

ANDREW LANE



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SHERLOCK
HOLMES

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MACMILLAN CHILDREN'S BOOKS

Dedicated to David Richardson, Justin Richards and Jac Farrow for enduring my temper tantrums while this book was being written; Ruth Alltimes and Katharine Smales for looking after me in Bologna, and to Louis Alcock, who was born at about the same time as this book was finished.

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CHAPTER ONE

Sunlight sparkled on the surface of the water, sending daggers of light flashing towards Sherlock's eyes. He blinked repeatedly, and tried to keep his eyelids half-closed to minimize the glare.

The tiny rowing boat rocked gently in the middle of the lake. Around it, just past the shoreline, the grassy ground rose in all directions, covered in a smattering of bushes and trees. It was as if it were located in the middle of a green bowl, with the cloudless blue of the sky forming a lid across the top.

Sherlock was sitting in the bows of the boat, facing backwards. Amyus Crowe was sitting in the stern, his weight causing his end of the boat to sink lower into the water and Sherlock's to rise high out of it. Crowe held a split-cane fishing rod out over the lake's surface. A thin line connected the tip of the rod with a small clump of feathers which floated on the surface of the water: a lure that, to a hungry fish, might look like a fly.

Between them, in the bottom of the rowing boat, sat an empty wicker basket.

'Why did you only bring one rod?' Sherlock asked, disgruntled.

'This ain't a day's fishin',' Crowe replied genially, eyes fixed on the floating lure, 'much as it may look like it. No, this is a lesson in life skills.'

'I should have guessed,' Sherlock muttered.

'Although it's also a way to get some dinner for me an' Virginia tonight,' Crowe conceded. 'Always, if possible, try to arrange that what ah do serves several purposes.'

'So I just sit here?' Sherlock said. 'Watching you fish for your dinner?'

'That's about the size of it.' Crowe smiled.

'And is it going to take long?'

'Well, that depends.'

'On what?'

'On whether ah'm a good fisherman or not.'

'And what makes you a good fisherman?' Sherlock asked, knowing that he was playing in Crowe's hands but unable to stop himself.

Instead of answering Crowe wound the bone-handled brass reel at his end of the rod, expertly pulling the line in. The feathered lure jumped out of the water and hung suspended in the air, glittering droplets of water falling from it and striking the lake. He jerked the rod back. The line flew above his head, the lure blurring as it moved. He whipped the rod forward again, and the lure made a figure-eight shape against the blue sky as it flew over his head and hit the surface of the lake in a different location, making a small splash. He watched, smiling slightly as it drifted.

'Any good fisherman knows,' Crowe said, 'that fish react differently dependin' on the temperature and the time of year. Early mornin' in spring, for instance, fish won't bite at all. The water is cold and it don't heat up much, because the sun is low and its rays bounce off the water, so the fish are

sluggish. Their blood, bein' cold and influenced by the surrounding environment, is flowing slow. Wait 'til late mornin' or early afternoon an' things start to change. The fish will bite intermittently because the sun is shinin' on the water, warmin' it up and makin' them more lively. Of course, the wind will push the warmer surface water and the little midges an' stuff they feed on around, an' as a fisherman you got to follow that movement. No point in fishin' where the water is still cold or where there ain't any food. An' all that can change dependin' on the time of year.'

'Should I be taking notes?' Sherlock asked.

'You've got a head on your shoulders – use it. Memorize the facts.' He snorted, and continued: 'In winter, to take an example, the water's cold, maybe even iced up, an' the fish ain't movin' too fast. They're livin' off the reserves they built up in the autumn, by an' large. No good fishin' in the wintertime. Now - what have you learned so far?'

'All right.' Sherlock quickly went over the facts in his mind. 'In spring your best bet is early morning or late afternoon, and in winter you are better off heading for the market and buying something from the costermonger.'

Crowe laughed. A good summary of the facts, but think about what's *behind* the facts. What's the rule that *explains* the facts?'

Sherlock considered for a moment. 'The important thing is the temperature of the water, and the thing that drives the temperature of the water is how hot the sun is and whether it's shining straight down on the water or at an angle. Think about where the sun is, work out where the water is warm but not hot, and that's where you'll find the fish.'

'Quite right.'

The lure jerked slightly, and Crowe leaned forward, washed-out blue eyes unblinking beneath bushy grey eyebrows.

'Each fish has a different temperature which it prefers,' he continued quietly. 'A good fisherman will combine his knowledge of the fish's preferred water temperature with his knowledge of the time of year, time of day and lake turnover conditions to work out which fish will be in a particular part of a lake at a particular time of the year.'

