself in the dim light of the sparsely placed gas lamps. "If you *must* know I left the yard only three months after the last case we worked together. I spent a couple of years unemployed actually."

"That explains much."

"Oh, does it Holmes?"

"Yes actually. Save for our singular meeting following that case, when I know for a *fact* that you were still working for the yard, I chanced to see you about town a few times over the next couple of years. Both times your appearance belied the fact that your fortunes had turned for the worse. That is why I was delighted to see today that you were in fact doing rather well for yourself."

"Ever the observant detective eh Holmes? I'm surprised that you didn't take it upon yourself to look into the matter deeper and investigate the details of my private life."

"Let us say that I became...preoccupied." I smiled.

His face hardened, "I'll have you know that I spent much of that time in and out of sanitariums." he then looked directly at Watson, "You can imagine the toll such a...revelation...can have on the *normal* human psyche."

"How very brave of you Lestrade. Lesser men would not admit to such weakness even in familiar company, let alone in the presence of a virtual stranger."

The detective let out a mocking laugh. "Seeing the fact that Watson here is a doctor and also a..." he hesitated to use the term, "a monster, or whatever you want to call it, himself, I hardly see where subterfuge is necessary."

I bowed my head in understanding. Though I chose not to speak of it I had seen my own share of difficult times after our encounter with the Bugbear.

Then from behind me, "Besides Holmes, I'm fairly certain that comment was an opportunity for a subtle jab at you yourself."

I spun to face him, eyebrow raised questioningly. "How so Watson?"

He cleared his throat. "I believe the detective was insinuating..."

"Insinuating that Holmes here is bestowed with nothing resembling a *normal* human psyche."

I considered myself a master of words and their subtle meanings. How had I not noticed the dagger hidden within the melancholy cloth of Lestrade's bellyaching? Regardless, the stab was real, tangible. There are those who would hypothesize that the great Sherlock Holmes has no feelings to be wounded but the truth is that like with any other man they *do* exist. I simply maintain a tighter reign over them than most. Had I though, in dealing with the Bugbear, lost control over them so totally, so terrifyingly, that my actions and emotional outbursts scarred Lestrade more deeply than the beast itself had?

"My office is this way." he barked as he continued up the stairs.

Unlike the lobby, which appeared to be in immaculate condition, this floor was in a state of partial construction. Elements of the old design were still present, overlaid with fixtures and plaster work that more closely matched that of the lower floors. Lestrade's door in particular displayed a clear juxtaposition of old and new. Its frame had recently been redesigned, plaster as I'd seen on his shoe, but the door itself, the knob, and the sign affixed to it were still of the type that could be seen further down the hall, in the area where construction had not yet begun.

Opening that door revealed an office far more dark and stuffy than I had expected. It reminded me more of the records room of a library than of any gentleman's place of business. A large portion of its space was taken up by an enormous desk so covered in piles of papers that its

surface could hardly be made out. Lestrade lit one of the lamps and bathed the space in a soft warm glow that contrasted the coldness of the room and the dreary blue light that came in through the singular window.

To the left of the desk, looking at it from the front, was a set of shelves built into the wall. They too were covered in papers and file folders but also small wooden boxes which, from what I could see, appeared to be filled with photographs, voice recording cylinders, journals and photographic plates.

“Please, have a seat gentlemen.” Lestrade gestured toward the two stuffed leather chairs that sat on the opposite side of the desk from the shelves, backed up against a wall decorated with a single item, a photograph of his wife. “You’ll have to forgive me for not being able to call for tea. I’m afraid the secretary is out sick today.”

“Think nothing of it Lestrade.” my words were genuine, as I did not wish the man to feel obligated to provide refreshments for Watson or myself. Still we’d had to skip out on breakfast and a bit of tea would certainly have been welcome. The detective, however, could not be faulted as he’d not have known that his message would interrupt our meal, seeing as how we’d taken it so late in the morning.

Lestrade hung his coat and then proceeded around to the backside of the desk where he pushed a pile of documents out of the way. He did this so that they did not obscure the line of sight between himself and his guests once he sat down. From the desk drawer he pulled a half empty bottle of brandy and three glasses. He filled them and handed one each to Watson and myself before taking his seat.

“As you have no doubt observed Holmes,” he began as he lowered himself into his chair. “in the intervening years since we last worked together I have stockpiled quite a wealth of information.” he motioned to the wall of books and boxes.

I leaned forward abruptly, nearly spilling my drink, “You don’t mean?” I left my question open-ended.

“That I’ve spent a good deal of this time looking into things that cannot be easily explained? Well I didn’t at first. There was shock, followed by an intense feeling of dread. No matter where I went or what case I was involved with I wondered if there was something sinister hiding around every corner. My performance as a detective inspector for Scotland Yard became so abysmal that the chief constable himself asked for me to resign lest he be forced to terminate my employment. He was trying to spare me at least a modicum of public humiliation.”

“Continue.” I encouraged. I tossed down the sip of brandy then reached for the cherry-wood pipe in my coat as I sat back into the chair to listen.

“The missus was understanding. I couldn’t very well hide the truth from her seeing as how I had to explain where these wounds came from.” he raked the fingers of his left hand across his face, mocking the claws of an animal. “All that I can say is that she had the heart of a saint. She believed me...believed everything. To be honest I’m not sure that I would have, had I been in her place. She stood by my side when the terrors got worse and I ended up in and out of the sanitariums.”

“Then you are truly blessed with the love of such a woman Mr. Lestrade.” Watson chimed in. He gave a light smile, his fingers lightly rapping at the brim of the bowler that he held in his lap.

“Assuredly.” I agreed.

“Well...*was* blessed Dr. Watson.” he looked up at the photograph on the wall behind where we sat. “She was taken by consumption nearly three years ago. May God rest her soul.”

“Oh, I’m so terribly sorry Detective.” Watson’s face showed legitimate distress.

“It’s quite alright Doctor. As Mr. Holmes here is so keen on pointing out I may have never been the world’s greatest detective, but I had the blessing of knowing the honest love of a good woman; not something that every man can say for himself. She hid the illness from me as long as she could, more concerned for my sanity than for her own health.” he paused for a short while, taking a few deep breaths before continuing. “Regardless gentlemen, that’s not why I summoned you here. You see after her death something came over me...I pulled myself together. I don’t think it was strength, something more like stubborn determination to not let her down. I cleaned up my act, got on here at Stilton’s, and spent every bit of free time I had when not involved in an investigation doing research. The fruits of which you now see upon those shelves.”

“Yes but to what end?” I asked, “Surely you’re not wiling away your nights pursuing the same creatures that I do. Were that the case we would have crossed paths by now, just as Doctor Watson and I did.”

“No, no.” he shook his head, “I’m not *hunting* anything, not in the literal sense anyway. You see during my time at the yard I recalled some cases where there seemed to be no logical explanation. Purely for my own edification I wished to find out if there existed other explanations for those incidents...non-logical ones.”

“Paranormal ones.” Watson added.

“Precisely.” Lestrade cleared his throat before going on, he looked right at me, “You see Holmes I *knew* that I wasn’t insane, that what had happened to you and I was real, but in the sanitarium one is told that such things are the result of psychosis and other abnormalities of the brain. Every time that I was able to draw a new conclusion about one of those old case files I proved that it was the doctors, and not myself, that were living in a deluded version of reality. Then, what began as a combination of curiosity, therapy, and busy-work turned into something more as I started connecting threads between some of the unsolved cases.”

“Just what are you getting at Lestrade?” I queried as I drew heavily from my tobacco.

He cleared away a pile of papers from the top of what had looked like merely a wooden box but upon doing so revealed it to be something altogether different. It was a magic lantern; a device used for projecting the image from a photographic slide onto a screen. I had seen one before and now felt the fool for not having realized that the square of white fabric that was attached to the wall, in an opening between the shelves to Lestrade’s right, was such a screen.

He pulled a box of matches from the first drawer of his large desk and spoke as he opened the top of the magic lantern so that he could light the candle or wick inside it.

“Let’s just say that, inadvertently, everything that I have learned and collected shall now be a library of the unusual that is at your disposal Mr. Holmes. For the plot that I feel I have uncovered will have grave ramifications not only for England but for the whole of Europe should we fail to prevent it from reaching its conclusion, and it will take both...no, all three of us to see this through to the end.”

## DEVILISH DETAILS

To say that I completely trusted the deductive skills of Gregory Lestrade would be a stretch. Still, the plot that he laid out for us was terribly intriguing and it did seem as though he had done an uncharacteristically thorough job of researching his facts. Had the years, and experiences, changed the man for the better? Perhaps.

Poring over the contents of file folders, photographic slides, intercepted correspondence and a meticulously complicated web of newspaper articles he pled the case to us, believing that beyond a doubt there was some sinister plot at work that held within it a cleverly veiled attempt at the life of none other than the Crown Prince himself.

There was more, of course. The assassination of a cousin to the crown of Liechtenstein, the investigation quickly brought to a conclusion by Scotland Yard when it was declared that he had been a pawn in the games of Irish Republican terrorists. The kidnapping and ransom of the son of a British arms manufacturer, mysteriously brought to a conclusion when the boy was returned unharmed and with no ransom paid. Constables being dispatched to famous landmarks to search, without proper cause, for something or someone whose identity was not disclosed.

Inquiries into these incidents by the press were met with untoward hostility or even downright brutality. Watson and I listened intently to the information the detective was so eager to share with us, our curiosity piquing even further when he began to detail case after case, bizarre and unsolved murders, to which the Yard seemed to have simply turned a blind eye, in some cases even going as far as attempting to destroy the files.

Lestrade, however, still had a few friends inside the Yard and though they were not convinced of some grand plot against the crown they had still taken note of strange incidents over the last few years and had agreed to help him by saving what they could from the furnaces. As he showed us witness accounts and crime scene photographs it instantly became clear to Watson and I the nature of the crimes in question. Surely Lestrade had jumped to the same conclusion and that was why he had summoned *me*, of all people, to his aid.

Still, what common thread did these cases all share, save for the fact that someone at Scotland Yard was attempting to sweep them under the rug? Most of them reeked of one thing, monsters, of that I was certain. The Yard's refusal to conduct serious inquiry into such cases was not surprising. How could they explain them to the public? But what of the more complicated affairs? Indeed they did hint at something further than the Metropolitan Police Force not wishing to get caught up in matters of monsters and witches for fear of being labeled lunatics.

The fact that both types of cases were being hidden from the public eye and frequently going as far as having the files destroyed seemed to indicate to me that there was indeed one officer, or possibly several officers working in collusion, who were privy to more information than they should have been and were participating in a conspiracy of some fashion. Though the detective had woven together a fanciful tale of how these items linked together into a plot to assassinate the Prince of that I was less than certain.

What I was *absolutely* sure of, however, was that something was amiss at Scotland yard and that I intended to get to the bottom of it. Anyone covering up the types of cases that he'd presented to us was obviously in the know when it came to matters of supernatural origins. In my mind that left three possibilities. A Versiecht like myself, using his position to obfuscate his night-

time hunting activities. A perfectly normal man, possibly wronged by some beast, doing the same to cover his tracks as he wrought vengeance upon those who'd wronged him or his kin. Lastly, a man who wore a uniform by day to hide his true nature but was indeed a beast of his own style. A man who would seek to use his position within the constabulary to prevent the public from learning about either his own wicked actions or simply those of his kind.

I freely admit that the last notion disturbed me most; a terror at Scotland Yard.



## A CURIOUS RESULT

"Watson what on Earth are you doing man?" I shouted as I stumbled into the parlor. "Turn on some lights my dear fellow."

Seated at my work table, the one to the left of the room, nearest the fireplace, he looked up at me with spectacles dangling from his nose that made his eyes appear easily three times their normal size; magnifying glasses, intended for close-up work. In his hands were test tubes that he clung to tightly and my table...he'd shoved its contents aside and they now sat piled into a nearby crate.

"Doctor I see that you've made yourself comfortable. Do you mind explaining why I should not fly into a rage at the sight of my belongings piled haphazardly into a box whilst your chemistry set now adorns the very spot upon which they once sat?" I asked, raising an eyebrow questioningly as my lips pursed into an angry scowl.

He removed the spectacles and placed them onto the table before jumping to his feet, still trying to keep the test tubes from spilling their contents.

"Holmes you absolutely *must* see this!"

"Oh?" I asked sarcastically, still glancing at my tossed aside brick-a-brack.

"Never mind the table will you old chap. This is most fascinating."

"Very well." I replied, pausing to remove my coat and placing it onto the back of one of the chairs before walking over to him.

"This." he raised his right hand, "is a sample of blood, my blood to be precise. This," he raised the other hand into view, "is the sample I drew from you after lunch."

"Fascinating." I feigned a smile.

"Come here." he motioned for me to follow him back to the work table which he had so rudely claimed as his own. There, taking a seat upon a stool that he had moved from elsewhere in the drawing room, he placed the two vials down into holders which kept them from spilling over.

"One of our earliest questions was of the nature of your abilities...or lack of them you claim, and how they relate to the world of *homo-monstrum*." he said, looking up at me. "Well I spent the afternoon, while you were out...."

"Doing research." I assured him.

"Ah I see. While you were out doing your research I pulled out my kit..."

"Commandeered my table without asking permission." I interjected. "Yes please proceed Doctor." I smiled.

He cleared his throat, "As I was saying Holmes. I pulled out my kit and began to run a battery of tests on your blood sample. From a purely medical standpoint I saw nothing strange about it whatsoever so I then delved into more unconventional experiments."

"May I assume that the results were enlightening?"

"You could say that." he smiled, then turned his attention to the row of bottles arranged in a wooden rack that he'd placed upon the table. From it he pulled an unlabeled tincture and, with the precise hands of a surgeon, placed two drops of the solution into the first vial of blood. Almost immediately it began to luminesce a vibrant green color.

"That would be *my* blood sample." he said.

"And the other mine."

"Yes." he uttered under his breath as he squeezed two drops into the second vial. It too glowed brightly within a matter of seconds. Vibrant green.

"What is it?" I asked, "This solution."

"It is a mixture of sodium hydroxide and hydrogen peroxide. It causes blood, or any traces of it, to reveal itself with a brilliant glow."

"That I can see Watson, and while it is quite remarkable and I can see much potential for it in the use of investigating murders or other violent crimes I suspect that this is not all that you wished to show me."

I watched as he pulled another vial from the rack, this one shaped like the other two and also containing a dark red fluid like the others as well. Blood. He placed it into the apparatus that already held the two, now glowing, sample vials.

"Watch this." he said, then placed two more drops of the solution he had devised into the third container. This one too lit up with an eerie glow but instead of green the light held more of a blue tint.

I looked at him questioningly.

"You see Holmes, the first two samples are from you and I. This one," he pointed to the blue vial, "is from a patient that I visited on my way back from Mr. Lestrade's office."

"Why does it luminesce differently? Some illness that your patient is suffering from?"

He shook his head. "Not at all. I was only checking in on Mr. Thompson to see if his fractured ankle was healing properly."

I smiled, "A procedure that would normally not require the sampling of blood, am I correct?"

"Typically, no. Not unless there were any signs of infection taking hold."

"And were there?"

"Not at all."

I laughed, "So then you *stole* some blood from your patient for your little science project?"

The doctor looked miffed, "Stop being facetious Holmes. Do you not see what this indicates?"

"Only what I can observe Watson. Our samples emanate a green light, Mr. Thompson's a blue one. What it means, however, is beyond my understanding. Though I feel that you are about to enlighten me."

He nodded.

"While I can say nothing for certain without quite a bit more research the fact that both of our blood samples produce a green glow while that of a *normal* human being typically produces one of blue I can surmise that whatever is at play in our biology that make us different from others is something that we both share."

"And may I surmise that you have tested this formulation on samples from numerous *normal* persons, all with the same effect?"

"Correct Holmes. All illuminate with a blue tone without fail, save for those from people that I know to be some form of...monster, if you will."

"Then..."

He finished my sentence. "Then there is no denying it my friend, you are indeed some variant of monster."

"Fantastic." I mused, reaching for my pipe. "A monster who hunts monsters."

"It's not without precedent." Watson reminded me. "And seeing as how you've not yet chosen to murder me can I now assume that you'll be taking a more discretionary stance in the future?"

“Indeed.” I said through the first puff of tobacco. “Still,” I said as I turned to the window, “I’m not like them.”

“Not like me you mean?” the doctor asked.

I spun to face him with a stern brow. “You know precisely what I am referring to my dear Watson. You and I may be gifted with special...attributes, but a monster that does not make.”

Watson stood, looked at me rather worriedly. “I’ve not known you long enough to determine, but you can understand if I say that I truly do hope that your change of heart is not based in selfishness, or worse yet shame.”

“No no.” I assured him. “While I do admit to a certain amount of apprehension at the thought of sharing some common biology with many of the terrible things that I have now spent some years of my life slaying I know full well, as do you, that not *all* beasts are agents of evil.”

I walked over and put a hand to the doctor’s shoulder, “Know this Watson, it was *you* who permanently swayed my outlook. Remember that I am a keen judge of character and I do not see in your eyes what I saw in so many others.”

“So how do you proceed Holmes?”

“I believe you to be asking whether or not I continue ridding the world of things that go bump in the night. The answer is yes. Neither your good nature nor the reality of my own being in any way changes the fact that there are good people in this world who deserve to live out their lives unafraid of gruesome deaths by things unimaginable.”

Again I walked over to the window. I looked out through it at the comings and goings of the people below.

“You know it does bring one very interesting question to mind though Watson.” I said softly, nearly to myself.

“And what would that be Holmes?”

“Evil is far from the exclusive domain of paranormal creatures. Darkness resides in the souls of ordinary men. Is it my place to reap vengeance upon them as well?”

It took the doctor some time to respond, as if he was turning the thought over in his head before returning an answer.

“To choose to take a life is a very serious matter. Is it possible that you’ve, until recently, silenced your own conscience by telling yourself that they were ‘simply monsters’?”

“Perhaps.” I mused. “Still, if an ordinary man be a monster, not of flesh and blood but of the mind, should his life not also be judged upon the same criteria?”

“Holmes if you are seeking some form of validation for your choices you shall not receive them from me.”

“Nor do I desire them Doctor.” I said, spinning to face him. I waved a hand at the abundance of instruments upon the table where he’d been working, “You seem to have been busy this afternoon. Have you learned anything else?”

To that he smiled. “Actually I *have*. Alas it’s not something that will brighten your day I’m afraid.”

I neglected to speak, instead only raised an eyebrow in question.

“You likely thought your blood sample to be free of all traces of morphine.”

My eyes widened.

“I’ll state simply that it was not.”

I looked slightly off to the left, averting my gaze from his.

“Oh don’t worry Holmes, I’m not going to give you the classic physician’s speech on the hazards of opiate addiction.” he took a step forward, spoke in a firmer tone of voice, “I’m going to lecture you on why I think your abilities are not as developed as they should be!”

I was taken aback. Surely a look of consternation was plastered all across my face.

“You are a Versieht...”

“Am I?” I asked.

“Yes, and stop being an arse! It is my firm medical opinion that years of opiate abuse has stunted the development of your natural abilities.”

“Hah,” I scoffed, “natural...”