'This is all very interesting,' Sherlock said cautiously, 'but I'm not likely to take up fishing as a hobby. It seems to consist of a whole lot of sitting around waiting for something to happen. If I'm going to sit around for a long period of time, I'd rather have a good book in my hands than a fishing rod.'

'The point ah'm tryin' to make,' Crowe responded patiently, 'in my own countrified, homespun way is that, if you're tryin' to catch somethin', you need to go about it in a structured way. You need to know about the habits of your prey and you need to know how those habits change dependin' on the local environment and circumstances. The lesson applies equally well to men as it does to fish. Men have their preferences, their preferred locations, at different times of day, and those preferences might be different if the sun's shinin' compared with when it's rainin', or if they're hungry compared with when they're full. You got to get to know your prey so you can anticipate where they will be. Then you can use a lure – just like this pretty collection of feathers ah tied together with cotton – somethin' they can't resist takin' a bite at.'

'I understand the lesson,' Sherlock said. 'Can we go back now?'

'Not yet. Ah still ain't got my dinner.' Crowe's gaze was moving around the surface of the lake, looking for something. 'Once you know your prey and his habits, you got to look for the signs of his presence. He ain't just goin' to pop up an' announce himself. No, he's goin' to skulk around, bein' careful, and you gotta look for the subtle signs that he's there.' His eyes fixed on a patch of water some twelve feet away from the boat. 'For instance, look over there,' he said, nodding his head. 'What do you see?'

Sherlock stared. 'Water?'

'What else?'

He narrowed his eyes against the glare, trying to see whatever it was that Crowe had seen. For a moment, a small area of water seemed to dip slightly, like a wave in reverse. Just for a moment though, and then it returned to normal. And once he knew what he was looking for, Sherlock saw more dips, more sudden and momentary occasions when the surface of the lake seemed to flex slightly.

'What is it?'

'It's called "suckin'",' Crowe replied. 'It happens when the fish – trout, in this case – hang nose-up just below the surface of the water, waitin' for insect nymphs to float by. Once they see one, they take a gulp of water, suckin' the nymph down with it. All you see on the surface is that little dip as the water is pulled down and the nymph is sucked below. And that, my friend, tells us where a trout is located.'

He tugged on his fishing rod so that the lure drifted across the surface of the lake, pulled by the line until it passed through the area where Sherlock had seen the trout sucking nymphs down. Nothing happened for a moment, and then the lure suddenly jerked below the surface of the lake. Crowe hauled on the rod, simultaneously winding the reel in as fast as he could. The water exploded upward in silvery droplets, in the centre of which writhed a fish. Its mouth was caught up in the hook which had been hidden inside the lure and its scales were mottled in brown. Crowe flicked his rod expertly upward and the fish virtually flew into the boat, where it flapped frantically. Holding on to the rod with one hand so that it didn't fall into the water, Crowe reached behind him with the other and pulled a wooden club from beneath his seat. One quick blow and the fish was still.

'So what have we covered today?' he asked genially as he detached the hook from the trout's mouth. 'Know the habits of your prey, know what bait he's likely to go for, and know what the signs are that he's in the vicinity. Do all that, and you've maximized your chances of a successful hunt.'

'But when am I ever likely to be hunting someone or something?' Sherlock asked, understanding the basics of the lesson but unsure how they applied to him. 'I know you used to be a bounty hunter back in America, but I doubt I'll ever go into that profession. I'm more likely to end up as a banker or something.' Even as he said the words he felt his heart sink. The last thing in the world he wanted to do with his life was a boring desk job, but he wasn't sure what else there was for him.

'Oh, life's full of things you might want to catch,' Crowe said, throwing the fish into the basket and placing the wicker lid over the top. 'You might want to flush out investors for some moneymaking scheme you've come up with. You might consider findin' yourself a wife at some stage. You might be trackin' down a man who owes you money. All kinds of reasons a soul might want to hunt someone down. The basic principles remain the same.' Glancing over at Sherlock from beneath his bushy eyebrows, he added: 'Based on previous experience, there's always the murderers and criminals you might come across during the course of your life.' He took hold of the fishing rod and flicked the lure back over his head in a figure-of-eight and into the water. 'And then, when all's said and done, there's always deer, boar and fish.'

With that he settled back with eyes half-closed and devoted himself to fishing for the next hour while Sherlock watched.

After two more fish had been caught, dispatched and thrown into the basket, Amyus Crowe set his rod down in the bows of the boat and stretched. 'Time to head back, ah think,' he announced. 'Unless you want to try it yourself?'

'What would I do with a fish?' Sherlock asked. 'There's a cook at my aunt and uncle's house. Breakfast and luncheon and dinner just arrive on the table without me having to worry about it.'

'Someone has to catch the animals to make the food,' Crowe said. 'And one day you might actually find yourself having to worry about where the next meal comes from.' He smiled. 'Or maybe you

might want to surprise the lovely Mrs Eglantine with a nice plump trout for dinner.'

'I could slip it into her bed,' Sherlock muttered. 'Would that do?'

'Tempting,' Crowe laughed, 'but no, I don't think so.'

Crowe took the oars and rowed the boat back to the shore. After tying it to a post that had been s into the ground, he and Sherlock set off back to his cottage.

Their path led up the steep side of the bowl containing the lake. Crowe pushed on ahead, carrying the wicker basket. His large body made surprisingly little noise as he moved. Sherlock followed, tired now as well as bored.

They got to the ridge at the top of the slope, where the ground fell away steeply behind them and levelled out in front, and Crowe stopped to let Sherlock catch up.

'A point to note,' he said, gesturing down at the blue surface of the lake. 'If you're ever out hunting don't be tempted to stop at a place like this, either to take in the view or to get a better look at the surroundin' terrain. Imagine what we look like to any animal in the forest, silhouetted here on the ridge. We can be seen for miles.'

Before Sherlock could say anything, Crowe started off again, pushing through the undergrowth. Sherlock wondered briefly how the man knew which way to go without a compass. He was about to ask, but instead tried to work it out himself. All Crowe had to go on was their surroundings. The sun rose in the east and set in the west, but that wasn't much help at lunchtime when the sun would be directly overhead. Or would it? A moment's thought and Sherlock realized that the sun would only be truly overhead at noon for places actually on the equator. For a country in the northern hemisphere like England, the nearest point on the equator would be located directly south, and so the sun at noon would be south of a point directly overhead. That was probably how Crowe was doing it.

'And moss tends to grow better on the northern side of trees,' Crowe called over his shoulder. 'It's more shaded there, and so it's damper.'

'How do you do that?' Sherlock shouted.

'Do what?'

'Tell what people are thinking, and interrupt them just at the right moment?'

'Ah,' Crowe laughed. 'That's a trick ah'll explain some other time.'

Sherlock lost track of time as they walked on through the forest, but at one point Crowe stopped and crouched down, putting the basket down.

'What do you deduce?' he asked.

Sherlock crouched beside him. In the soft ground beneath a tree he saw a hoof print, small and heart-shaped.

'A deer went this way?' he ventured, trying to jump from what he saw to what he could work out based on what he saw.

'Indeed, but which way did it go and how old was it?'

Sherlock examined the print more closely, trying to picture a deer's hoof and failing.

'That way?' he said, pointing in the direction of the rounded part of the print.

'Other direction,' Crowe corrected. 'You're thinking of a horse's hoof, where the round bit is at the front. The sharp bit of a deer's hoof always points in the direction it is heading. And this one's young 'un. You can tell by the small oval shapes behind the print. Those are made by the dewclaws.'

He looked around. 'See over there,' he said, nodding his head to one side. 'Can you make out a straight trail through the bushes and grass?'

Sherlock looked, and Crowe was right – there was a trail, very faint, marked by the bushes and grasses being pushed to either side. It was about five inches across, he estimated.

'Deer move all day between the area they bed down in and their favourite watering hole, trying to find food,' Crowe said, still crouching. 'Once they find a safe route they keep usin' it until they g

spooked by somethin'. And what does that tell you?'

'Prey tends to stick to the same habits unless disturbed?' Sherlock replied cautiously.

'Quite right. Remember that. If you're lookin' for a man who likes a drink, check the taverns. you're lookin' for a man who likes a bet, check the racin' tracks. And everyone has to travel around somehow, so talk to cabbies and ticket inspectors – see if they remember your man.'

He straightened, picking the basket up again, and started off through the trees. Sherlock followed glancing around. Now that Crowe had pointed out what to look for, he could see sets of different tracks on the ground: some deer, of various sizes, and some obviously something else – maybe wild boar, maybe badgers, maybe foxes. He could also see trails through the underbrush, where the bushes and grasses had been pushed to one side by moving bodies. What had previously been invisible was suddenly obvious to him. The same scene now had so much more in it to look at.