Watson greeted my cynicism only with a scowl and what I could have sworn, though it was barely audible, to have been a very low growl.

“Put your coat back on Mr. Holmes.” he barked at me as he reached for his own.

I did not argue. I watched as he retrieved a small metal case from the table, placed it into his pocket, then motioned for me to follow him.

## CORRESPONDENCE

*Dear W,*

*The mathematics of our plan remain unchanged. Targets will be identified as discussed and assets will be seized. Be in position at the arranged hour. The tools shall be in place before you arrive. It will all be over in a flash. Do not cease until you are certain that the carriage has been struck. The rest will be attended to. Defend yourself if necessary but do not act in haste. Burn this letter after reading its contents.*

*Sincerely,  
John Morrison*

## TRUST ME, IT'S FOR SCIENCE

The night was cool and I found myself standing upon the roof of 221B Baker St. with my new companion Doctor John Watson. Mr. Hudson had shouted something about us catching our deaths by doing something so foolish as we'd passed him in the hall but regardless there we stood. From his coat pocket Watson produced the small metal case that I'd seen him stash there only moments before. With a smirk he reached out and placed it into the palm of my gloved right hand.

"What is it?" I asked. It was not mine nor had I ever seen it before.

"More importantly is what is *in* it." the doctor replied.

Not wishing to waste any more time than necessary standing upon the cold roof of my apartment, so warm and comfortable below me, I flipped the latch and opened the little box. White powder...surely it was not...

"Cocaine, Holmes." Watson chimed. The wind picked up and ruffled the whiskers of his moustache, the very ones which nearly concealed his grin.

"Are you serious man?" I begged.

"Extremely, and you're going to help me test a hypothesis."

"What precisely..."

"Holmes I already know very well that you partake on occasion." he wagged his finger at me, "I found residue in the drawer of your table."

I sighed. "You'll have to forgive me Doctor, I did not expect anyone to be rummaging through my things."

"You're forgiven." he smiled, "Now please, just humor me."

"How so Doctor?"

"At this very moment do you see me as a man or as a Mor?"

"Why a man of course."

"Ah, yes, but we are standing under moonlight. You should be seeing me as a Mor."

I looked up at the moon, it was not full but still managed to light the rooftops quite well.

"My good man only moments ago you yourself laid out to me that my habitual opiate use has prevented my abilities from manifesting."

"Yes," he said, pointing at me, "but I believe the problem to be mental, not physical. I can see *you* for what you are just fine under the moonlight."

I smiled and nodded.

"I see, and you believe that a drug with stimulant properties might be the key to unlocking my hidden talent?"

He could be correct. I'd been under a minor influence the evening before.

"Precisely!"

"Well then, I cannot say that I am opposed to indulging in a bit of cocaine...under the supervision and even encouragement of a physician no less, but I'll be needing several items from my desk."

"Why so?" he looked puzzled.

"Dear doctor I consume the extract of the coca plant exclusively in a 7 percent solution injected intravenously."

“Oh come on Holmes.” he waved his hands at me in frustration, “It’s freezing out, can’t you just sniff a little of it and be done.”

I eyed him derisively.

“Watson if we were to do this in the parlor we could both conduct your experiment *and* not risk the future ability to use our extremities.”

“No, I want as much of the moon’s light as possible. We need to exercise the parts of your mind that have lain dormant for years and we should do so starting with the best chance for success.”

Rather unhappily I decided to give in to his request. I held some doubts that what he suggested would even work and I wished to return to the comfort of my room. Very unceremoniously I lifted the container to my left nostril and drew a bit of the fine powder into my nasal cavity. Rather uncertain that I’d managed the proper dosage we decided to give the drug a few moments to take effect before going any further; five minutes according to the doctor’s watch to be precise. At the conclusion of that duration I reported to him that I was certainly feeling its effects, though not as strongly as with my normal, and carefully prepared, amount.

“Do I look any different Holmes?”

“No, though you would not regardless since the moon is currently behind a rather large cloud.”

Watson detected the jocularly in my voice and commented on it.

“It would seem that cocaine brightens your spirits Holmes.”

“Indeed it does Doctor Watson. As a matter of fact I believe that to be the primary reason that it is so frequently indulged in by those who can afford its charms.” and with that I lifted the container to my nose and took another small sniff. I expected the act to draw a look of contempt from my new friend but instead he appeared to trust my judgment. “Of course I do not typically imbibe to heighten my spirits but rather to sharpen my focus so that I do not fall into a malaise when there is no case to be had.”

Wind currents, far above where we were standing, slowly freed the moon from its prison and I watched intently as its light once again began to stretch out across the rooftops. As it fell over the form of Doctor Watson, standing with his hands in his pockets and exhaling copious amounts of steam as he breathed, I scrutinized him for any changes. There were none.

“It’s not working Watson.” I declared, ready to head inside and have Mr. Hudson prepare us some hot chocolate.

“Dammit Holmes your eyes are lit up like lanterns. The physical aspect of whatever makes your ability work is certainly doing its job...”

The intensity with which he was speaking sharpened my attention, a small change at first, but it was there. The eyes! I dropped the container from my hand, which luckily slammed itself shut as it hit the roof, losing only a small amount of the powder inside in a brief puff that was carried away by the cold night air.

“What is it Holmes?” he queried.

“Shhh!” I exclaimed as I held up a hand to silence him. “I am trying to concentrate.”

Slowly, before my very eyes, fur, then teeth, then claws were revealed. Then as suddenly as it had appeared it began to fade away again. Had I lost focus? No, a small wisp of a cloud had passed through the rays of the moon and once it moved on I could again see Watson as the Mor that he was.

“May I assume,” I asked, “that you are not doing this on purpose?”

“You can see me?” he smiled through sharp teeth.

“Oh yes I can Watson. Come!”

“Wait where are you...?” he posed the question as I bent to retrieve the container of cocaine then hurried to the stairs.

“Are you gentlemen alright?” a concerned Mr. Hudson asked as we passed him a short moment later in the hallway.

“Indubitably Mr. Hudson, indubitably.” I pronounced happily as I grabbed my hat and walking stick.

Watson’s only response to the bewildered old man was a brief shrug before taking off after me. He caught up with me halfway down the stairs.

“Holmes where on Earth are you going? Perhaps my little experiment was not such a good idea after all. You should return to your room and I can give you a sedative.”

“Nonsense!” I punctuated my statement with a lifting of my walking stick into the air, then turned so unanticipatedly to face the doctor that he nearly walked right into me. “I am simply conducting a little experiment of my own.”

He tried to protest but I paid his words no heed. I was through the front door and out onto the street in a dash.

“This way.” I shouted back at my companion before turning left at the road and walking briskly and with much determination toward my destination. There were few people out in the street and my eyes scanned them cursorily but found none of them to be very interesting. My jaunt ended precipitously standing in front of 103 Baker St.

“A hotel?” Watson asked.

I turned and gave a wicked smile.

“Yes Watson. I’ve suspected the commissionaire of this building of being a Vinterrotte for some time.”

“I’ve not heard of that one.” the doctor admitted to me.

“It is a little known Norwegian myth. A creature that exists as both man and rat. They are said to be covered in a pelt as white as snow and normally quite timid, unless given no other recourse. Some legends say that they are irresistibly handsome when in human form...but if Mr. Molloy is any indication that part of the myth has little basis in reality.”

I charged forward and as I approached the door it swung open. Before me, in his impeccably clean uniform, stood the balding, white haired, and round-bellied commissionaire. The smile that had been intended to greet me quickly metamorphosed into an expression of terror and with that the man fled back into the building.

“Well?” Watson raised his hands questioningly.

“Vinterrotte, most assuredly.”

“Well he obviously recognized you as a Versieht.”

I chuckled. “Of that there can be no doubt whatsoever. I shan’t think that Mr. Molloy will be keen to greet me with his usual tip of the hat when I walk down this part of Baker street again.”

“I didn’t see him change though Holmes. When you and I met in the garden I was stuck in my animal form and could not change back.”

“An effect of the adrenaline coursing through my veins at the time Doctor, enhancing my abilities? Or perhaps it was you who was so frightened that you could not transform.”

“I suppose that either is a possibility. That shall mean more tests...but we will leave that for another night. This December air is terribly cold, we should return indoors.”

“Agreed Watson.” I said, my mouth feeling somewhat numb from the effect of the cocaine.



After that little adventure, as both physician and friend, John Watson ordered me back to my apartment where I was commanded to ingest some hot chocolate and a warm cup of soup before retiring for the night. That was the first of our evenings practicing my abilities but it was far from the last. We made good use of the remaining evenings in which there would be moonlight. The cocaine was necessary, at first, but by the fifth night, despite the ever-waning light of the moon, I began to be able to function without its stimulant effects.

My days, in contrast, were spent going over Lestrade's information regarding the plot. He'd managed to make some meaningful connections but much of it I found to be flawed. Still it was something to start with and considering the intertwining nature of so many events untangling the web would not prove to be an easy task.

To assist me in my endeavors I'd quite purposefully convinced Lestrade to enlist Graham Roth as our go-between. The young man was bright and enthusiastic, and also I knew that he annoyed the inspector to no end and I found that quite amusing. My good humor, however, was not to last. As I connected piece after piece of the puzzle it became apparent that the threat which Lestrade had spoken of presented a much more imminent danger than he had reasoned.

## A FIGURE IN THE DARK

Reigning in the enthusiasm of an energetic and eager young man can be quite a task. That was precisely the reason that I'd asked Graham Roth to accompany me on the evening of the 5<sup>th</sup> of January to Scotland Yard. I sent him in through the main entrance carrying a stack of case files so large that he could barely manage them. The sight was, in fact, quite comical.

It was after 10 o'clock in the evening when I turned him loose. I can still only imagine the look on the desk Sargent's face when the lad came in with such a burden, asking to query dozens of police records. I'd later find out that the Sargent had acted precisely as I had expected and had told Mr. Roth in no uncertain terms that he'd have to return in the morning.

Lestrade and I had not revealed the finer details of the investigation to him but the young man was keen to prove himself and did as he was told without question. He was to insist on querying those records, to make a scene of himself, and if necessary to spend the evening in a jail cell so that I could stealthily make my way into the rear of the building and do some querying of my own.

During our cab ride to Whitehall Place I'd had to humor the young man, who had wished desperately to query me about some of my case files. Though he greatly tried the patience of Detective Lestrade I rather liked the fellow and saw in him a healthy amount of potential. He had my own zest for uncovering the truth, though his energy was wild and unfocused. He needed a mentor, but alas I had neither the time nor the desire to be one. I did, however, happily tolerate his myriad of questions as I am not one to dampen anyone's enthusiasm in regards to my own fantastic accomplishments.

I will state in no uncertain terms that Mr. Graham Roth did not disappoint me that evening. Barely had I dashed around the building and made my way over to a vantage point in the shadowy alcove of a nearby structure, where I could watch for my opportunity, when it presented itself. He'd worked quickly, almost too quickly in fact. For through the doors of Scotland Yard could be heard a great deal of shouting, most of it unintelligible, though I knew it to be constables attempting to calm a hysterical man with an armload of paperwork. Mr. Roth, it seemed, very much desired the letter of recommendation that I'd promised to write on his behalf to Mr. Stilton. He would later recount for me what had transpired.

Inside the building his confrontational attitude with the desk Sargent had not drawn enough attention, so the clever young man had resorted to a full on shouting match. When even that failed to provoke the proper response he'd then proceeded to toss his papers about the station's floor, questioning the virtue of the mother of every constable in sight. Then, to ensure that the law men were properly distracted, so as to allow me a stealthy entry, he'd proceeded to run about erratically, defiantly eluding every police officer who attempted to grab hold of him. The tactic had been a rather simple one, but I could not argue with how brilliantly it had worked.

The two men who'd been chatting near the door quickly ran back inside to see what all of the commotion was about, leaving me with my opportunity. I double checked the area and then, with not a soul around to see, I crept easily into the rear entrance and made my way up the first flight of stairs that I happened across. The upper floors were dark, abandoned for the night. I had little fear of being discovered lest I chance upon a detective working late at his desk. Still I moved

carefully, listening to the sounds in each room for several moments before entering it. I used no light that could give myself away, instead allowing my eyes to adjust to the darkness.

Despite the knowledge that my accomplice would make bail as soon as dawn broke, that his charges would be dismissed after a certain doctor declared him to have been acting out of temporary insanity, and that he would likely get the promotion to detective that he so desperately sought, I could not help but feel a slight bit of guilt at having him play such a part in the endeavor. Several hours of uninhibited access to the records at Scotland Yard, however, seemed well worth the price.

I learned more in those few late night hours than I did in the previous weeks of investigation. It appeared as though Lestrade's fears were anything but paranoia. Plots most foul were indeed being hatched in this place, the very bosom of the law.

I worked ever so cautiously, lighting only one lamp at a time and being certain that it was on its lowest setting. In the dim illumination I pored over case files that not only revealed to me the veracity of every claim that the detective had made but also much, much more. Two and one half years, that is when the case files, subtly altered by a very clever individual, began to appear in the records.

I let time get away from me and it was shortly after one o'clock in the morning when I was disturbed by a sound in the hallway. Quickly extinguishing my lamp I ducked into a position that allowed me to peer through the window of the record room door without easily being seen by anyone on the outside. The hall was only lit, ever so dimly, by moonlight that shone through a window at the far end of it. There was a rustling sound, that of cloth and with the faintly detectable jingle of metal. A man undressing?

The answer was provided, much to my horror, only a moment later. From the shadow, into the pale shaft of moonlight that fell across part of the tiled hallway floor, I saw move the leg of a man; one that, upon touching the light of the moon, metamorphosed into a cloven-hoofed version of itself that fell heavy onto the floor with the clatter of two hard surfaces meeting one another. Much to my relief as the rest of the man's naked body followed suit it too changed form before my very eyes. While I can appreciate the complexity of the human form I am not particularly fond of the nude male figure, the feminine physique being much more pleasurable to view. My comfort, however, was only fleeting, as the shape that replaced that of the man disturbed my mind far in excess of anything that squeamish sensibilities could ever accomplish.

The form was that of a tall beast, massively heavy in appearance, that stood upon two hoofed legs and that bore the coarsely furred torso of a man but the substantial head of a bovine...particularly that of a bull. I had, at that point, encountered monsters of many varieties but I can say with no uncertainty that until that moment not one of them had frightened me so deeply. It had not the fangs of a Loup-Garou, nor the claws of a Bugbear, yet still something about its presence chilled me to the very depths of my typically cool and calculating soul. The beast's breath was drawn in slowly but powerfully, then exhaled with such force that I could feel the resonance of its deep rasp through the door. Without warning its head turned and I ducked below the glass of the window. Had it sensed my company? No real moonlight was falling upon me, so surely the emerald radiance of my eyes could not be spilling into the corridor. Could it? I did not know.

I sat perfectly motionless, totally silent. With nothing more than a meager piece of wood between myself and the monster I began to regret the decision not to bring any weapons with me. I'd done so on the chance that I'd been apprehended, so that the charges against me would not include possible conspiracy to commit murder.

With a forceful snort the creature sniffed at the air several times. Then, a moment later, I heard the heavy falls of cloven hooves as it continued down the hallway. I dared steal a quick glance out of the window as I heard it do so and saw that even though it had stepped out of the light of the nearly full moon it remained in its bestial form. It had fully transformed, hence the removal of the clothing, but for what purpose? Why would a *homo-monstrum*, as the doctor preferred to call them, wish to possibly reveal itself by walking about in plain sight inside of a police station? Yes the upper levels were shut down for the night, but there still remained a decent chance of being spotted. In my mind that hinted at something.

“This creature is not afraid of revealing itself because it does not *care* if it is seen.” I thought.

Quickly I tucked my notebook and pen into the pocket of my coat and reached for the door handle. Unaware of how keen or not the beast’s hearing was, or how far away it was for that matter, I proceeded in utmost silence. There it was, lying on the tiled floor, a crumpled police uniform. In the darkness I could not make out details but I was certain that it held the answer to exactly who our mole inside Scotland Yard was. Carefully, and in a crouched position, I moved across the floor toward it. My hand reached out, I needed only to see the officer’s name, when, much to my surprise a hand laid itself upon my left shoulder. I froze.

“Sherlock Holmes I presume.” said the voice of a man roughly forty years in age, one who was a long time smoker. He had spoken softly. Did he know of the presence of the minotaur?

“You would presume correctly.” I replied in a gentle tone. “Whoever you are sir I must say that your skills in regards to stealthy movement are to be applauded.”

“Kind words. Now stand up slowly.” he instructed, and I heard his billy club slide free of the ring that held it to his belt.

I whirled and grasped his wrist. Our eyes locked and though it was dark I could see the stupefaction within his. A quick blow to the throat prevented him from calling out and as I grabbed his other wrist and spun him into the nearest open door I caught a glimpse of him in the moonlight, albeit a terribly brief one. Some form of feline, of that there was no doubt. It certainly explained his ability to move silently. It also explained the sudden materialization of claws that dug into my wrists, an attempt to free his own from my grasp. His tactic worked as I recoiled in pain but he had not counted on me retaining the equanimity to grasp the billy club from him as I did so. With it I feigned a strike with my left hand, a maneuver which brought his arms up into a defensive posture, and then delivered a swift heel kick to the sternum. This sent him backwards into a desk that was overflowing with stacks of papers, most of which promptly tumbled to the floor after the desk moved back several inches from the impact, an action which caused its legs to make a loud scraping sound across the floor. As the man, a constable who I was not familiar with, grasped at his chest I switched the baton to my right hand and promptly struck him upon the left temple. He fainted, collapsed back onto the desk, then fell forward into my arms.

It was then that I heard the smashing of weighty hooves upon the tile some distance away. Our altercation had drawn attention and without my weapons I had no desire to engage such a beast in a dark and mostly unfamiliar setting. I scooped up the constable, who luckily was a wiry chap of no more than eleven stone, and bolted for the nearest set of stairs. If only I had been able to examine the discarded uniform. Damn!

## ONE OF THOSE NIGHTS

“Mr. Hudson!” I shouted as I burst through the front door of 221B Baker St.

“Yes Mr. Holmes?” I heard his voice ask meekly from a nearby room. I heard the shuffling of his feet as he came to greet me. Saw the look of surprise in his eyes as he saw me carrying the unconscious officer whom I’d quickly wrapped in a filthy coat that I’d purchased from a tramp so that I could pass him off as a drunken companion that I was escorting home. “Good heavens Mr. Holmes, it’s going to be one of those nights isn’t it? I’ll go and put the tea on.”

Watson, now hurrying down the stairs, could not help but overhear the exchange. As Mr. Hudson shuffled away to the kitchen, content that Watson would assist me with the burden I was bearing, the doctor stared at me peculiarly.

“Is this a habit of yours Mr. Holmes, bringing in unconscious...?” he paused and questioned me with his eyes.

“Yes, unconscious. He’s not dead.” I shook my head.

“Bringing unconscious fellows into the house at all hours of the night?”

“Let us just say” I smiled, “that Mr. Hudson is accustomed to my ways. Now then, will you help me get this gentleman into the basement?”

“What the devil for?” then, noticing the constable’s uniform, “Good lord Holmes is he an officer of the law?”

“Yes, either that or he is *impersonating* one. Regardless he not only attacked me but also revealed himself to be a form of your *homo-monstrum* that I have never before encountered.”

Watson perked up, his curiosity took hold.

“I will gladly relay to you the events of this evening once our guest is secured. Suffice it to say that I wish to question him about some of the goings on at Scotland Yard.”

“Fine.” the doctor let out a sigh, “But once we get him tied up can I at least be allowed a few moments to change into something decent?” he gestured to his pajamas.

“Of course Watson. Now please, if you don’t mind, this chap is beginning to get rather heavy. The feet Watson, grab the feet.”

## SPILL YOUR GUTS

“Your tea Mr. Holmes.” Mr. Hudson said politely as he placed the tray onto the small serving table that he’d brought down into the basement and had situated several feet from the work bench that held a variety of tools. At that very moment it also held a few of my more intimidating looking weapons; primarily for *visual* coercion of course.

“Thank you Mr. Hudson. If you’ve also brought down the bucket of water that I asked for then that’ll be all for the evening.”

“It’s right here sir.” he said pointing to the wooden pail near the bottom of the stairs.

“Excellent. We shall endeavor to keep the noise to a minimum Mr. Hudson, but as you well know this sort of business can become quite raucous at times.”

The landlord waved a dismissive hand at me as he ascended the stairs. The previous winter I had installed sound dampening materials into the basement, dually for the consideration of Mr. Hudson but also to prevent any passersby from hearing sounds not meant for their ears. Still, it was not perfect and someone on the first floor of the building might be disturbed should things get overly out of hand. Make no mistake, I was not in the habit of torture. I found it, especially in protracted form, to be repugnant. I did, however, occasionally have little choice in the matter. If it came down to forcibly extracting information from a beast of the night in order to save the lives of many ordinary people then I would not think twice about it. In this case there seemed to be even more at stake; a plot of royal assassination, one that could very likely lead to a war in which many innocents would lose their lives. Though I’d not admit it to the doctor, lest he attempt to psychoanalyze me, I genuinely hoped on this night that I could reign in the intense power of my darker nature and not let my emotions move me to actions I would normally abstain from. It was a rare occurrence for me, still it frightened me no less when it *did* occur.

Watson, hands in his pockets, leaning against the work table, watched as I walked over and scooped up the pail of water by the handle and stepped across the concrete floor to where our bound and gagged constable was tied to a sturdy chair.

“Time to rouse yourself Constable!” I bellowed as I splashed the man down with the entire contents of the bucket.

He jumped with a start, shook his head and squinted his eyes in apparent pain, then looked up at me. Gingerly I leaned in and grabbed the rag that served as his gag.

“I am going to remove this sir, and when I do you will answer some questions for me. There shall be no screaming, lest it be repaid in pain.” I gestured toward the table and the sharp implements that lay upon it. “Likewise there shall be complete cooperation, or there shall be pain. Am I understood?”

Groggily he shook his head in the affirmative. I removed the gag, awaiting a cry for help, but the man was apparently not bold enough to call my bluff. He was silent, and much to my chagrin, remained that way.

“Who is the minotaur?”

“Who are you working for?”

“Who is going to attempt an assassination of the prince?”

“What sort of beast are you?”

All of these questions and many more I asked of him. All answered with determined silence. Only when I went for the table, a pretense to threaten him with bodily harm if he failed to speak, did he finally utter a few words.

“You may cut me to ribbons sir, but I cannot answer your questions.”

I picked up my blade, the silver one, and rushed to a crouching position beside him. With wild eyes I pulled his head back, exposing his neck, and with a deliberate motion raked it across the flesh, cutting him ever so slightly. No reaction to silver, interesting. It was far from a certainty that it should work but it was the closest thing to an Achilles’ heel that I’d ever discovered amongst were-creatures.

“Constable...” I read from his badge, “...Lewis, I know that you are aware of who I am, for you uttered my name when you came upon me back at Scotland Yard. I can then only presume that you are aware of my exploits as a consultant to the yard but have no knowledge of my career since that time, otherwise you would not have made the mistake of warning me of your presence before your assault.” I leaned in even closer, “Or did the motivation lie elsewhere? Did you think you could apprehend Sherlock Holmes and ingratiate yourself with the beast that is no doubt your master?”

The thought *had* occurred to me before, that I’d possibly made enemies amongst the community of monsters residing in England and that one day they may conspire to capture me for the purpose of exacting revenge for their fallen brothers and sisters.

“Oh I know who you are Mr. Holmes.” the man gasped, blade pressed into his neck. He did not turn his head of course, but did the best he could to force his eyes to meet mine. “I know you’re supposed to be some kind of vigilante but that the yard can never pin anything on you.”

I withdrew the blade and holstered it in my coat, confident that he would now at least speak with me, even if he would not answer the questions I truly wished to have answered.

“Then why my good man would you risk your life? Why not simply smash me over the head with your billy club the moment you came upon me and be done with it?”

“I knew you didn’t have your weapons with you.” he lowered his head, spat on the floor, then his expression turned to one of shame, “I thought I could apprehend you the proper way Mr. Holmes. Bring you up on charges for trespassing on police property. It’s evident by my current situation, however, that I was quite wrong.”

“Wrong indeed Constable Lewis.” I spoke the words in the heavy posh accent that I’d not used in some time, making sure to roll the R in wrong. “As you have learned I do not need weapons to be a formidable opponent.”

The man scoffed. “And now you’re going to kill me is that it Mr. Holmes?”

Something was very peculiar. He seemed resigned to his fate. What I had first mistaken for a resolve to defy me I now perceived as despair on his part. A notion struck me. I crouched down to his level once again, withdrew the knife. The man watched nervously and I even caught a glimpse of Watson flinching as I brought it around to the chap’s back. With a deft flick of the wrist I used the razor sharp blade to cut the rope that held his hands bound behind him and in turn to the chair. Its sections fell to the wet basement floor.

“Sir?” the constable asked of me.

I stood and turned my back to the man. I dropped the blade into a special scabbard that had been built into my coat, specifically for the silver knife, and it produced a metallic ring that echoed in the barren space as gravity slid it into place. Watson, standing to my left, could still see my face which was partially lit by the lantern resting on the work table which he was leaning

upon. I could see him as well and though it was with my peripheral vision I detected a queer expression.

“Holmes what are you doing?”

There was a nervous quality to the doctor’s voice. I knew precisely what he was thinking. Did I intend to release the man or had I simply freed his bonds so that I could take his life without feeling the guilt of cowardice?

“Mr. Lewis,” I spoke, my back still to him. “for the last hour I believed you to be avoiding my questions...some sense of allegiance to a dark master who could care not whether you lived or died...but I now believe that to have been an error on my part.”

I pivoted on the ball of my left foot to face him.

“Sir?” he asked anxiously, taking a moment to wipe the blood from his neck with a handkerchief.

“In the hallway at Scotland Yard, when we grappled...” I stepped closer, “I detected a very brief moment of surprise in your face as we passed through the moonlight. Tell me, you’ve never seen someone like me before have you?”

“Like you sir?”

“A Versieht!”

“I...I don’t know what you mean sir, I swear it!”

“Of course you don’t.” I stated as a matter of fact.

“Holmes?” Watson queried but I lifted a hand to stay him. I peered into the constable’s eyes, scouring them for hints at underlying emotion. What they revealed confirmed my suspicion. Spending the most recent years as a hunter of all things wicked my pure deductive powers had indeed begun to fade. Five years ago I would never have missed the signs. That is not to say that I was still not a force to be reckoned with, for my skills were still many orders of magnitude greater than the average fellow, but they had apparently become something less than what they had once been.

“You do not know of any plot to assassinate the crown prince do you?”

The waifish man shook his head.

“Nor of a mastermind manipulating proceedings at Scotland Yard?”

Again, he shook his head.

“You do not even know what you *are*...do you?”

I watched as he passed a hand through the chestnut brown hair that adorned his head, attempting to straighten it, then paused at the bump on his temple where I had struck him with the billy club.

“N...no sir. I don’t.”

I looked over to Watson who was watching in amazement.

“Wait,” he protested, “do you mean...?”

“Precisely Watson. This man *did* see something he could not explain as we passed through the moonlight. Vibrant light of a green tint emanating from my eyes. Tell me constable is that not what you witnessed?”

“Why, yes.” the man replied meekly.

“But you, of course, have no understanding of the significance do you?”

“Not at all sir.”

I turned to face Watson fully.

“That is because, my dear Doctor, the constable here may very well be a prime example of your *homo-monstrum* but he himself knows not what that means.”



“Homo...?”

I spun, waved a finger and shook my head to suppress the man.

“You were raised in an orphanage yes?”

“Why...yes Mr. Holmes. However could you know such a thing?”

“Because if you had been reared by your own parents you would not suffer from such an identity crisis. You *do*, after all, know that you are different from others, correct?”

“Y...yes.” he admitted sheepishly. I caught his eyes darting over to the doctor.

“Oh, how very rude of me Constable. This is my esteemed colleague Doctor John Watson.”

The man took a step toward Watson and reached out to shake his hand. The good doctor accepted it but gave me a look that said “Are you sure it’s wise to be announcing my name to this fellow?”

“Constable, I’d like you to take a seat.” I smiled, “This time of your own volition of course.”

“Oh...very well Mr. Holmes.” and he did as instructed.

In the relative darkness of the basement I made out the shape of a large soap crate under one of the shelves near the work table. I pulled it out, dusted it briefly with the palm of my hand, then placed it near the chair that Constable Lewis was sitting in and rested myself upon it.

“What you saw as we wrestled in the hallway of the yard was a part of who I am Mr. Lewis. My friend Doctor Watson, of whom I’ve only known for a short time but implicitly trust, tells me that I am a *Versieht*...a man capable of seeing through to the true nature of those we call were-creatures, or simply weres.”

“Were-creatures?”

My eyes remained fixed with that of the constable.

“Show him Watson.”

“Excuse me?”

“Go ahead Watson it’s all right.”

“It’s not a bloody parlor trick Holmes.”

Finally I broke my stare and looked over at the doctor, though I placed a reassuring hand lightly onto the constable’s knee.

Watson sighed and rolled his eyes, but in the end agreed to comply.

“Now, Constable do you remember, during the scuffle, that you sank claws into my wrists?”

He looked down at my wrists, the same ones that were now haphazardly bound in remnants of my handkerchief.

“I...it’s hard to remember.”

“Constable, this *has* happened before has it not? You *do* know that you are different, I sense that you do.”

“Yes.” he admitted, then hung his head so that I could not look him in the eye. In the meager lighting I thought that I could see the beginning of tears welling up. “When I was a lad...in the orphanage...I hurt some other boys who were picking on me.” he looked up, “Pretty bad too. No one ever believed them though because it looked like they’d been torn up by an animal. Then again, much later in life, when my no good harlot of a wife left me...I woke up near the docks covered in blood...I...to this day I don’t know what happened but a constable friend of mine named Charlie Suggins helped me through it.”

I listened intently, trying to radiate kindness. I then gave a slight gesture to the doctor.

“I want you to look at my friend. He is going to show you something but I do not want to you be afraid. Do you understand?”

He looked immensely confused but nodded in agreement.

“Swear it to me.”

“I swear it sir!” he blurted at a level that was nearly a shout.

I inhaled, as did the constable, and it felt as if all of the air in the room was drawn into our lungs as our attention shifted to the doctor, who’d already begun the process of metamorphosing into his badger-like state. I would have not thought it possible but the officer still managed a gasp. John Watson’s form truly was something to behold. Not a terrifying monster that could instantly chill the essence of even the most hot blooded man but instead a thing that seemed simply to be out of place, impossible.

The constable stared for a few moments, none of us speaking, until finally he turned to me with the questioning gaze of a child.

“How?” was all that he said.

“My poor fellow.” I said, placing my hand onto his shoulder. “You truly do not know do you?”

“No sir, I truly do not, I swear to you.”

I waved at Watson who promptly shifted back into human form.

“Well then, that presents us with a problem.” then to the doctor, “Doctor have you, in your large amount of experience, ever encountered such a soul as this?”

“I’m afraid not Holmes.” he said as he approached, hands back in his pockets, I presumed so as not to appear threatening. “Now that I think of it there *must* be cases such as his, where a child is separated from his parents before he can learn exactly what he is...but I’ve never seen one myself. May I ask sir, how old were you when your parents passed away?”

“Oh...I think about a year or so.”

“How dreadful. And no uncles, aunts, or grandparents that could have taken you in?”

“They told me at the orphanage sir that I was simply found wondering the forest near a farm in Kent. They said I was about a year old at the time, possibly a little more.”

I watched as the doctor freed one of his hands and stroked his moustache in thought.

“Remarkable.” I mused, “Then I will presume that if I were to ask you to change right now, at this very moment, that you’d have no idea how to do so?”

“Like you Doctor?” the man asked, bewildered. “You think I’m like you?”

“We *know* you are like him Constable.” I interjected. “As do you...” I smiled.

He looked at me, as puzzled as ever.

“Well...not exactly like him, but you are certainly *something* unnatural.”

“Holmes I do really wish that you’d stop phrasing it like that.” Watson objected.

“Oh come now Doctor, we both now know that I am every bit as much of a freak of nature as you and our new friend the constable here.”

Watson’s scowl did not improve but I let him keep it, he’d not get any further concessions from me. If I could label myself a freak then he’d simply have to deal with my attitude on the subject.

Turning his attention back to the officer, “My colleague,” Watson began, “told me that during your altercation the moonlight revealed you to be some form of feline. Are you certain that you do not possess the capability to show us? Speaking for myself I would be most intrigued to study you.”

The man simply shook his head, he had no words that could satisfy either myself or the doctor.

“Watson!” I ejaculated, “I have a brilliant idea. Just wait right here.”

And with that I flew up two flights of stairs. I returned not more than a minute later carrying in my hands a syringe. To say that both of the men were taken by surprise by what I'd retrieved would have been a gross understatement.

"Close your mouths gentlemen you look like puppies." I laughed.

"What...what's that for?" Lewis retreated a couple of steps from me.

"Oh, my good man, let me explain. When my friend Doctor Watson and I first met I too had no clue as to how to harness the abilities that I was born..."

"Now wait just a minute Holmes." Watson protested, "That's not what I think it is, is it?"

"Why of course." I smiled laughingly, "It's cocaine!"

"Cocaine?" the constable challenged.

"Ah, yes, an explanation is in order. You see the doctor found that my abilities had lain dormant but that a powerful stimulant could assist me in bringing them forward."

"That," Watson demanded, "was because you'd spent years dulling yourself with opiates Holmes! Now I'm not an expert on the development of...whatever form of were-creature it is that Mr. Lewis happens to be, but even without parental guidance he mostly certainly would have discovered how to transform all on his own by now! Are you absolutely sure that you saw what you claim to have seen in the moonlight?"

I raised my hands into the air.

"Do you believe these claw marks to have been a figment of my imagination? And what of the Constable's own admission that he has on occasion, earlier in life, been party to acts that could only have been committed by a non-human beast?"

I walked over and placed the syringe down onto the work table.

"But you don't need to take my word for it Watson. Go and retrieve your gear and we shall test his blood right here."

He rubbed at his moustache for a moment before responding. "You understand that I *do* trust your word don't you Holmes? I just cannot in good conscience inject a man with seven percent..."

"Twelve percent." I added.

Watson sighed, "With a *twelve* percent cocaine solution on a whim."

"Oh of course Doctor. As I said, retrieve your kit so that we can make certain."

As he did so I spent the next few minutes reassuring our new friend that we intended him no harm. Whether or not that was true depended greatly upon what our results were with the intravenous cocaine. I *had* to know what he was, for there were many creatures that I had encountered who were not purposefully malevolent, but that had been driven to kill or maim out of natural instinct. If I could identify what he was then I would be in a far better position in regards to knowing if I could trust him or not. I thought of simply pulling him onto the roof, but from the glimpse I'd seen at Scotland Yard I had no idea what kind of monster he was and it'd likely do no good to have a second look if Watson could not also see him in his true form. It was an off-chance but perhaps the doctor could identify the constable's lineage.

I'd had absolutely no doubt in regards to the outcome of the blood test, green, the same as Watson and I, and after a brief exchange in which the doctor and I squabbled over whether or not it was right to force the man into such an experiment he, much to my surprise, volunteered of his own free will.

"My whole life Mr. Holmes, I've wondered why I am different. If you can give me that peace then I'll gladly go along."

“You do understand that there is no guarantee in this whatsoever, correct?” Watson made sure to ask him.

Lewis nodded.

“Very well. Roll up your sleeve please Constable.”

He did as instructed and in very short order the experienced doctor had located a vein and began to pump the solution into the man’s system. Mr. Lewis’ breathing began to grow ragged, shallow. I was standing close enough to see his pupils dilate. The physiological responses that I observed in him gave me great insight into my own experiences with the drug. Then, as if to startle both Watson and I half to death, the man jerked violently and in a moment far faster than I would have thought possible he performed a full transformation.

“By Jove!” the doctor exclaimed.

“Indeed.” was all that I could mutter, my probing gaze fixed upon the form that stood before us.

“Do I...do I look any different?” the constable asked.

## GOOD NIGHT SWEET BAKENEKO

“And then you asked ‘Do I look any different?’” Watson laughed as he handed the exhausted Mr. Lewis a cup of tea. After a bit of study we had brought him upstairs and he now lay upon my sofa, resting. Still in his cat-like state the constable let loose a hearty chuckle at the doctor’s comment. We’d of course given him a mirror so that he could see himself for who he really was for the first time in his life. After the initial shock he’d settled down a bit, but he’d been full of questions and was rather communicative, likely a result of the stimulant effect of the cocaine.

I sat in a nearby chair, my feet resting upon an ottoman, and drew heavily from my pipe as I continued to study the strange creature.

“Feeling well are we Mr. Lewis?” I asked.

“Oh yes.” he said. He paused to sip his tea but found his new anatomy to be troubling in that regard. After a moment he gave up. “I know that most would see this as something of a burden but to be honest with you Mr. Holmes I view it as more of a relief! To finally know that I’m not crazy, I mean that’s such a weight off of my chest that I can hardly describe it. Though I suppose I do now have a lot of work to do to figure out where I fit into the world and all.”

Seemingly having read my mind Watson returned with a little something to counteract the cocaine which had made our guest so incredibly talkative.

“Morphine?” I inquired.

“Yes.”

“From my private stock?”

“I’m afraid I don’t have any in my kit right now Holmes. Besides, you’ve no business with the stuff any longer.”

I gave a half-hearted smile and nodded.

“This should calm you Constable.” Watson said as he searched for a vein. The man did not protest, and only seconds after the narcotic entered his bloodstream we began to see a change in his physical appearance.

“Incredible!” I asserted.

“Indeed.” Watson agreed. He turned to me and smirked, “I might have to lace some of your crossbow darts with that.”

“You jest Watson...but the thought has already entered my mind.”

“I don’t doubt it. Well if you have any more questions for the constable I suggest you pose them quickly. He’ll be drifting off shortly.”

“Only one.” I said plainly, “How did you know that I was in the building and that I was unarmed?”