It took another half an hour to reach the gates of Holmes Manor.

'Ah'll take my leave of you here,' Crowe said. 'Let's pick up again tomorrow. Ah've got some more to teach you about trackin' and huntin'.'

'Do you want to come in for a time?' Sherlock asked. 'I could get Cook to make a pot of tea, and one of the maids could gut and bone those fish for you.'

'Mighty accomodatin' of you,' Crowe rumbled. 'Ah believe ah will take advantage of that offer.'

Together they walked up the gravelled drive towards the impressive frontage of Holmes Manor. This time Sherlock was in the lead.

Without knocking, he pushed open the front door.

'Mrs Eglantine!' he called boldly.

A black shape detached itself from the shadows at the base of the stairs and slid forward.

'Young Master Sherlock,' the housekeeper answered in her dry-as-autumn-leaves voice. 'You seem to treat this house more like a hotel than the residence of your family.'

'And you seem to treat it as if you are a member of that family rather than a servant,' he retorted in a voice cold but heart trembling. 'Mr Crowe will be taking afternoon tea with me. Please arrange it.' He had stood waiting, uncertain whether she would take his orders or dismiss him with a cutting word. He had a feeling that she wasn't sure either, but after a moment she turned and moved towards the kitchen without saying anything.

He felt a sudden and irresistible urge to push things a bit, to needle the woman who had done so much to make his life uncomfortable over the past year.

'Oh,' he added, gesturing towards the wicker basket at Amyus Crowe's feet, 'and Mr Crowe has caught some fish. Be so good as to have someone gut them and bone them for him.'

Mrs Eglantine turned back, and the expression on her face could have curdled milk and caused sheep to give birth prematurely. Her lips twisted as she attempted to force back something she was going to say. 'Of course,' she said finally, through gritted teeth. 'I will send someone up for the basket. Perhaps you would be so good as to leave it here and repair to the reception room.'

She seemed to melt back into the shadows.

'You should watch that woman,' Amyus Crowe said quietly. 'When she looks at you there is violence in her eyes.'

'I don't understand why my aunt and uncle tolerate her presence,' Sherlock replied. 'It's not as if she's a particularly good housekeeper. The other staff are so terrified by her that they can barely do their jobs properly. The scullery maids keep dropping dishes when she's around, their hands shake so much.'

'The subject would benefit from some further investigation,' Crowe mused. 'If, as you say, she's not a particularly good housekeeper then there must be some other compellin' reason why she's kept on, despite her vinegary personality. Perhaps your aunt and uncle are indebted to her, or to her family.'

in some manner, and this is a way of repayin' a debt. Or perhaps she's privy to some fact that your family would rather keep secret, and is blackmailin' herself into a cosy job.'

'I think Mycroft knows,' Sherlock said, remembering the letter his brother had sent him when he first arrived at Holmes Manor. 'I think he warned me about her.'

'Your brother knows a lot of things,' Crowe said with a smile. 'And the things he don't know generally ain't worth knowin' anyway.'

'You taught him once, didn't you?' Sherlock asked.

Crowe nodded.

'Did you take him out fishing as well?'

A laugh burst through Crowe's usually calm expression. 'Only the once,' he admitted, through chuckles. 'Your brother an' the great outdoors ain't exactly on speakin' terms. It's the first time an' the last time ah've seen a man try and catch a fish by chasin' it into its natural environment.'

'He dived in after a fish?' Sherlock said, trying to imagine the scene.

'He fell in, tryin' to reel it in. He told me, as ah was haulin' him out, that he would never leave the safety of dry ground again, and if that dry ground was a paved city street then so much the better.' He paused. 'But if you ask him, he can still tell you the feedin' an' swimmin' habits of all the fish in Europe. He may have a dim view of physical exertion, but his mind is as sharp as a seamstress's ball of pins.'

Sherlock laughed. 'Let's go into the reception room,' he said. 'Tea will be on its way.'

The reception room was just off the main hall, at the front of the house. Sherlock threw himself into a comfortable chair while Crowe settled himself on a sofa large enough to take his considerable bulk. It creaked beneath his weight. Amyus Crowe was, Sherlock estimated, probably as heavy as Mycroft Holmes, but in Crowe's case it was solid bone and muscle.

A soft knock on the door heralded the appearance of a maid carrying a silver tray. On the tray were a pot of tea, two cups and saucers, a small jug of milk and a plate of cakes. Either Mrs Eglantine was being unusually generous or one of the staff had decided to make the guest feel welcome.