As his human form began to return and his eyes grew heavy Mr. Lewis spoke through a smile that was quickly widening across his face. “That Roth chap, they’d thrown him in a cell. After a while in there, I reckon when he figured no other coppers were around to hear it, Chief Inspector Wilks went in there and roughed him up. He beat the tar out of the poor boy. He talked.”

“Surely he didn’t send only you to ferret me out. Who else went with you?”

“No one sir.”

My thoughts were back to the minotaur. "Someone else *must* have been ordered to search for me."

"That's not it sir." he said, waving his hand awkwardly and getting drowsier by the moment. "*Nobody* was told to go looking for you. I simply overheard the chief inspector and Mr. Roth and took it upon myself, that's all."

A startling realization. I said no more, allowed the man to drift off to sleep. After he had done so I jumped from my chair and nearly collided face first with Watson who'd come out of his room carrying a book.

"Watson, I know who the minotaur is!"

"That's fantastic Holmes." he said, downplaying my excitement and peering at me over the rim of a pair of reading glasses. "And *I* think I know who...or rather *what*, our friend lying on the sofa is."

"Do tell Doctor."

"Well, take a look at this." he held the book so that I could read it with him more easily. The volume itself appeared to be at least a century old, possibly a good deal more, and its binding was badly broken. Only Watson's deliberate efforts to hold it in such a fashion that it did not completely fall apart kept it from doing so. The page to which he pointed contained a bit of text and a curious illustration, that of a cat, wearing what appeared to be a napkin or handkerchief upon its head and standing on its hind legs. No, not standing, rather *dancing*.

"A Bakeneko? Surely that's not possible dear doctor."

"Oh?" he asked.

"Firstly the Bakeneko is a legend from the orient, the island of Japan to be more precise, and as you can tell our constable here is anything but an oriental fellow. In fact I'd dare say he descends primarily from Welsh or possibly Cornish stock. Besides, the legends of those creatures do not refer to a man who exists as a were-creature but of a domestic feline who, later in life, develops the ability to transform itself into human form, speak human words, and generally manipulate human beings for its own ends...a sort of bewitching if you will."

"Ah, that is the legend, yes..." he turned the page ever so carefully, "but on this page we have the firsthand account of none other than my very own great grandfather, who claims to have once met a Bakeneko, or something very similar to one at least, during his travels in Cambodia."

There was another illustration on the second page, this one apparently not copied from an ancient text as had been the first one but instead a sketch done in the naturalist style. Despite the typical 18th century dress the man appeared to hold a good deal more than a passing resemblance to Constable Lewis in his bestial form; the eyes, the whiskers, even the small tuft of fur at the chin that was reminiscent of a goatee.

"I will admit that the likeness is uncanny, but this in no way proves that a Bakeneko is truly what we are dealing with."

"But listen to this..." he pointed his index finger at a block of text on the page and read it aloud, tracing it with his finger as he did so. "The man related to me that he'd been found, at around one year of age, and taken in by a family of Mors that had relocated to his part of the world. That to me explained his relaxed demeanor in my presence and his willingness to allow me to sketch him. I found him to be a kind man, relatively meek and gentle. Still, he admitted to me that when his temper did have occasion to be roused he found it difficult to control, and regretted having hurt others before when they had treated him badly. Because of this, he claimed, he had relocated several times during his life so as not to arouse suspicion from neighbors or townspeople. As to his physical appearance he was covered from head to toe in a coat of thick,

yet fine, blue-grey fur that was as soft as mink to the touch. He possessed rather formidable claws, as black as obsidian, but which remained sheathed at all times save for when he allowed me to examine them. His whiskers were thick and as white as snow; eyes, a pale orange and with slitted pupils like any other member of the family of Felidae. In this state his knees bent in the opposite direction to that of a man's, much like that of a Werewolf but unlike that of my own kind, resulting in a peculiar gait that was oft times accompanied by a side to side motion of the tail that sprang forth from his backside when metamorphosed."

"Lastly," Watson continued, "in regards to my observances of the man, I should like to note that in cooler weather his coat of fine grey fur had the tendency to collect charges of static electricity, which would result in a mild shock upon touching him, and that, though he never admitted to the act himself, I seemed to observe him on several occasions appear to bewitch another person into telling him the truth when he believed them to be speaking a falsehood. I suppose that it is not beyond the realm of possibility that I merely imagined such acts, so I include the information as nothing more than a footnote."

I listened intently to the words, written in India Ink upon the antique paper, and watched as Watson turned to the next page, this one with only a short block of text.

"Remaining in Phnom Penh for five months I had occasion to meet with the gentleman's adopted father who had come to visit with him. He confirmed for me that the boy had been found wondering near a rice field on the outer edge of a village near Koulen, in the north. He related to me that at first the boy was wild, near totally feral. He attested that it had been sheer luck that he had been the one to come upon the child. The boy would partially metamorphose at the slightest provocation and had it not been a Mor or other were-beast that had found him it is very likely that the child would have been hunted down as a demon of the forest and killed. Furthermore, while not in the presence of his adopted son, the man sat down with me to explain his theory as to the boy's origins. It was his belief that the legend of the Bakeneko, a creature of Japanese folklore, was the explanation. A common domestic cat, having lived a long but abused life, would somehow, upon reaching its twelfth year of age, transfigure itself into human form and begin a new life. He believed that most of them lived out their second lives as outcasts, demons who haunted mountain passes and preyed on travelers; in some fashion taking their revenge upon humans for the wrongs done to them in previous lives, but that by taking in and caring for one it was capable of living a life little different than any other were-beast. Though I found the concept to be intriguing in the extreme there was, of course, no way for me to either prove nor disprove his hypothesis. In the end I was left with a mystery."

I squinted my eyes, pondered the meaning of it all.

"From where did you obtain this book Watson?" I said after a moment.

"It was handed down through my family. It began as the travel journal of my great great grandfather. He wrote little of note in it save for mildly interesting descriptions of far off places, but my great grandfather, as you've seen, made it a point to investigate the mysterious creatures that he encountered on his travels. There are quite a few other accounts in here, all very intriguing."

"Fascinating. It seems as though scientific inquiry into the phenomenon of *homo-monstrum* did not begin in your family with you my dear Watson."

"Oh not at all." he shook his head, "Though my grandfather and father did not have the means nor opportunities to travel quite as much they too added to the book what they could during their time."

"An excellent addition to the resources I have thus-far collected then?"

“I should say so.”

“Then what do you make of this notion of the Bakeneko Watson?”

“I must say,” he removed his glasses and set the book onto the table with all of the care one would expect a man to treat a family heirloom, “the very idea of a were-creature that began its life as something else entirely...it’s shocking. If true then this man,” he pointed to the sleeping constable, “would be a near mirror-image of the rest of us, not a man with an inner beast, but a beast with an outer man I suppose you could say.”

“I am certain that I already know the answer to my question, but am I correct in assuming that you have never once met, or even *heard of*, a family of Bakeneko?”

He shook his head in the negative. “No Holmes. I’ve met all manner of beings during my time but never once have I even heard of such a creature save for in the written account of my great grandfather.”

“That goes at least some way toward validating the theory.”

“Surely, but it does *not* confirm it.” he reminded me, “If they are creatures of the far-east then it’s possible that families of them are simply a rare sight for the eyes of westerners such as ourselves.”

“True, but I fear that we shall find little more evidence upon which to base our own conclusion and at this time we must work with the most sound theory that is available to us.”

“Even though it flies in the face of everything that I know as both a were-creature myself *and* all biological knowledge that I have pertaining to *homo-monstrum*?”

“Oh come now Watson,” I began as I allowed myself to drop into one of the chairs across from the sofa, “you know as well as I do that despite the fact that were-creatures seem to fit nicely into a mostly scientific mold as far as defining their characteristics and origins that there exists in this world a plethora of other beings that have no explanation that a reasonable mind can wrap itself around.”

Looking partially defeated he responded, “On that point I suppose I cannot argue.” then he smiled, “Though you don’t have to be an arse, reminding me that what I *don’t* know about *homo-monstrum* greatly outweighs what I *do* know about the subject.”

I laughed, “Not my intention at all dear Watson. Merely a reminder that we must at all times keep an open mind.”

He changed the subject slightly, “Now that I do think of it I noticed a small discharge of static electricity when I went for his arm to administer the morphine. That fits in line with the description.”

“We should also not discount the possibility that Constable Lewis here is *not* a Bakeneko but instead some little-known relative of the form.”

“Would that not be more likely, seeing as how he is not of oriental descent?” Watson posed the question.

“When dealing with such an unknown, a creature that may not be the result of inherited biology as we understand it, we could likely rack our brains all night and not settle upon a satisfactory answer.”

“I suppose that we may have more time to study the chap. That is, assuming you’ve decided his fate.”

I went to open my mouth but he cut me off before I could speak.

“Keep in mind Holmes, that in my opinion this man is relatively harmless and that if you are intent upon harming him I will have no part in it.” I looked up to see that he was staring at me with a furious gaze. I turned away, then began my thought.



“Let us assume that he is what your great grandfather’s acquaintance claimed, the product of a life of abuse, a vengeful soul if you will, granted another life with which it might strike out at those who harmed it...”

“Holmes that is...”

“Please allow me to finish Doctor!” I said firmly, not meaning to offend but simply to be allowed to speak my mind. “Let us assume that origin. From two accounts, the one recorded in your journal and that of Mr. Lewis himself, these creatures *do* have occasion to lose control and become violent.”

Again Watson began to interject but I raised a finger in protest.

“However,” I said loudly, having no fear that I would wake our sleeping guest, “in both cases their outbursts seem to have been triggered *only* when they themselves were in some way or another wronged. This puts the constable here into a very grey area in my mind. He is potentially dangerous, yet I do not think him to be purposefully ill-intentioned. Therefore, if he should be willing to forgive my kidnapping of him from Scotland Yard this evening I believe the best course of action to be to allow him to leave when he wakes in the morning. I shall then endeavor to do my best, especially once this matter of the assassination plot is resolved, to study the constable in detail and uncover both the mystery of his origination as well as his true potential for violence.”

“And it wouldn’t hurt to have a friend inside of Scotland Yard would it Holmes? Most specifically one who can bewitch others into telling the truth, that is of course if the legend is to be believed.”

His words were uttered with smug satisfaction. Watson believed himself to be quite adept at anticipating my thoughts and sadly there was some truth to it. Beginning to feel exhaustion from the many hours I had been awake creep over me I suddenly found myself without the desire for a verbal joust. I conceded the point to him.

“Touché Watson.”

## TO HAVE MY CAKE

It was some time approaching half past ten o'clock the next day when I spied my colleague stepping from a cab onto the curb near where I sat sipping a delightfully hot and aromatic cup of coffee. I noticed as he looked around for me, I raised my hand to signal him, and saw as he caught sight of my rather distinctive face that sat under the wide brimmed hat that I had taken to wearing frequently.

"I have already taken the liberty of ordering you a tea Doctor." I grinned. "Darjeeling, one sugar. Am I correct?"

"Though you've never once witnessed me order it Holmes it does not surprise me that you'd know precisely what my favorite cup of tea is."

"Your curiosity, however, is piqued by just how I'd know *when* to place the order. Am I right?"

"You knew that I was going to check in on Mr. Roth, who by the by is doing fine save for a mildly bruised rib and some swelling around the eyes. It would have been simple enough for you to reason that my visit would take approximately fifteen minutes. You then knew that I would return straightaway to Baker street to report my findings and that I would immediately discover the rather cryptic letter that you left for me."

I nodded.

"What I do *not* comprehend is how you deduced precisely how much time it would take me to decipher its contents and then locate you. Really Holmes, instead of a wild goose chase you could simply have told me where to meet you. A test of my powers of reasoning?"

"Indeed." I said smugly. "How did you enjoy the bit about St. Paul's Cathedral?"

"I did not." he said as he folded his overcoat and sat. "That still doesn't explain how you knew when I'd arrive."

Just then a server came out onto the terrace where we were seated and placed a steaming hot cup of tea in front of the doctor.

"Elementary my dear Watson." I said, then leaned forward and smiled. "I simply instructed the staff to brew a new cup every five minutes and to deliver it immediately upon my companion taking his seat at the table with me."

Watson chuckled. "And what is the point of all of this?"

"You are right Doctor, I *was* testing your skills..." I then admitted, "and also having a bit of fun with you."

"You're in a pleasant mood." he remarked, "Is it because today is your birthday or may I assume that you concluded the business with Constable Lewis satisfactorily?"

"Oh yes. I'd nearly forgotten about my birthday."

"Poppycock." he responded. "Not only did you leave lying about this morning a telegram from your brother Mycroft wishing you a happy birthday but I also spied the note that you left for Mr. Hudson, instructing him to pick up a cake for you at the bakery this afternoon."

"You know Doctor if you're going to scrutinize my life so closely perhaps you should take to writing it down for posterity."

"Me?" he chuckled, "With literary aspirations? That's laughable Holmes, truly laughable. I can barely write a medical paper let alone narrate your...adventures."

I sipped my coffee then returned to the original question.

“My birthday aside I had a most productive day. As to Constable Lewis he remains most curious about his own nature, and seeing as how you and I are the only ones in London whom he may count upon to help him with such a matter he was most inclined to keep our relationship amicable. In fact as we speak he is looking into a few things for me back at Scotland Yard.”

“What of his disappearance last night? Surely it will be difficult for him to explain his sudden abandonment of his duties.”

“He will explain that he spotted a suspicious figure trying to make a covert exit from the station and that he gave chase. That there was a brief altercation, in which his own billy club was taken from him and he received a rather severe blow to the cranium, and that he spent the rest of the night lying in an alleyway only a couple of blocks from the station.”

“Well, the mark on his temple will certainly corroborate that story.”

“Yes it will Doctor, and what’s more I believe that he will be debriefed by the party most interested in my business inside the building last night; none other than the minotaur himself. By the way, didn’t have you breakfast with that wife of yours this morning?” I changed the subject momentarily. “How did it go?”

The doctor grimaced. “You claimed last night to know who he was, didn’t you?” his attempt to ignore the subject and return to our original conversation told me not to press the matter.

“Yes,” I said plainly, pausing to sip at my coffee. “and if you shall recall you dismissed the concern entirely in order to show me your book.”

“A matter of some importance at the moment, would you not say? Besides, don’t be a prat. There’s no doubt that the beast is menacing in appearance, but that hardly proves that he is behind the overarching plot that you are investigating.”

“If he is confirmed to be whom I believe him to be then yes, I will have strong evidence that it is indeed he who has been manipulating events at Scotland Yard.”

“Then tell me, whom do you suspect?”

“It’s all in this notebook here Doctor.” I smiled. “I’ll tell you when I’m more certain.”

“Give me that.” he demanded, then reached for the leather-bound volume, sealed with a bit of string, that sat in front of me.

Like two adolescent school boys we wrestled over the object for a few moments until he finally managed to pry it from my grip.

“Fine.” I scoffed, then returned my attention to my coffee.

He untied the knot in the scrap of string and flipped through the book’s pages for a few minutes as he enjoyed his tea. Occasionally I would see an eyebrow raise or his eyes squint.

“This is just bits and pieces, random words scrawled unintelligibly.” he declared at last and tossed the notebook back onto the table unceremoniously.

“To *you* Watson. But *I* have a system.” I pointed to my head and smiled sarcastically.

“I have no doubt.” he said with a mock grin. “To be quite honest I’ve watched you scurry all over town for the last couple of weeks poking your nose into seemingly random places, ruffle Detective Lestrade’s feathers with twice-daily reports from Graham Roth, and break into the headquarters of the metropolitan police, abducting a constable no less, and yet I’m no closer to understanding what on Earth it is that you are piecing together.”

“Through no fault of your own Doctor, you are a busy man with your practice and all.” the comment was meant to be a friendly jab, “But to be honest it is rather complex and though I’ve made some progress it’s still rather unclear even to myself. I do, however, promise you Watson

that the moment I have managed to at least put together a working theory I shall fill both you and Lestrade in fully.”

“Well that’s a relief, and have you any idea as to *when* that might be?”

I looked past him, to a figure approaching in the distance. One who was attempting to cross a busy intersection without being trodden under the feet of countless horses.

“That would be the constable’s messenger now.” I motioned with my head for him to turn and look. “If my suppositions are correct then I believe that in only a few moments I shall possess the necessary pieces with which to construct a clearer picture of this puzzle.”

## AND EAT IT TOO

The information delivered in the nervously scribbled hand of Constable Lewis stirred something inside of me, something I had not felt in some time. Yes, I'd spent some years using minute details to assemble profiles of individuals, to uncover their deeds, discover their whereabouts...but *true* mysteries had been only a memory from the past. What lay before me was precisely that; an intricately woven plot, one so devious and inspired that I held no doubt that it had been woven by a spider that was a criminal genius of the very highest caliber.

Upon returning to my apartment at Baker street I locked myself into my study and, taking chalk to board with a raucous clatter, began to follow the strands of information in an attempt to reveal their interconnections.

"Wilks!" I exclaimed back at the cafe before running off, leaving the doctor to his practice for the day.

He no doubt knew of whom I was referring to and had therefore concluded that it was he who was at the center of this conspiracy. That, my many hours of thought revealed, was only *partially* true. Yes, Chief Inspector Wilks was almost certainly the minotaur that I had seen at Scotland Yard and was also very likely the man who'd been personally manipulating police records, and even the very outcome of cases, but the strands hinted at something more.

Wilks *was* central to the plot, the beast waiting in lie to devour those ensnared in the web, of that I was certain, yet I came to believe that he'd not been the one who'd spun it in the first place. It had the finesse of a man with an intellect far superior to his, a very learned individual with an interest in politics to be exact, and though the evidence illuminated me as to *what* was to take place the man behind it all remained obfuscated from me, at least for the time being. So many strands...I connected dozens yet an uncomfortable amount of loose ends remained. It then occurred to me that perhaps there were two interwoven agendas at play. Some of the smaller cases, perhaps, had been the work of the Chief Inspector directly; working to disguise the actions of *homo-monstrum* in the city of London, possibly dating back to a time even before his promotion. The larger events, however, seemed to bear the signature of the unknown mastermind. Perhaps Wilks was merely his instrument, or perhaps even the instrument of more than one master. The possibilities and my inability to see the picture as a whole flustered me to the point of near madness.

It was nearly a half past six o'clock when I heard the recognizable cadence of John Watson's steps as he ascended the staircase. When he opened the door his expression instantly changed from one of frustrated exhaustion to one of genuine curiosity. For at the table sat Inspector Lestrade, the battered but ever-conversational Graham Roth, and myself. One chair was left empty, for the doctor himself.

"Do come and join us Watson." I said.

"Certainly," he replied. "What is that delicious aroma I detected emanating from Mr. Hudson's kitchen?"

"That would be roast duck and potatoes."

"Sounds delightful." he said, then made his way over to the table after hanging his hat and coat. He made sure to greet each of the gentlemen before taking his place.

"How are you feeling Mr. Roth?" he asked of the young man.

“That’s uh...that’s *Detective* Roth sir.” he beamed.

“Why congratulations Detective.”

“It’s all thanks to a personal recommendation from Mr. Sherlock Holmes here sir. To be honest sir it makes any discomfort suffered at the hands of Scotland Yard a right bit more tolerable.”

Watson smiled, but his gaze was still begging the question.

“As to your query sir, thanks to a good deal of rest today and, in no small measure the medication you prescribed for my pain, I’m feeling nearly right as rain.”

“That’s excellent.” Watson said, taking a moment to lay his napkin into his lap. “Just keep in mind that despite that shiny new badge of yours I want you resting up for at least a week.”

“And rest he shall Doctor, *after* tomorrow night.” I chimed.

“Tomorrow night?”

“Being reasonably clever you’ve no doubt deduced as to why the detectives have joined us for dinner this evening.”

“You’ve discovered something.” it was a statement, not a question. “It’s certainly not a birthday celebration, since you forgot all about that, remember?” he smiled mockingly.

The other men at the table then of course had to wish me a happy birthday before I was allowed to proceed. I promised them cake after dinner and with that returned to addressing the doctor.

“I have made a discovery Watson and let me be frank when I say that I have done so in the very nick of time.”

“Do go on Mr. Holmes.” young Detective Roth said excitedly.

“Very well. As we await Mr. Hudson’s roast duck, which shall be mildly overcooked but still quite palatable, I shall endeavor to explain. After that we will enjoy our meal and dessert, a fortification of brandy, and then a good night’s rest. As we shall need it.”

The men proceeded to converse amongst themselves whilst I filled my pipe with tobacco, then took a moment to savor it before beginning.

“Lestrade, I shall begin with you.”

“Me?” he held his hands up, pointing to his own chest

“Yes Detective. For were it not for you this mystery would have simply passed me by as a ship in the night. Your notes have been *most* invaluable. You are to be commended...” I grinned, “I didn’t think you had it in you Lestrade.”

Watson did not laugh but a chuckle briefly escaped Graham Roth, who instantly straightened up in the presence of his superior who frowned at him disapprovingly.”

“Detective Roth,” I addressed the fresh young investigator, “your many hours spent digging tediously through veritable mountains of records as well as the performance that allowed me nearly unfettered access to Scotland Yard was of immeasurable assistance. My sincere gratitude goes out to you.”

The young man visibly squirmed in his seat at the thought of being instrumental in a case involving Sherlock Holmes. I made a mental note at that moment to abstain from further praise of the young man lest he leap from his chair and begin to celebrate unbecomingly.

“Lastly I’d like to thank Doctor Watson who has been...”

“Get on with it please Holmes. That duck smells as though it’s just about done and I’d really rather not have this discussion over dinner if you don’t mind.”

I paused.

“Point taken Doctor.” little did he know that the duck would be out of the oven no sooner than ten minutes past the time that it should have been. “You shall all forgive me if I tend to ramble. I have spent some years in relative seclusion and have in some ways forgotten my manners.”

This provoked a sincere chuckle from Inspector Lestrade who added to the conversation. “I’ll have you know that there were little to begin with Doctor.”

And to this Watson covered his mouth with his hand to mask his own laughter. Only Mr. Roth failed to find it amusing; a bit of hero worship I feared. I puffed my tobacco, waited for the gentlemen to compose themselves.

“The reason that I have gathered you here tonight is that I now know that we have very little time in which to act. The conclusion of the plot that Detective Lestrade began to uncover some time back shall take place tomorrow evening.”

Lestrade, taking a sip of his water, nearly choked.

“Tomorrow evening?!” he gasped.

“Yes,” I said dryly, “and as most of you know I am not a man who cares to act without every detail clear to me. In fact I find the very notion detestable. Alas this plot is very convoluted and at this point I am certain about only a few of its key elements. One of them being an attack, tomorrow evening, upon the carriage of the crown prince as he travels through the streets of London on his way to a clandestine meeting with the Duke of Troppau...”

“Of Liechtenstein?” Lestrade begged.

“Precisely Detective.” I replied flatly.

“Surely his visit is due, at least in part, to the assassination of his cousin here in England...yet that was nearly two years ago.” Lestrade frowned.

“Indeed I do find it to be difficult to fathom that it is a coincidence and that his visit is not related. Still, I have no hard evidence linking the two events.”

“And what of it being a *secret* meeting?” Roth asked this time.

“That is the part that I find the most peculiar, yet nothing in my arsenal of information reveals to me precisely why it should be so. Regardless, I have managed...through no small feat mind you...to piece together what I believe to be the rough path that the prince’s carriage shall take through the city streets. I believe that it will be guarded only minimally, so as not to draw attention, and that I have identified eleven key places in which an assault is most likely to take place.”

“Eleven?!” Lestrade shouted, “How in the hell are we supposed to keep an eye on all of them? I thought you’d figure out who was behind this and we’d be able to stop them before the attempt went forward, this is not like you Mr. Holmes.”

“Admittedly.” I said, “And given proper time I would very likely untangle this tightly woven web of deception but as we have already established it is a miracle that I have even uncovered as much as I have before the plot was put into action!” my voice rang with frustration, not only at Lestrade but also at myself. For he was, of course, right about me.

“So then what *is* your plan Holmes?” Watson asked, attempting to return the conversation to a productive state.

“I have a very good idea of whom the assassin might be Mr. Lestrade.” I quipped, “However I do not believe him to be the true mastermind behind this plot and if I were to simply dispatch him before the fact then I might never have the chance to discover the true threat, one that could pose a continuing danger to Queen and country.”

“Then, as Doctor Watson has posed, what is your plan dear Holmes?”

“Tomorrow evening Mr. Lestrade, dressed in common clothes so as not to arouse suspicion, Mr. Roth will watch for the prince’s carriage to leave the palace and he will follow it...”

“I should be the one to do that.” Lestrade belted.

“Have you not a limp Lestrade?”

That silenced him.

“And a rider on horseback following closely would draw too much attention. No, you will be in position at one of the areas where the danger of stealthy attack is most prominent.” I turned my head, “As shall *you* Doctor. While Detective Roth attempts to follow the carriage, staying with it and keeping out a keen eye for danger, I shall move some bit ahead of it, taking care to examine each area in great detail only moments before it arrives.”

“Holmes, not to squabble over details but you told me earlier today that this meeting would take place only once you had a clear understanding of the entire plot. From what I can see that is not the case.”

“Regrettably so Doctor.” I admitted. “Yet what I am certain of is that we must act, and quickly. In the other room,” I pointed, “is a chalkboard filled with clues that tie one incident to another. The assassination of a cousin to the crown of Liechtenstein, the search of landmarks, the kidnapping of the son of the arms manufacturer...dozens more cases that were in one fashion or another manipulated by a man inside Scotland Yard. They *do* tie in to one another and I *do* know who stands at the middle of it...yet I cannot yet determine who is pulling his strings or for what reason.”

“Then who is it that stands at the middle of it all. who is your potential assassin?” Lestrade begged.

“That would be none other than Chief Inspector Wilks of Scotland Yard of course.”

Gasps were heard from both detectives.

“Come now Lestrade, did you not notice that the most peculiar of the occurrences started shortly after he began his stint as chief inspector?”

“I had made the mental connection Mr. Holmes, but had no evidence linking him to any of it whatsoever.”

I could tell that Watson did not wish to undermine me in front of guests, but still he could not bite his tongue.

“Lest your information from Constable Lewis provided further clarification I believe you to be operating on an assumption Holmes. Simply because Wilks is a form of *homo-monstrum* and that he had wished to capture you whilst you trespassed on police property does not make him the mole inside of Scotland Yard.”

“And if I told you that the constable’s information confirmed it beyond a shadow of a doubt?”

“That would change everything, wouldn’t it Holmes?”

“Not only did Constable Lewis confirm my suspicions that Wilks was indeed the minotaur that I saw...”

“Minotaur?!” both Lestrade and Roth blurted.

I steadied them with a hand gesture. “In due time gentlemen, in due time I assure you. Wilks was apparently *very* keen to interrogate the constable, and did so in a remarkably thorough fashion, about the man he saw sneaking out of the building last night. In fact he claimed that the debriefing nearly came to violence. Likewise our own Detective Roth here can attest that no one save for Inspector Wilks even *knew* that I was in the building...with the exception of Constable Lewis who eavesdropped on the conversation.”



Roth nodded.

“That means that only two men were looking for me and we already know that the constable is *not* a minotaur. Furthermore, Lewis found in the chief inspector’s desk unmodified versions of no less than five of the files I had suspected to have been tampered with. It would seem that Wilks is something of a poor housekeeper.”

My eyes scanned every man seated at the table, “Make no mistake. Once we have done all that we can to ensure the safety of the prince I shall turn my attention to the details of this case and fully intend to uncover the mastermind behind it all.”

“What of the constabulary?” Lestrade asked, reclining back into his chair with his hands bound together by intertwined fingers at his belly. “Surely we should find some way to alert them to the danger, albeit with subtlety so as not to alarm the masses.”

“That, my dear Inspector Lestrade, is a component of the mystery itself. For you see the metropolitan police are already keenly aware of a threat, though the source of their information has conveniently been labeled as ‘anonymous’. They will be pulling men from all around the city to secretly monitor the prince’s route.”

“But for obvious reasons we should not leave the matter solely to them.” Roth chimed in.

I nodded. We spoke on the matter for approximately ten more minutes before I heard the laden steps of Mr. Hudson making their way up the stairs. As predicted the bird was mildly overdone yet retained an excellent flavor. The roasted potatoes, however, were cooked to perfection and were in such demand that they quickly disappeared from the dinner table.

After our meal we conversed again for some time regarding the urgent matter and over some glasses of brandy I even brought the men into my study and showed them the convoluted web that I had begun to delicately untangle. There was much speculation, and some notions that I’d not considered were put forth, but in the end there was little that could be looked into on such short notice. The facts were clear, we owed it to Queen and country to do what was in our power to prevent the death of her son. All other discussions would have to be tabled for a later time. We spoke of our positioning for the following evening and decided to meet early in the afternoon on the next day in order to make final preparations.

After exhausting my supply of brandy the elder inspector took his leave of us, and though I sensed that he wished to remain and pose a great deal more questions to me in regards to my older cases files the young Mr. Roth chose the path of proper manners and promptly dismissed himself as well.

“There is more to your plan isn’t there Holmes?” Watson asked as we began to turn down the drapes and snuff the lamps.

“Somewhat.” I admitted, but followed with, “Though it’s not as multi-faceted as you may have come to expect from the reputation of Sherlock Holmes.”

“If it *is* Chief Inspector Wilks, if he turns out to be the assassin...will you kill him?”

“Without doubt.” I said, blowing out the candles that had been left to burn upon the dinner table, their tallow running down their sides into large pools that collected at the bases.

“And have you any notion of *how* to put to death a minotaur?”

“Interesting that you should ask Watson. Do have a seat.” I motioned to a chair across from the one that I intended to sit in myself. I pulled my pipe from my coat, the tail of which I flipped up to allow me to sit comfortably, then after checking that there remained some tobacco to be consumed, lit it and drew in the fragrant smoke.

“I’ve had less time than I would have liked to do so but I did manage to research the beasts. I now believe that what I am dealing with is not a minotaur at all.”

“What then?”

“A minotaur is something wholly different, should they even exist at all. They are nothing like a were-beast as they are incapable of disguising themselves as a man. No, what I believe, but cannot verify, is that Chief Inspector Wilks is instead an Auroch.”

“Auroch.” the doctor rolled the word over in his mind. “It sounds distinctly familiar but I cannot place it.”

“Scientifically speaking they were a species of ox-like creatures that existed until the recent past, having gone completely extinct sometime around 1627, with the last recorded specimens having been seen in the Jaktorow Forest in Poland.”

“But then we’re simply talking about animals aren’t we?”

I flashed a quick smile, “Have you ever heard of Circe?”

“The figure from Greek mythology who is said to have drugged sailors who visited her island and turned them into wolves, lions and all other manner of beasts?”

“That one precisely.” I said as I let out a ring of smoke.

“I don’t understand, surely she was merely as legend.”

“Like werewolves, trolls, witches...”

“Point taken Holmes. Still, how could you have possibly made the mental leap from a minotaur-like creature in London to a Greek figure who lived on a faraway island in the Mediterranean?”

“Two...no nearly three years ago I spent some time on the continent tracking what I believed to be werewolves that had been preying upon the denizens of a village in Poland just north of the German border. Imagine my surprise when I located and killed what turned out to be a man that had somehow been bewitched into the form of what I could only deduce to be a Lynx.”

“Bewitched?” the doctor asked curiously.

“That was the opinion of the locals. They called it ‘Circe’s Bane’, or at least that was the closest translation I was capable of achieving. Of course at the time I did not have at my disposal the knowledge that I do currently about your *homo-monstrum* nor did I have the talents of a physician with a vested interest in the subject. I suppose it possible that the man was nothing more than an average were-beast and that the surrounding mythology was nothing more than that.”

Watson rubbed his moustache. “I’ve never heard of a were-Lynx, but that does not mean that they do not exist of course. As to Circe if she were to still be alive she’d be many thousands of years old by now.”

“That she would. Of course we have no way of knowing whether or not if such a person has a definite lifespan like the rest of us. I also entertained the notion that the ‘Circe’s Bane’ merely carried her name. Perhaps either a talent passed on to another at some point in history or simply a similar technique given a name that had some historical bearing.”

“So either the work of a Greek woman from antiquity or that of a powerful witch? Even if it were true where does your theory of the Auroch enter into it?”

“After my success in Poland there were a great deal of locals eager to tell me tales of fantastic beasts that had been seen in or near other villages. Before returning to London I spent several weeks investigating the reports. Time and time again there were accounts of a bull or ox-like creature that was simply referred to as ‘Auroch’. I was given many descriptions of the beast and still retain in my collection many of the drawings that I was provided with. I was never able to locate a living specimen, but still I found the subject quite interesting. Upon further examining my memories of last night’s events at the station house I am now confident that my recollections

match closely the descriptions I was given of the Auroch; a more likely suspect than a minotaur, a creature incapable of taking human form and therefore incapable of walking the streets of London without attracting a great deal of attention.”

“In your time in Poland were you told of any way to kill the beast? If it is not a were-creature then it is very likely that your cure-all of silver will have no effect.”

“That thought has most certainly crossed my mind, and luckily yes, I was told of a supposed way to deal with the beast, which is said to be immensely strong and invulnerable to nearly any form of attack.”

“That being?”

“A horn or bone fragment of the animal which the cursed creature is based upon, blessed by a holy man, plunged into its heart.”

“And where are you to find the horn of a long extinct animal Holmes?”

I reached into my pocket and pulled from it an object that provoked a sigh from my colleague.

“Where did you get that?”

“Oh this? A fragment of preserved Auroch horn? Why from the natural history museum of course.” I smiled devilishly, “I told you that I’ve had a busy day Watson.

“You stole it.” he declared.

“For Queen and country Watson.” I said as I waved the fragment of horn back and forth in front of him.

“And has it been blessed by a holy man?”

“Not yet, however after I fashion it into a weapon that shall be your first chore of the morning.”

Watson simply shook his head.

“Well then, since I shall apparently have a long day tomorrow I think I’ll turn in and leave you to it.”

He rose from the chair and gave me a pat on the shoulder before turning for his room. Partway there he paused, “You *do* realize Holmes, that if your Inspector Wilks is a cursed creature and not a were-beast, that we’ve learned something new about your own abilities.”

“That I can see through the disguise of *any* creature who takes human form whether their mask be the result of nature or the doing of witchcraft. Why yes, it *had* occurred to me.”

“Most curious.” I heard the doctor mutter to himself as he waved me off and made for his room to change into his night clothes.

I sat up for somewhere around two hours after he retired, polishing my weapons and modifying them appropriately for the day to come. I took special care with the small dagger that I fashioned from the sliver of Auroch horn. A specialty weapon no doubt, but one that I was quite proud of.

## DO NOT QUESTION ME

“I am telling you that the plan is no longer necessary. I have gathered enough evidence to be reasonably certain.”

“*Reasonably* is many orders of magnitude below the threshold of certainty that I require.”

“Please sir. There is no reason to go forward from this point. I can easily arrange to have the locations searched. I can even find ways to make sure that it is legal, so that no undue attention is drawn.”

“I understand what you are, better than any man alive, and I would not have taken you for a coward. You have no reason to be.”

“I...” the first man’s voice raised in anger, then he remembered his place. “I am no coward. I simply no longer see the point in continuing with such a grand farce if it is not absolutely necessary.”

“It is *my* purview to deem what is and what is not necessary.” the angry second voice spat. “There are things far bigger than your puny imagination and meager intellect could ever conceive at play here. You shall leave it at that. Am I understood?”

The first voice fell silent for a moment. He stared at the figure in the shadows, the one who’d never allowed himself to be seen fully. There should be no logical reason to feel so, for it would be a small matter to crush the man’s windpipe and leave him to die, yet Wilks could not help it; when he listened to the voice that had guided his actions for so many years he felt something he was unaccustomed to...fear.

“Yes sir. I understand.”

## DAY BEGINS

“I am off to see Father Sutton at St. Paul’s as you have instructed. I have one patient that I must attend to after doing so but expect to return no later than eleven o’clock. Please do take the time this morning to formulate an alternative Holmes, for should Chief Inspector Wilks prove to be something other than what you believe him to be the blade I bring with me to be blessed shall prove itself to be little more than an irritant to the beast.” I read the words of Watson’s letter aloud as I reclined on the sofa in my robe, sipping my first coffee of the day.

“Watson you shall worry yourself into an early grave I fear.” I mumbled to myself. “Is there really any doubt that I’ve formulated a fallback plan?”

“What’s that sir?” Mr. Hudson paused his task of dusting to ask.

“Nothing Mr. Hudson. Only speaking to myself.”

His only response was a quick shrug before returning to his work. I picked up the morning paper that he’d brought up only moments before and glanced through its pages. As had been expected not a single mention of the prince’s clandestine meeting was to be had within it. There was, however, a very small article on the third page mentioning that the Duke of Troppau had arrived by steamer last night. The reason given for his visit was pleasure, and that he would be provided a government escort to show him the sights. I would have mused at the peculiarity of the inclusion of such seemingly irrelevant information in the newspaper were I not familiar with just how desperate its editors were for content.

During the time of my former vocation I would have agonized over the article, spent many minutes analyzing and reanalyzing its meager five sentences for some hint of deeper meaning, but I’d not gotten to sleep until very late and even then had passed a very fitful night. While I did feel some regret at the dulling of my sheer capacity for deduction over the previous years in that very moment I also delighted in the knowledge that what I had lost had been replaced with a sort of self-assuredness that’d not come to me easily before. I held no doubt that to others I’d always appeared quite confident, but they of course had no way of witnessing the inner turmoil that I dragged myself through in order to reach each conclusion. Now I was sharper, more keen to trust my instinct, and prepared to take action even when I was less than one hundred percent certain. I worried, yes, but it was more of a fear that I should give in to my baser urges than it ever was a doubt of my abilities in combat. In my new life certainty was never assured. Boldness was key and I had every intention of being exceptionally bold today.

The constabulary was aware that the prince would be moving. They were planning on having a discrete but powerful presence in London this evening. What I had not time to ascertain was whether or not that was due to, or in spite of, Chief Inspector Wilks. In my younger days I would have never given a second thought to my judge of character, no matter how brief the encounter had been...but as I’d come to learn not everyone is as they appear. All evidence led me to believe Wilks to be on the opposite side from myself on this historic occasion but there was the possibility, no matter how slim, that I had been wrong. Without a complete picture of the plot it remained remotely feasible that what I had observed to be the work of Inspector Wilks meddling in police affairs at the behest of a criminal genius was in fact reversed; that he was instead aware of some great conspiracy that I was not privy to; that he was instead working to undermine it just as I was.

I dismissed those thoughts. I was, after all, not the man to drive myself mad any longer with such unending circuits of logic, was I? I suppose that though I had said otherwise and had attempted to convince the others that action was necessary that there remained a small but very rigid part of my own psyche that detested the notion of operating off of less than certain facts. Give me a good fight, a moment in time where my doubts melted away. That was the true freedom that I'd found in my new line of work. I could not ignore this situation however, for the consequences were simply too dire.

Five years ago Lestrade and I discovered a very deep, very dark part of me that I'd, until then, not consciously acknowledged. It yearned for justice, not in some vague legal sense but in a palpable spilling of blood. One that allowed my incessantly calculating mind to give way to raw emotion while simultaneously comforting my conscience with the knowledge that what had been done was for the purpose of good.

I held little doubt that my own monster would soon be sated. One way or another I would walk in the company of death this evening. What I genuinely hoped, however, was that the day's events would not lead to more bloodshed than England, or the world for that matter, was prepared to handle. We found ourselves on the cusp of a new era of industrialized warfare and I had no intention of the assassination of the prince of Wales being the spark that ignited the ever-growing powder keg that I sensed the world around me to be turning into.

## NIGHT FALLS

With Watson and Lestrade alternating between several key points along the route, Mr. Roth keeping pace with the nondescript carriage that had been chosen for the prince, and me always remaining some bit ahead of them I felt at least a modicum of confidence that we should be able to identify any threats to the royal personage before they should become imminent. As I began my evening's work, not three blocks from where the carriage set off at Buckingham Palace, I instantly recognized the presence of plain-clothes members of the constabulary littering the streets nearly every place that I looked. The average person would never have noticed but they were as apparent to me as if they'd never taken off their uniforms. The sheer number, I suppose, was what held the biggest surprise for me. Traffic was heavy, as most were leaving their places of business and heading home for the evening. The choice of the city's busiest hour as a time to transport the prince did not escape me. Certainly it held significance. Perhaps it was chosen so that the carriage would make as slow a progression as possible, to aid in the assassin's work?

One thing was certain, it made staying ahead of him much easier. Then a thought struck me. If it had been a conscious decision to have the prince's caravan, for it was actually three carriages and not just one, move through town at the busiest hour in order to slow its movement, then someone in a position to dictate such things would have had to make that decision.

The Duke of Troppau! How had I not seen it before? What a fool I'd been! It was *he* who had arranged the meeting and therefore had insisted upon a time and place that would take the prince through an area where he would be an easy target. Why London, rather than asking a member of the royal family to officially visit Liechtenstein, if there was state business to discuss? That was a simple matter; for had the assassination taken place on his own soil the Duke might find himself blamed for the prince's death. An ally of the Hapsburgs or not that would have been a most undesirable position to find one's self in. No, instead have the act carried out not only on the royal family's own soil but in its very own capital city. It is then easy to dismiss it as the act of a disgruntled subject of the crown, likely Irish.

Still, what motive could there be for the Duke to wish the death of the prince of Wales? The man's cousin had been himself killed while visiting London but a good deal of time had passed since then. Not only that but the Duke must surely know that despite the attack occurring on English soil that he would still risk being considered a suspect, since it was he who had arranged such a bizarre meeting. My mastermind perhaps? It would make considerably more sense that the Duke had been coerced into asking for the meeting, a ploy to draw the prince into a vulnerable position. Yes, that was far more likely.

With the sun having set nearly an hour previously and its light slowly being replaced by the glow of gas lamps and the first vestiges of moonlight it was near Sloane Square that I caught sight of, from the periphery of my vision, something that interested me. Onto the facade of one of the office buildings on Chesham street, a building whose front lay at a nearly thirty degree angle to the square, there looked to be recent modifications. A plate made of a durable metal, likely steel, seemed to have been bolted directly below one of the windows of floor number four. It'd been quickly camouflaged with paint that *nearly* matched the brickwork but a keen eye could pick it out; though I doubted that anyone without at least a passing interest in architecture would have even noticed it.

I stood there, intrigued by it, for likely close to a solid minute when, fortuitously, a man in a heavy overcoat bumped into me, jarring me from my reverie. The man himself was of little interest, a solicitor on his way home by the looks of him, but the happenstance of his blow caused me to look up at just the right moment. A face passed through the light of a gas lamp. Chief Inspector Wilks. He was dressed in the clothes of a tramp but there was no doubt that it was him; the strong jaw, the cleft of chin, the heavy eyebrows.

A cursory glance revealed at least four more policemen in the square within my range of sight. He, however, was not carrying himself as did the others, nor did they seem aware of his presence. I walked along slowly with the crowd, keeping an eye fixed upon him, and when he broke away and headed up Chesham street I did likewise. The residents of the city, a seething mass of black and grey suits and hats, took no notice of my movements nor of his. Not even the constables on the street gave the slightest glance in our direction.

Beneath a raggedy bowler the man's silhouette shifted as he tossed a look over his shoulder, only once and very briefly, before he ducked into a structure fronted by red brick whose door was ajar. One, not by coincidence I presumed, directly across from the building I'd been eyeing only a short moment before, the one that appeared to have been tampered with. Squeezing past a veritable flock of businessmen I managed to follow the chief inspector, poking my head into the doorway just in time to see his feet walk out of sight at the top of the staircase that wound its way to the upper floors.

In stark contrast to the relative brightness of the gas lamps that my eyes had grown accustomed to out on the street the interior of the building was nearly as black as pitch. Though difficult to discern with so little illumination I was able to make out a bevy of tools and a state of general disarray that suggested that the structure was undergoing renovations. A fact, I noted, that would make my target more easy to track as the floor was covered in a very fine layer of white dust, the unintended result of plaster work. Instinctively my hand made its way to the Auroch-horn dagger that lay inside my coat and with a level of stealth I'd only learned to be possible since switching vocations to one in which the hunter could very easily become the hunted, I moved silently up the dark stairway.

Twelve seconds, that was the estimate in my mind, of how far behind my prey I was trailing. Had the building been populated I'd not have allowed him such a lead but in an abandoned place such as this there seemed no reason to close the distance and possibly give myself away. I could, of course, seize the opportunity to strike at him and prevent whatever it was that he was planning altogether. This would, however, negate my learning of his intended method of assassination and possibly ensure that I would never uncover who it was that he was working for. My spider's web would remain forever tangled and what remained of a detective in me would not allow that to stand. I required answers and would make the inspector speak before I ended his life unless circumstances did not allow.

My eyes, admittedly not as sharp as they had been in my younger years, were scarcely capable of detecting the faint outline of footprints in the powder as I rounded the top of the stairs. They went off in the direction of the nearest hallway and I followed them for some six or seven yards but they suddenly reversed course and doubled back. Was the inspector aware that I had followed him? Surely not, for I took him to be a more clever man that would have known better than to employ such a pathetic tactic against the legendary Sherlock Holmes. I will admit, however, that I did half expect him to burst forth from one of the doors that lined the hall in his full bestial form, ready to tear me limb from limb. It proved to be a false expectation. At the



stairs I could see that he'd simply gone up the next flight. Perhaps in the anxiety of the moment he'd simply forgotten which floor on which his weapon had been placed.

I assumed that there was a weapon already in position since I did not see him carrying a rifle, or anything capable of concealing one, when I had spied him upon the street. Ascending the first steps my mind paused and a thought occurred to me. Though a firearm capable of accurate long-range shots was the only weapon that made any sense in such a situation the building in which I found myself was angled in such a fashion that a shot from one of the front-facing windows would be impossible. Was Wilks actually just performing his duty as an officer of the law and investigating the area? I thought it unlikely.

At the top of the stairs I was greeted by a familiar sound. It was only faintly perceptible over the sounds of the street below, something I could make out only thanks to the echoing emptiness of our surroundings, but there was no mistaking it. The sound was that of a rifle being assembled. But how...?

"The steel plate!" I almost shouted aloud in excitement as my mind created the connection.

He intended to ricochet his bullet, or bullets, off of the metal plate that had been affixed to the building across the street. Surely there could be no accuracy with such a shot however, unless he was coordinating with a signalman on the adjoining rooftop or some other similar method. Even then, why such an apparent waste of energy when a simple and straightforward shot could achieve the same goal much more easily?

My feet fell as softly as I could make them while I advanced on the room from where I had heard the sounds.

"How very curious." my own voice reverberated in my head as I peered around the corner and saw the man standing next to a large wooden crate adjacent to a window that looked out onto the street. On its lid sat a multitude of small parts. Springs, cogs, lenses...all parts of the rifle that Chief Inspector Wilks was now ardently assembling. This, however, was *not* what caught me by surprise. The light of the full moon was falling fully through the open casement, allowing me to more clearly see the man's labors, and yet he appeared to me as precisely that...a man. On the street I had merely assumed that I'd seen him as such due to the indirect nature of the moon's light but this was no longer the circumstance, he was standing directly in its path and yet nothing of his true nature showed through.

What I saw in the station was apparently *not* due to my own abilities; the inspector had simply been in the midst of transforming himself as he'd stepped into the light of the moon and I'd mistaken it for something that it was not. It was a valid assumption, yet still I felt like a fool for having made it. There was little time to think of it, however, as Wilks appeared to be rather skilled at assembling the weapon; a custom one, designed specifically for this task, from what I could tell.

I listened intently, wishing that I could hear the approach of the prince's caravan, but knew all too well that it would be indistinguishable from the noise of so many other hooves clattering upon the pavement below. Carefully, without making a sound, I slipped into the room and concealed myself behind a crate very similar to the one nearest the window. Exposing only as much of myself as absolutely necessary I squinted at the facade directly across the street, looking for any sign that would betray the presence of a signalman, but could find none. Stooping closer to the floor, so that I might see further up the building, I did notice that one window and one window alone was lit, it was the one directly opposite us but on the fourth floor, the one with the metal plate directly beneath it. In it I spotted a figure, that of a man seated at a desk. As I stared

at his silhouette the sounds of assembly ceased. I heard a final decisive note, that of a cartridge sliding into place and a bolt being locked.

The man in the window, was *he* the actual target? Had we been misled this entire time? I knew not who he was so could not dare to venture what the possible motives for his assassination could be but regardless the time for action had come. I had waited too long! The assailant was lining up his target and regardless of whom it was I had to stop him. With only the slightest rustle of cloth the Auroch blade slid free of the confines of my long coat. A flash of light appeared in the window.

“Too late!” I thought as a shot rang out, louder than I had reasoned it would be from such a rifle. “You damned fool what you have done?” was all that I could think, “You should have killed him when you had the chance!”

Screams erupted from the street below accompanied by the sound of men of authority barking orders to one another. Again I heard the bolt slide back and the inspector chamber a round but in an instant I was upon him. The blade came down with all of the strength I had in me but I watched in what seemed to be one-tenth real time as it struck the barrel of the rifle, which had been brought up at the last second in a defensive maneuver, and shattered to pieces. My heart sank. Without the Auroch blade there was little chance that I would even be able to *injure* my target significantly let alone slay him. Instincts run deep however, and as I dodged the gun, which was thrown at my head, I pulled free the silver blade and plunged it into Wilks’ chest. My aim had been off in the dark and it clearly missed his heart but still managed to lodge itself well into the flesh of his left pectoral muscles.

He reared back and grasped at it in pain. He tightened the muscles of his face, bared his teeth, and appeared to roar though he apparently stifled it as I heard no sound come from him. A quick ripping motion tore the blade from his chest and sent it clattering to the floor.

“I knew it was you Holmes.” he said, panting heavily.

“Who else would it be my dear inspector?” I asked rhetorically and with a great deal of sarcasm.

“You have no idea what I am talking about...” he managed with a devilish smile, “Sherlock Holmes, the great amateur...I’m going to see to it that tonight is the last time you are ever a thorn in our sides.”

I allowed him a moment to speak, a moment that I used to reach for a throwing knife which flew forth and sliced into his throat just as his sentence concluded.

“I’ve no time for games Mr. Wilks.” I said, walking over to where he had fallen to his knees clutching at his profusely bleeding neck. I grabbed him forcefully by the hair and put my face close to his. My words spat forth with all of the fury I contained within, “You will find sir that it is *you* who will be meeting his maker this very night.” I jerked hard again as I placed a knee into his back, “But not before you tell me *everything* that I wish to know.” A familiar sense of losing control over myself began to stir from somewhere deep inside. It was both terrifying and delightful at the same time.

Much to my chagrin the inspector smiled. In anger I threw him to the floor and walked over to the window. A quick glance revealed that the one in which I’d spied the figure was now vacant, but not shattered. In the square, however, there were a plethora of men running about in all directions and shouting. Words were hard to pick out of the noise but a few made their way to my ears; carriage, prince, shot.

I reached into my coat, feeling for the serrated knife that I kept primarily for inflicting pain, as I strolled back to my fallen opponent. “I’m sure that you know what kind of horrible death

*they* would have given you for what you've done..." I was of course speaking of the Royal Guard, "but I am not so sure that you are prepared for just how...creative...*I* can be Mr. Wilks."

Slowly he pulled himself from the floor and when the officer got to his feet I saw that his wounds, though more slowly so than many other forms of beast, were already beginning to close. I was not surprised. I had not expected him to go quietly, nor would I have been satisfied if he had. Even without the Auroch blade I was not without my methods of subduing such a beast, or at least that is what I told myself as a comfort. The man's anger was apparent, and he drew in a deep breath, taking the time to exhale it through fiery nostrils like a bull. The serrated blade, much longer than most of the others, resonated with a metallic hum as I freed it from its sheath but no sooner had I done so than the inspector raised a foot and kicked me harder than I had ever been kicked in my life.

With a resounding crash my body reduced one of the wooden crates to mere shards as I fell back into it with great force. One piece, nearly as large around as my ring finger, found its way into my right thigh and after my breath and senses had returned to me I looked up to see it protruding, glistening with blood in the faint light which spilled into the room.

I looked up to see that the inspector had retrieved my blade. It looked far larger and more intimidating in the hand of another than it ever had in my own. His fingers ran over its wooden grip as he strode over to where I lay, his footsteps falling heavily on the newly tiled floor. There was something casual in his walk. His face, what I could see of it, was wrapped in a sardonic expression.

"Sherlock Holmes..." he smiled, "monster hunter."

He knelt down to meet me nearly at eye level then raised the knife and pointed it at my throat.

"You really should have found a profession that doesn't require you sticking your nose into business that isn't yours."

I said nothing. Instead I took the opportunity to continue catching my breath and righting my senses.

"The most prodigal amateur detective the world has ever known and now here he sits...his death imminent; no clue as to what he's stumbled into."

At that I nearly rebutted but without warning he drew the knife away from me and buried the tip of its blade into one of the boards belonging to the crate which only moments before my body had shattered to bits. He leaned in closely and spoke.

"You have no idea how much pleasure I am going to take in ripping you apart, and when I'm done I'm going to mail your severed parts to friends in all four corners of the globe. Your corpse, Mr. Holmes, will be a warning to any who would seek to take up your particular...hobby."

Wilks rose to his feet and backed away into the shadows.

"Interesting that you should be so concerned about someone like me Inspector." I belted out, "Since the man you find yourself working for at this very moment seeks to do much more harm to your fellow monsters than I could ever accomplish."

Silence.

"But I am going to guess that you did not know that. After all how could you? I'm extremely clever and even *I* could barely piece it together."

Again, not a word, though I did hear the rustling sounds of movement coming from the dark.

"He wishes not to kill your kind Wilks but instead to enslave you...*all* of you."

The bass of a deep exhalation reached my ears, a steam of breath reached out from the darkness into the shaft of light coming through the window.

“Of course he’s already got *you* under his control doesn’t he?”

A deep snort was the only retort to my quip. Just beyond the veil of blackness which my vision could not penetrate I knew all too well what the inspector had become and precisely what he had planned for me. I groped blindly for one of the shards of shattered Auroch blade but before I could do so beastly hands reached out from the shadows and grabbed my ankles.

The creature swung me like a ragdoll into a partially deconstructed wall and I crashed through its narrow timbers easily before striking the floor with such force that I was knocked unconscious.

## THE AUROCH

“Holmes!” I vaguely remember hearing a voice cry out to me. I was then met with a cold slap that brought me back to reality. “Holmes!”

I fended the hand away.

“Yes, yes I’m awake. Stop that.” I shouted. Squinting in the darkness I struggled to make out the features of the face. “Lestrade is that you?”

“Yes it’s me you daft lunatic. What on Earth happened to you man?”

I sat up with a start. “To blazes with *me* man what of the prince?”

“He’s fine,” Lestrade demanded, “and being rushed back to the palace under the guard of nearly every constable in the city.”

“Then the shot missed?”

He nodded, then seemed to remember that I might not be able to make out the gesture in the dark. “It struck the prince’s carriage but didn’t harm anyone inside.”

“Not surprising,” I said, rubbing my temple. “Seeing as how the shot was not a direct one.” I then pointed to the window. “It was ricocheted off of a steel plate mounted to the outside of the building across the street.”

“Why in the devil would anyone do that? Why not just fire directly from a line of sight.”

“Why else Lestrade? To obfuscate the true location of the shooter. The police are no doubt searching the building across the way at this very moment but they’ll not be looking here and why...because it would have been impossible for the shot to have come from here. A plan that would provide more than ample time for the assassin to escape.”

“Brilliant.” the detective muttered.

“Not so it would seem, as the prince and his entourage are unharmed.”

Then it struck me. I jumped to my feet and dusted myself off.

“Wilks could have killed me easily while I lay here unconscious. Likewise it would not have been that difficult to find someone willing, for the right price of course, to fire the shot properly from a better vantage point. I don’t think the motive was to kill the prince at all.”

“Holmes?”

“There was a figure in the window across from where the shooter fired his rifle. I’ll wager that at this very moment he is being placed under arrest for the attempted assassination of the Prince of Wales; a weapon of the same caliber as the assassin’s having been placed in his office some time earlier today.”

“You think this was all to frame someone, but who?”

“That is something that we shall endeavor to find out in the morning, as it will be up to us to clear that poor fellow’s name. For the time being, however, I have some answers to wring from the neck of Chief Inspector Wilks.”

I struck a match and by its light quickly retrieved my weapons as well as the largest fragment of the Auroch blade that I could still find intact. Why had the inspector left me alive despite his comments that he intended to kill me? It made little sense but I had not the time to ponder it for I signaled to Lestrade to keep up as best he could and ran for the door. I was down the stairs in a flash and back onto the street which was still filled with onlookers despite the fact that the

carriage had long-since moved on. I spotted a familiar face. With the moonlight upon him the cat-like visage of Constable Lewis was easily recognizable.

“Constable!” I shouted as I ran up to him, “have you seen Chief Inspector Wilks this evening?”

“Why yes sir, some hours ago back at the station.”

Frantically I replied, “No, I mean in the last few minutes.”

He shook his head in the negative.

“Thank you Constable.” I said and then pushed my way through the crowd.

Of the exact distance I am not sure but Scotland Yard was well over a mile from Sloane Square and my progress was slowed by the wound to my leg. I stopped in an alcove, only for a moment, to remove the offending fragment and wrap my scarf around the wound tightly before continuing on. Despite being in excellent physical form for someone of my age, and my habits, I did find myself nearly out of breath when I reached the station. It was, not to my surprise, virtually abandoned. Knowing full well the danger that lay before me I paused under the light of a gas lamp, sat on the wooden bench that was positioned there, and took two minutes to allow myself to recuperate.

“Constable.” I said loudly as I flung the doors of Scotland Yard open two minutes and fifteen seconds later and was greeted with the face of officer Hightower, the strapping chap that I’d met some weeks back; the same day that I’d met the Chief Inspector for the first time. He was apparently performing the duties of desk sergeant for the evening.

“Mr. Holmes?” he asked, bemused. “Are you alright sir?”

“I shall be as soon as you tell me...”

And just then a moonbeam, reflected through the open door by a passing carriage, swept over the young man’s face. While I must admit to some degree of shock at the sight of a Hirschmann there in the center of London I dare say that the boy was far more startled by my appearance than I was of his.

“Versieht!” he screamed, the jumped from his seat and immediately began to sprout antlers. I knew that in a moment he would attempt to trample me with powerful hooves, a typical Hirschmann defensive maneuver, but in a flash I drew my crossbow and fired a morphine-tipped dart into his left shoulder. His eyes went wide and only seconds later he collapsed back into his chair, fully returned to human form. I’d never known a Hirschmann to be dangerous, save for during rutting season, so I decided to leave the young man where he lay. The chief inspector was my target and I wasted no time in hurrying up the stairs to find him.

As I reached the top of the second flight and stepped out onto the third floor I began to notice a sound, a slight rhythmic tapping.

Tap...Tap...Tap...TAP. Tap...Tap...Tap...TAP.

I followed the emanation down the hall and paused at the door from beyond which it seemed to be coming. Gingerly I twisted the knob and pushed it open, peered into the room. The light being extremely dim I could not fully make out the figure yet I could see that someone, or something, was sitting at a desk at its far end. The room looked to be mostly empty, used perhaps only for storage of some unneeded materials, yet there had been a heavy lock on the door and a sign which had read “no admittance” affixed to it. Boxes. The random objects around the room were boxes I could discern as my eyes further adjusted to the darkness. Original and unaltered case files or material evidence no doubt.

“Please show yourself sir. So that we may dispense with the pleasantries and settle this matter once and for all.” I said loudly and clearly. My words echoed off of the bare walls.

I heard a huff of breath, then the strike of a match. The lamp near the desk came to life and I could see that the hand which worked it was anything but human. The light which it gave off allowed me something of a silhouette of the figure at the desk but not a full view.

There was a sound that caused me to rouse, reach for a blade, but as I looked down at my feet I saw that it was a box of matches that had been slid across the floor to me.

“You want me to see you? Is that it? To fully witness the horror that will be the death of me?” I reached down and scooped up the matches. “Very well.”

I wasted no time igniting one of the lamps affixed to the wall near me and as it filled the room with meager light I was finally able to make out the inspector’s form more clearly. He huffed, stood from his chair. At that very moment there was little doubt in me that I’d never seen a more intimidating creature in all of my years. There were not the powerful jaws of a Bugbear, nor the razor sharp claws of the Loup-Garou, but this beast exuded an air of pure strength that I can only describe as having raised the hairs on the back of my neck. This was not the bizarre manifestation of nature gone wrong, this was the work of a very special form of dark magic.

Large dark eyes examined me carefully. My own went over the body of the creature. Dense musculature rippled beneath what looked to be a truly thick hide covered in a short coat of shiny brown fur. The head was monstrous, easily five times the size of a man’s, and topped with horns that easily spanned further than my outstretched arms. He adjusted the angle at which he was standing, shifting his weight from one foot to the other, and I could feel the weight of his body through the floorboards.

A twitch. Strong vascular arms sprang into action as the Auroch grabbed the edge of the desk and with considerable might flung it, toppling end over end, across the room. I managed, but only just, to jump out of its path. With an impact that felt as though it shook the entire building the piece of heavy wooden furniture lodged itself into the wall behind me. Battle was joined.

The beast reared up, nearly as tall as the ceiling itself, and roared so loudly that it caused my ears to ring. I reached into my coat and withdrew a throwing knife which I launched into the right bicep of the creature. It grunted in pain and slapped the knife away but the attack had merely been a distraction. I ran forward, silver knife in hand, and ducked a wild swing that the Auroch made for my head. As I dropped to one knee and spun around I left a slice down the monster’s body from his belly to his right thigh then flipped the blade around in my hand and shoved it backwards and over my head, straight into the beast’s chest. It roared in pain but much to my surprise grabbed hold of both the handle of the blade and my hand which was still grasping it and tossed me forward what must have been ten feet, whereupon I landed face first onto the hard wood of the floor.

Behind me I heard cloven-hoofed steps smash into it, felt the reverberations with each stride. When I was certain that the monster was only a couple of feet behind me I spun over onto my back and pulled free the bola that I kept on my belt. The beast reached down as if to grab me, once again by the ankles, but a quick spin and I loosed the weapon around his neck. He immediately reached up to grasp at it and I feared that his sheer strength would easily break the line so I gave it a hurried tug. He reacted exactly as I had hoped. The bola tightened around his throat and he instinctively reared back, the sheer power of which pulled me across the floor whereupon I slid into a position nearly between his legs. With one good kick I put the heel of my boot into the most sensitive bit of his male anatomy. Steam erupted into the cold air of the room from the mouth and nose of the beast as he lifted his head and roared in agony. I went for a knife, intent on stabbing it into his belly, but he regained his composure faster than I had expected. His

fists, locked together, came down in a crushing blow that flattened me against the floor. Had I heard ribs crack? Very likely.

I braced myself for another blow but instead this time when the beast came for me he grabbed me by the coat and, with phenomenal strength, flung me across the room and through the large bank of windows that lined the outside wall. With one gloved hand I managed to grab hold of the sill, though some of its glass cut through the protective layer and into the palm of my hand. My other hand still held the end of the bola and without thinking I allowed myself relief from the cutting glass by releasing my grip on the window sill and letting all of my weight drop onto the line. I heard the beast inside howl and could make out the sound of his hooves grinding against the wooden floor as he was dragged to the window and his neck was pulled down onto the sharp glass waiting for him at the sill. With a mighty thud he came crashing down and I was greeted with a spray of blood as the creature tried to push away, gasping for air through its punctured windpipe. As I had feared, and as had been demonstrated by my earlier attacks, the Auroch did indeed seem to possess the ability to heal somewhat rapidly so I had to work quickly. I wrapped the cord around a piece of brickwork to keep him in place and climbed up it until I could grasp onto his horns. Furiously I shifted my weight about back and forth so as to thrash the tender flesh of his neck upon the fragments of glass that he was impaled onto.

“I had really hoped to interrogate you Mr. Wilks.” I said, in the sociopathic and heartless tone that I’d come to be at peace with. My intellect might be capable of controlling that part of myself, but it is not capable of eliminating it. Best to put it to good use.

A piece of authentic Auroch horn to the heart might be the preferred method of dispatching such a beast but since that was no longer possible, not with only a fragment of the blade and myself and the beast in such a position. I opted for another course. The large serrated blade zinged free of my coat and with a mighty chop I brought it down onto the back of the monster’s neck.

“If I could not stab him in the heart I’d saw his bloody head off!” I thought to myself.

I held on desperately with my left hand as my right worked. The beast released muffled howls and sprayed blood at me as I tried with all of my strength to remove his head from his body. The pain must have been tremendous however, for eventually Wilks summoned the strength to snap the line that held him down and pulled both of us crashing back into the room. A room that he’d apparently been using as a secret office of sorts and one that was now once again dark, the wind whipping in through the shattered windows having blown out the lamps.

I rolled off of the creature and up onto one knee. It laid there clutching both the front and back of its neck and gasping for air, its blood pouring out into a large pool around its body. I knew, however, that the condition was only temporary. The ripper, as I’d come to call the serrated knife, in one hand and the fragment of Auroch blade in the other I leapt onto the monster’s chest and sunk the ripper into a space between two of his ribs. I then lifted the hilt of the Auroch blade, endowed with what I hoped was *just* enough length to reach his heart, over my head. I brought it down swiftly but just as I did so he heaved to the side, sending both me and the blade sliding toward the door.

I recovered quickly and got to my feet, but the beast had done the same. One hand he used in an attempt to stem the flow of blood from his throat wounds and the other he used to pull the serrated blade free of his chest. He brandished it at me and stamped a hoof onto the floor. From its holster I pulled the crossbow and fired a morphine dart straight into the beast’s neck, above the cuts from the window and just below his jaw. He reeled backward and I fired off two more, both striking him within inches of his heart.



I watched as he shook his head, blood splattering across the room as his ears made an audible flapping sound. For a moment I expected to see him shrink down to his normal human form...but that was too much to hope for. Angrier than ever he ripped the darts from his powerful body and rushed me. Like the most adept of bullfighters I spun, leaving him to strike only the cloth of my long coat. I gripped the remnants of the Auroch blade tightly, waited with my back to him. I heard the stamping of feet, felt the floor give slightly as he turned and dashed forward. I spun on the ball of my foot and dropped to one knee, cleanly planting the blade into his chest. The ripper fell from his grasp with a loud clatter and I thought the beast done for. The Auroch blade, however, had indeed been too short.

With both hands he reached down and clutched me by the neck, lifting me clear off of the floor. Never one to give up I used the last weapon available to me. The tips of my boots held small silver spikes which I kicked repeatedly into the Auroch's chest but despite the fact that he was now dripping blood from more wounds than I could count his strength only seemed to grow in unison with his fury. I felt something in my throat give way. This was it. Sherlock Holmes was about to meet his end.

BANG!

The beast dropped me to the floor where I collapsed into a heap.

BANG!

I shook my head violently to try to get my eyes to focus.

BANG!

It was Lestrade!

“Try to kill the prince will ya! Try to kill my friend! Die you son of a bitch!”

BANG!

BANG!

BANG!

And that was it. Lestrade had emptied his revolver. As I had recently discovered, however, the old chap had learned much during the last few years. He'd informed me the previous night that he'd be lacing the bullets in his revolver with extract of nettle, an herb said to ward off curses.

The hulking beast fell to a knee and its tremendous weight caused a snapping sound in several of the boards beneath it. It clutched at its wounds and tried to howl even though its throat was mangled. What did manage to emerge sounded more like whines or moans than anything else. We watched as it convulsed and knocked over the few stacked boxes that were still standing. Lestrade worked feverishly to reload his gun. Just as he'd locked the cylinder back into place and leveled it at his target the Auroch summoned enough strength to rear up and lunge forward. The flash of Lestrade's discharge lit up the room as its report deafened us all once again but I could still hear just well enough to catch the detective's cry of agony as the monster's horn impaled itself into his chest.

“Lestrade!” I yelled to no effect.

The man's last shot had hit its mark, right into the beast's skull, so it quickly shook the detective free and stumbled forward to lean against the wall, so as not to collapse. Its breathing was ragged and it seemed as though it was done for but I knew that to be a very temporary state. Realizing at that very moment that I could not, in fact, be a true sociopath, as my anger welled up at the creature for what it had done to Lestrade, I reached for the discarded chair that had been behind Wilks' desk. I grasped it firmly and ran forward across the room, screaming as I did so.

The beast turned at the sound but I struck it across the head as hard as I could and the piece of furniture shattered into fragments. The Auroch fell back against the wall and with a fury that surprised even myself I drove the splintered chair's leg into the monster's left eye and pushed as hard as I could. It reached out for me desperately but soon its hands fell to its sides as it slumped to the floor.

"Lestrade?" I begged as I stooped to his body. I tore off one of my gloves and felt for a pulse. It was there, but only just. Airing on the side of caution I pulled him into the hallway, at least out of easy reach of the creature that was no doubt already beginning to recover.

"Lestrade can you hear me?"

The man gasped, his eyes opening wide.

"Don't try to speak my good man."

He slapped me on the arm and continued to do so until I knelt closer to him.

It was difficult for him to speak at all with the damage he'd suffered to his lungs but he managed just once short sentence. "Wilks' desk." and with that I felt him slip away from me into the eternal darkness that eventually catches up to us all. I closed his eyes and laid his head against the floor. I sat there in thought for a few moments when, only feet away and just through the door, I began to hear a faint scratching sound. The beast was not finished. *How* was I to finish him?

I sprang to my feet. The very idea was insane but those often proved to be the best ones. I did not hesitate. I drew the crossbow once again but this time loaded a cocaine dart into it. Seeing as how there'd been no effect from the multiple doses of morphine that I'd injected the beast with it was certainly a gamble as to whether or not *this* drug would perform as expected but I believed that it would. I was about to turn an injured and terribly angry Auroch into a raging stimulant-fueled locomotive on the hopes that it would cause a lapse in judgment and prevent him from transforming back into his human state.

I walked back into the room and took aim. The first dart penetrated with hardly a whimper, the second with a hearty grunt, but it was the third that truly roused the beast from his slumber. The effect of the cocaine beginning to take hold the monster flailed wildly, smashing holes through the walls, as it attempted to stand. I waited for it to do so, but was ready on my feet. Shaking its head once again and stumbling slightly it looked up and fixed its gaze on me.

"Come and get me Mr. Wilks." I smiled and spat the remark at him snidely before turning to bolt down the hallway.

He roared as best as he could manage and his hoof dug into the wood as he pushed off in pursuit. I could hear him smash his way through the door as I hit the stairwell and like an insolent child I mounted the banister and rode it all of the way to the bottom. I did not, however, stick the landing. My arse landed upon the hard station floor, with no small amount of discomfort, and skidded for some distance until I nearly toppled the good Constable Lewis.

"Constable!" I shouted as I jumped to my feet. He studied my general level of dishevelment.

"Mr. Holmes?" he looked truly puzzled, "Is that *your* blood?"

"Some of it...most of it...to be honest I'm not quite sure." I waved my hands frantically, "Some of the men are beginning to return to the station after the fiasco in Sloane Square am I correct?" I pleaded.

"Yes sir. What's going on?"

"The armory my good man, get to the armory and get a rifle or a revolver...or both if possible...grab every man that you can manage to find and meet me in the street in front of the station, post haste!"

“Sir?” he asked, then turned at the sound of a great racket emanating from the stairwell.

“The Auroch is *here, now*, and I *do* mean post haste Constable!”

With that he ran off. Constable Hightower, who was just coming to his senses, looked up and noticed me standing there. I raised a hand for him not to scream.

“Yes, I am a Versieht and you are a Hirschmann, but I guarantee you that I mean you no harm. That however...” I pointed toward the stairwell and the dreadful sound making its way down it, “will likely rip off all of our heads if you don’t follow Constable Lewis to the armory immediately!”

He looked around, confused, then nodded in acknowledgment and scurried off after Lewis.

Apparently becoming rather tired of plodding down a slippery staircase with hooves coated in blood the Auroch instead decided to simply *jump* down from the second to the first floor and he landed with such a force that the floor shattered beneath him. I could not say that he looked any better than before, for in the much brighter lighting I could see every wound that I had inflicted upon him, including the chair leg which still protruded from his eye socket, but he certainly seemed to have recovered some of his vitality.

## OVERWHELMING FORCE

At full tilt I burst through the front door of Scotland Yard out onto Whitehall Place, surprising many a passer-by as I did so. Their bewilderment, however, very quickly metamorphosed into terror as the Auroch that was hot on my heels smashed through the door himself with such velocity that his hooves lost traction and he skidded down the steps and landed face-first onto the pavement. The tumble was barely acknowledged however, as he immediately got back to his feet. He glared at me. I was standing in the middle of the street and nearly found myself struck by a passing cab as its horse panicked. He stood as tall as he could and belted forth the most violent roar that he could muster. All around us citizens ran for cover, screaming in horror as they did so. My supposition had been correct. Either Wilks' ability to return to his human form was gone or at the very least his *desire* to do so was. Regardless, the end result would be the same. As fearsome as he may be such a creature can only last so long out in public before overwhelming force is brought to bear upon him.

"And that would be it now." I said smugly, gesturing toward the stationhouse door.

Had it not been in the midst of a frenzy brought on by chemical stimulation I believe the creature would have at least turned to see what I was speaking of, but it did not. It charged forth belching steam into the cold night air but just as before I spun at the right moment like a skilled matador and sent Wilks crashing into a parked carriage. He struggled for a moment to free his horns and by the time he'd done so he turned around to see that I was now standing on the steps of 4 Whitehall Place, otherwise known as Scotland Yard, with no less than seven constables bearing loaded rifles and more that I could hear running up from behind me.

"I don't suppose you'd like to sit down over tea and have a nice chat with me would you?" I called out to him mockingly.

He pawed at the rough pavement with his right hoof and then ran face-first into a hail of gunfire. There was a brief moment of panic as each shot did little to slow him, but the cumulative effect of so many striking him at once halted his advance just as he passed the middle of the road. He roared once again and collapsed into a defensive ball on the ground as the pelting continued.

"Don't stop firing do you hear me?! Don't stop firing until you've exhausted your ammunition!" I commanded, then ran back into the station.

I dared not take the time to ascend the stairs and go groping around for my serrated blade so my eyes caught upon the first object that I thought capable of performing the task I had in mind. In an office off to the left I spotted a large cutting board used for slicing straight edges through stacks of papers. I ran to it and in a flash removed the nut that held its cutting arm in place. Now wielding it in my right hand I dashed back through the door to find my constables still firing. I watched as they continued. The beast moaned again but this time it was not anger, it seemed to my ears to be more of a painful cry than anything else. Were I any other man I might have even pleaded for a halt to the hail of bullets that were shredding the monster's flesh, but I knew not to fall for such tactics.

When the officers exhausted their ammunition, and yes I allowed them to fire every last shot they carried on them, I raised a hand and told them to stay back. With the heavy cutting blade swinging at my hip I walked briskly, and with deadly purpose, over to the moaning pile of blood

and hair and lifted it high before bringing its full force down to bear on the spot where the creature's skull met its spinal column. I heard gasps from several of the men as it took a full three blows to finally remove the beast's head.

I then called for two of them, one of whom quickly became sick, to assist me in rolling the body over onto its back whereupon I climbed atop it and removed the fragment of Auroch blade that still protruded from its chest. Using one of my smaller knives I cut into the carcass and exposed the heart...still beating...then plunged the fragment of dagger into it.

Much to my dismay the remains did not transform themselves back into their human form despite the fact that the heart stopped beating, a clear sign that the beast was dead. Many were-creatures retained whatever form they were in when they expired but most lore stated that a cursed creature reverted to human form once their curse had been broken. Curious.

I looked up to see most of the constables still watching on in horror.

"Do you mind if I keep this?" I asked, "I may wish to study it."

## WHAT'S UNDER THE SHEET?

“Good God, what on Earth have you there Holmes?” Doctor Watson asked as he came through the back door of 221B Baker street and into the alleyway where I’d parked my cart. “Holmes is that blood dripping from the back of...?”

“Why yes Watson, it is.” I smiled, “Now help me with these materials before we unload the body.” I said as I handed him a box full of papers and photo slides.

“Holmes!” he demanded.

“What is it Watson?” I asked, attempting to seem courteous of his concerns.

“What is it?!” he became flustered, “The prince’s carriage was shot and I’ve not heard from you for four hours, then no sooner do I walk through the front door does Mr. Hudson tell me I’m needed at the back to ‘Help Mr. Holmes unload a corpse.’”

“Yes,” I waived at the blood-stained sheet near the back of the cart, “well a corpse is only part of it.”

He gave me an indignant stare and crossed his arms, refusing to take the box. I huffed, set the box down onto the ground.

“It was Chief Inspector Wilks just as I’d thought. We had a scuffle near where the shot was fired. He then ran off to Scotland Yard and changed into...well, this...” I lifted the covering just long enough to give him a glimpse of the Auroch’s face.

“I’ll say that there *was* some violence Watson, and with the help of some well-trained constables I was able to subdue him.” then I thought about it, “Wait a minute. Where have *you* been all of this time Watson?”

“Looking for you Holmes.” he moaned.

“Ah, well since you’re not a simpleton I’ll assume that you already made your way over to Scotland Yard.”

“Indeed,” he replied snarkily, “only after searching the streets for either you or Lestrade for quite some time. When I *did* eventually make it down there the lads were being rather tight-lipped about what the hell had happened tonight. Luckily for me I chanced upon our friend Constable Lewis and he filled me in on the details.”

“Yes, I figured they’d rather just sweep this whole matter under the rug. Good to see that I was right. I wouldn’t want any reporters getting involved, poking around, asking me questions.”

My thoughts turned to Lestrade. I hesitated.

“Watson I am afraid that there is sad news.”

“Besides the prince nearly being killed?”

I waved him away, “No no, that was only part of a plot to...well I’ll fill you in on that later. It’s about Detective Lestrade.”

Watson caught the somber look in my eye, removed his hat and held it to his chest.

“Did he...pass quickly?” the doctor asked.

“Quicker than many Watson.” I stated. “He did, however, achieve something in death that he never did in life.”

“Oh, and what would that be?”

“He saved a life, namely my own...*and* he put me on the path to solving this case”

“How so?”

“Watson I’ll be happy to explain everything just please be a dear and help me bring these materials upstairs and this body into the cellar.”

The doctor looked at the boxes piled in the cart.

“Those are Lestrade’s things aren’t they?”

## A DISTINCT LACK OF CACHE

“You see it was the detective who’d come looking for me and had first checked Chief Inspector Wilks’ office. He’d seen the note left carelessly lying upon it and I believe he’d figured out the true motives behind the assassination plot.” I said as we ascended the stairs.

“Which is?” Watson asked, huffing under the load of the heavy boxes that he was carrying.

“There are actually several facets to the plot but I believe that its primary objective was to secure the very documents that we now carry.”

“Lestrade’s research?” Watson seemed positively confused.

“Yes.” I said as we reached the top of the stairs, “I believe that the cunning individual who masterminded this elaborate plot also has a vested interest in *homo-monstrum* and that he was aware that someone else was stockpiling information on the subject. I believe he desired to uncover who this person was so that he could procure the documents for himself.”

I pushed the door open with my foot and both the doctor and I let out audible gasps.

“Holmes! The apartment’s been ransacked!”

I walked over to a table, pushed some debris aside, and set my box down.

“That I can see Doctor.”

I motioned for him to set down his own load and then I let myself fall into my favorite chair, one that now bore a large hole in the fabric haphazardly cut into it with a dull knife. I leaned over and rifled through some of the detritus on the floor and quickly located my pipe. I checked it for content, pulled it to my lips, and lit it.

“So you thought they were going after Lestrade’s research so you rushed to his office and confiscated it? By the looks of this room I’d say it was more likely that *you* were the intended target all along Holmes. You not only revealed yourself to whomever was watching the events of this evening but also remained away from your home for many hours. Plenty of time for its contents to be pillaged.”

“Mr. Hudson!” I called as loud as I could.

It took a few moments before I heard the familiar pattern of footfalls on the steps and several more after that before he popped his head into the room and gasped.

“Have you any idea when this happened Mr. Hudson?” I asked with very little enthusiasm.

“Why no sir.” he looked around, baffled. “I went to visit my brother earlier, like I do every Thursday evening, but there was no sign of anyone having broken in when I returned.”

“Indeed. This room and this room *only* has been disturbed.” I said.

“And your research materials taken no doubt.” Watson chimed in.

“No doubt at all.” I stood, then said. “Luckily I keep them in triplicate.”

Watson cracked a large smile.

“You truly are something to behold Holmes.”

“Nonsense, I’m simply prudent. Now, about...”

A sudden and terrible thought struck my mind. Putting my pipe down I ran over to where I’d placed the box from Lestrade’s office. I pulled from it a case of photo slides, opened the top, lifted one of them to the light.

“Blank!”



I tried another, also blank, then a third and a fourth. I tossed the box onto the floor and heard the plates inside shatter but I did not care. I grabbed a pile of papers and analyzed them.

“Gibberish, it’s all gibberish.” Watson said, looking over my shoulder.

I tossed the papers aside, grabbed the first book in the stack. I opened the cover and inside...blank pages, all of them.

Watson seemed as though he wanted to say something but could not find the proper words.

“I *was* the target Doctor, but not the *only* target.”

“But why go through the trouble of making stacks upon stacks of false documents Holmes? It doesn’t make any sense.”

I felt defeated. “It does Watson, if one assumes that whomever is at the center of this plot wishes to see me go through as much pain and inconvenience as possible before I die.” I sighed.

“Either that or they are intent upon playing a terrible game with me.”

“Incredible.” the doctor said as he crouched to paw through the books in the box which he’d carried up to the apartment. “You said that you had uncovered other elements, perhaps those...”

A small piece of cardstock fell from the second book which he flipped through. Curiosity tempted him to pick it up, which he did, and then read its contents aloud, for unlike the other items it was not blank.

*Dear Sherlock Holmes,*

*If you are reading this message then it is safe to assume that you have bested my Auroch. I applaud you, truly I do, as that is no small task. I am, however, not completely taken by surprise as your reputation has come to precede you. I would like to give my condolences on the loss of Detective Lestrade but I do wish you to know that all of his years of dedication and hard work shall not go to waste. The world is changing Mr. Holmes, and if you are strong enough to defeat my Auroch, and more importantly clever enough to find me, then I believe that there is a promising future for you working at my side.*

*Sincerely,  
John Morrison*

“Let me see that Watson.” I asked, and to which he gladly complied. I pulled from my pocket the note which I’d retrieved from Wilks’ desk.

*The mathematics of our plan remain unchanged. Targets will be identified as discussed and assets will be seized. Be in position at the arranged hour. The tools shall be in place before you arrive. It will all be over in a flash. Do not cease until you are certain that the carriage has been struck. The rest will be attended to. Defend yourself if necessary but do not act in haste. Burn this letter after reading its contents.*

*Sincerely,*

*John Morrison*

“The same signature, though the first one was otherwise dictated and the second one, the one left with Lestrade’s things, was written personally.”

Watson nodded in agreement, then pointed out. “He says that he would like to give condolences for Lestrade’s death. Does that not indicate that he planned on killing the detective regardless of what happened tonight?”

“Yes, I believe that it does.” I looked around the room, my eyes stopping upon one particular spot, then looked back to the letters. “Watson be a dear and grab me the third book from the left on the undisturbed shelf near the corner; the one entitled ‘The Powers of Binomial Theorem’.”

“This shelf?” he asked. “I wonder why they didn’t go through it as well.”

“Because all of those books are by published authors my dear Doctor. They can be had in any library.”

“Then I fail to see what a book on mathematics...” he paused, “The letter mentions mathematics but what can that possibly have to do with any of this?”

“Please just hand me the book Watson.”

He did as was asked of him. Mr. Hudson was still in the room and making dissatisfied noises as he attempted to begin the cleanup of the terrible mess that the intruders had made of the place.

“Mr. Hudson,” I said as the doctor handed me the book I had asked for. “it may wait until morning. It will do no good to fuss over it at such a late hour.”

“Oh I’m so frazzled that I’ll never get any sleep anyway. You just let me do and go on about your business Mr. Holmes.”

“Very well.” I replied.

I opened the book, one of a medium size with a black leather cover and gold embossed lettering on the front and sides of it, and flipped to the title page. I then lifted both the letter and the note up to it and placed their signatures as close as I could to the inscription in the book.

“I had the occasion to meet the author in person some years ago Doctor. He inscribed it for me and though the name is different I thought that I recognized the penmanship. Look at it closely.”

Watson leaned in, then after a moment. “J...M.”

## NEMESIS

I had no intention of presenting myself in such a place wearing anything less than the finest gentleman's attire. I wore a pin-striped black overcoat, shoes made from the finest Italian leather and polished to a shine, a brand new top hat and carried with me a walking stick of the latest fashion.

The placard next to the door told me that I was in the right place. The door itself was of a heavy English wood but had a large window in it made from glass with a slight frost upon it. Inside I could see a figure, though not clearly. Regardless, I knew it to be him. Simply from the posture, the uprightness of a smear of light, an astute man could determine the bearing of another. I reached out a gloved hand and turned the handle, one that looked to have been turned by the hands of dozens or even hundreds every day for many years, as its brass plating was beginning to wear quite thin. With only the slightest hint of a creak the door swung open and I was greeted by warm colors and the familiar smell of chalk.

The figure at the desk did not look up for a moment, but instead continued to work feverishly with a quill at a piece of paper that sat under a small lamp. I took a step inside, closed the door behind me. I looked again at the man. He was several years my senior, ten, perhaps even fifteen. Despite this fact there appeared to be only a minimal amount of white hairs penetrating his otherwise flawless dark brown beard and head of hair. There was a presence about him. He knew that I was there, of that I was keenly aware, yet his failure to acknowledge me was not out of arrogance or pettiness. He was transfixed to his task, and when it was completed I would have his full attention, and so it was. After a few moments he gently placed the writing tool down onto the desk, removed his reading glasses which he placed into a pocket with great care, and then finally lifted his eyes calmly up to meet mine.

His stare was an analytical one. He looked me over very carefully then, as gently as he'd done the other things, pushed back his chair, then rose to greet me. Only then did I walk forward. He came around to the front of his desk to meet me.

"This is a fine classroom that you have here Professor." I said with only the faintest indication of a smile.

"Thank you Mr. Holmes."

His voice was calm, filled with self-assuredness. This man was intelligent in the extreme, yet in his eyes where one would normally find some spark of human warmth there was only a cold void of numbers, calculations. Even here in this room, so visually full of warmth, there was a near palpable cold that could be felt on the skin. I extended a gloved hand to him. He looked down at it, again analyzing me very carefully, before he lifted a hand of his own to meet mine. I grasped it and gave it a shake.

"I sir am Mr. Sherlock Holmes, but of course you already knew that."

"As I am Professor James Moriarty, but of course you already knew *that*."

"Indeed I did," I stated, broke the handshake, and placed both of my hands atop my walking stick. I stood as tall as I could manage and though I towered over him by at least four inches I felt small in the presence of this man. In my life I had faced beasts that would make even the hardiest fellow shake in his boots but the monster that I stood face to face with now was one of the mind, not one of flesh and bone. "And I have a great many questions for you."

“No doubt Mr. Holmes,” Moriarty smiled though there was no warmth in it. “Please proceed. As a professor I am quite accustomed to answering questions.”

“First,” I started, “one of mathematics.”

He raised an eyebrow, his steel-grey eyes never deviating from direct contact with mine.

“I have no problem believing that a man such as yourself would possess the ability to determine the trajectory necessary to ricochet a bullet, but how did your man know *when* to fire?”

“Did you not notice the photographer on the street?”

I had seen a flash as I’d leapt for Wilks but I’d mistaken it for the discharge of his rifle. Likewise I had noticed the photographer but had not considered him to be any threat yet his flash had been the signal.

“The man in the window across the street from where your shooter was positioned, a business rival?”

“Very astute Mr. Holmes.” the professor leaned back on his desk in an attempt to seem more relaxed but his demeanor remained the same. Again his eyes never left mine. “His name is Francis Hale, he is a major stockholder for Carrington Arms and once he hangs for attempted murder of the prince his son will gladly sell controlling interest to me.”

“Expecting a war Professor?” I asked, making sure that the snideness of my comment was blatant.

He did not miss a beat, he met my sarcasm with determined energy. “I am *always* expecting a war Mr. Holmes. The world has become a ticking time bomb and when it goes off I plan on not only surviving the resulting explosion but also profiting from it as well.”

“Then you’re not worried in the slightest that the fine detectives at Scotland Yard will discover the steel plate affixed to his building?”

“Removed in the dead of night, just like the rifle from the building across the street.”

“No less than I’d expect from you. You are every bit as clever as I had believed.” I nearly said ‘feared’.

He studied me for a moment. “You’re as clever as I’d hoped as well sir. Tell me, what else have you deduced of my plot?”

I closed my eyes, partly to escape his insufferable gaze for just a moment but also so that I might take in a deep breath and collect my thoughts.

“Firstly, I believe that you wished for Detective Lestrade and I to reveal ourselves. You had suspicions as to who was collecting information on the unnatural but you, being an astute man, wished confirmation. Furthermore you then wished for us to be vacant from our properties for some time simultaneously so that you could arrange for our materials to be stolen.” I said nothing of the fact that I still had copies of my own documents and would also likely be able to recreate a small percentage of Lestrade’s through the use of my peculiarly keen memory. His men had also failed to locate the doctor’s personal archive.

“Surely there is more?” he asked, raising an eyebrow.

“Of course. You also hoped to do your own small part in raising tensions, and therefore the possibility for war, in Europe. It was not enough for you to merely have the Duke of Troppau’s cousin killed, nay, that was but the first move in your game. It was merely a demonstration to the Duke that he too could be eliminated lest he agree to assist you in your plot. You then coerced him into requesting a private meeting with the prince, one which would lead to an assassination attempt. One that would appear to have been perpetrated, no less, by the son of a wealthy

Bavarian heiress who was distantly related to the first royal that you had killed. Oh yes, I've already looked into your Mr. Hale."

He smiled briefly, "A coincidental link of which I was not even aware."

I analyzed his face. Surely he knew that not only would he succeed in procuring Hale's stock but that it could also possibly be construed as an act of revenge, thereby heightening international tensions.

"It makes no difference," I said, "I've already presented the evidence of Mr. Hale's innocence to Scotland Yard. He'll not be held responsible."

A quick flash of anger crossed the man's lips, almost imperceptibly. "Legally, perhaps, he will be safe. Still, his name will be ruined and given enough time he'll sell to me himself. That, of course, is beside the point."

"Then do enlighten me." I demanded, my expression shifting to one of anger. The professor sensed it for I saw his breathing quicken.

He returned to a standing position with his face in an uncomfortable proximity to mine. He spoke softly, but with a threatening tone I'd not detected before. "I do not care about the Duke of Troppau, he was a means to an end but not the end that you believe. If fears of political assassination arise between the houses of Europe then so be it, but my true cause was to strike fear into the crown itself. You see...if the Royal Guard cannot protect the queen and her family then perhaps it is time for a private security firm to step in and handle the matter."

How had I not seen it? It had been in the note. "do not cease until you are certain that the *carriage* has been struck."

"No one wished to kill the prince Mr. Holmes, simply to remind the royal family that assassinations were possible and that certain...extra measures...might be necessary to ensure their safety."

I suddenly remembered newspaper articles from recent months. Carrington Arms...they'd all been about Carrington Arms. The company had put on a series of private demonstrations for the queen and several members of Parliament. They were also hiring up ex-military men for "research and development". There'd even been mention of them organizing a private security force, one that had gotten Lestrade's feathers into an uproar over the notion of losing his position at Stilton's if the competition sent them under. I had laughingly dismissed it. The rumors, however, were wrong. Carrington was not creating a detective agency but rather building a private *army*.

Seeing the realization in my eyes the professor spoke. "Now you see don't you sir? With Detective Lestrade's books and everything that I've already accumulated on my own I'll soon have dominion over the so-called unnatural creatures of this city and shortly thereafter I'll also have my fingers wrapped around the very neck of the British monarchy itself."

He watched me closely, his gaze jumping from one of my eyes to the next.

"Time to choose sides Mr. Holmes. Do you want to be part of the past...or part of the future?"

I gritted my teeth. At that very moment I had no idea as to how I was going to stop this madman from achieving his goals.

"Where are the works of Gregory Lestrade?" I demanded, letting my anger boil over visibly and lowering my right hand to grasp the walking stick just below its top. The professor took note of my action.

"Oh come now, you're not going to try to beat that information out of a man who's offering you a new chance at life are you? It's not your style."

“Where?!” I asked, lifting the stick slightly off of the floor.

“I *know* you Holmes. I followed your career with great interest. I can recount in great detail all of the cases in which you assisted Scotland Yard. What you are considering...it is not in your character.” he said very self-assuredly.

I bared my teeth only slightly and moved my head closer to his. This act, finally, provoked a reaction. Exactly what I had wanted. If I could scare the man I could eventually defeat him. He was *not* unflappable even though he liked to think himself that way.

With a final look of derision I turned and walked for the door.

“Is that all? I offer you so much and you have nothing more to say to me?”

I paused, my back still to him. “Actually, Professor, I *do* have one final question. In your note you made mention that Gregory Lestrade would be dead. How could you be so certain?”

“He was to be killed of course, on his way home. It seems my Auroch simplified the matter though wouldn’t you say?”

“Why him, why not me as well?”

“Save for his research I saw no use for the man. Not like you, had I been able to convince you to see things my way, that is.”

“And now that you haven’t? Shall I be assassinated upon my walk home, or perhaps poison slipped into my dinner at a fine restaurant?”

“Not quite. I hold out hope for you yet.”

I began to walk away.

“Don’t hold your breath Moriarty.”

“You have friends...” he called out to me. I paused once again. “A Mr. Hudson I believe, your landlord.”

I gritted my teeth.

“Also a Doctor John Watson if I am not mistaken.. Oh, and what about that delightful Constable Lewis? Like I said Mr. Holmes...I *know* you.”

My coat flapped as I spun and with a quick toss sent my walking stick clattering into the row of desks. I strode up to the vile man that was every bit a monster as any true beast I’d ever encountered and drew the blade concealed in my left sleeve and without a word slid it up through his jaw and into his brain. I let his body collapse onto the stone floor as I walked away, stopping only to grab my cane.

“I’m *not* the Sherlock Holmes you think you know.”

## About the Author



Michael Moreau is creator of series such as The Futureman Adventures, Rocket Riders of the 27th Century, and The Robert Carson Files. He is a life-long fan of science fiction and always dreamed of writing books of his own. He is a supporter of pulp-style fiction and a staunch advocate for self-publication. He is also a prolific filmmaker, photographer & artist. More information can be found at:

**[www.mmoreau.net](http://www.mmoreau.net)**