There was also an envelope, white and narrow.

'A letter for you, sir,' the maid said without making eye contact with Sherlock. She set the tray down on a table. 'Will there be anything else?'

'No, thank you.'

As she left he reached out eagerly to take the envelope. He didn't get many letters at Holmes Manor, and when he did they were almost always from -

'Mycroft!'

'Is that a fact or a deduction?' Crowe asked.

Sherlock waved the envelope at him. 'I recognize the handwriting, and the postmark from Westminster, where he has his office, his lodgings and his club.'

He ripped the envelope open, pulling the flap from the grip of the blob of wax that held it firm.

'Look!' he said, holding the paper up. 'The letter is written on the headed stationery of the Diogenes Club.'

'Check the postmark on the envelope,' Crowe murmured. 'What time does it show?'

'Three thirty yesterday afternoon,' Sherlock said, puzzled. 'Why?'

Crowe gazed imperturbably at Sherlock. 'Mid-afternoon on a weekday, and he's at his club, writing letters, rather than at his office? Does that strike you as unusual behaviour for your brother?'

Sherlock thought for a moment. 'He once told me that he often walks across to his club for lunch,' he said after a moment. 'He must have written the letter over lunch and got the footman to post it for him. The post would have been collected in the early afternoon, and the letter would have got to the sorting office for around three o'clock, then been stamped half an hour later. That's not suspicious,

it?’

Crowe smiled. ‘Not in the slightest. Ah was merely tryin’ to indicate that there’s a whole lot of facts that can be deduced from a simple letter. If the postmark had been Salisbury rather than Westminster it would have been unusual, and would have prompted further questions. If we knew your brother never left his desk durin’ the day, not even for lunch – an unlikely occurrence, ah have to admit – and yet the letterheaded stationery was from his club then that would have been unusual as well. You might have surmised that your brother had lost his job, or was sufficiently disturbed that he had not gone into work, or left early.’

‘Or maybe he’d just taken some stationery from the Diogenes Club and was using it in his office.’ Sherlock pointed out.

Crowe looked discomfited. ‘Ah guess there’s always an alternative explanation,’ he growled.

Sherlock scanned the letter quickly, excitement growing as he read the words until he was almost at fever pitch.

My dear Sherlock,

I write in haste, as I am awaiting the arrival of a steak and kidney pudding and I wish to do it full justice before I return to my office.

I trust you are well, and that the various scars from your recent adventures have healed. I trust also that our aunt and uncle are well, and that our Mrs Eglantine is proving too unpleasant.

You will be pleased to hear, I am sure, that arrangements have been satisfactorily concluded to allow your education to continue at Holmes Manor. The news that you will never have to return to Deepdene School will, I presume, not come as too much of a shock.

Amyus Crowe will continue to school you in the more practical and sporting aspects of life and Uncle Sherrinford has agreed to become responsible for your religious and literary education which only leaves mathematics. I will ponder on that, and let you know when I have reached a decision. The aim, of course, will be to prepare you for university in a few years' time. We can discuss at some stage whether you have a preference for Oxford or Cambridge.

This morning, by the way, a letter arrived from our father. He must have posted it in India the moment he arrived, as it summarizes everything that happened to him on the voyage. I am sure that you would rather read the letter than have me tell you about it, and so I invite you to dine with me (at my club, naturally) tomorrow.

Please pass the invitation on to Mr Crowe: I have some details I wish to discuss with him about your education. The 9.30 a.m. train from Farnham will bring you to Waterloo in good time and I will meet me at 12 sharp.

I look forward to seeing you tomorrow, and to hearing all about the events that have befallen you since we last met.

Your loving brother,

Mycroft.

‘Anything interestin’?’ Amyus Crowe asked.

‘We’re going to London,’ Sherlock replied, grinning.

CHAPTER TWO

Sherlock rode into Farnham that afternoon, through a light rain that left puddles on the roads and trickled down the back of his neck no matter how much he turned his collar up or tucked it in. He was riding the horse he had ‘liberated’ from Baron Maupertuis – the horse he still had to find a name for if he ever did.

He just couldn’t understand why people gave names to animals. The animals didn’t care if they had names, or numbers, or nothing, and it implied a level of empathy and equality that shouldn’t exist. Animals were animals and humans were humans.

As his horse splashed its way towards the market town, Sherlock found himself thinking about the strange difference between pets and animals. If you could eat a cow, in the form of beef, then why couldn’t you eat a horse? There seemed to be no logical reason why not – as far as he knew, horse flesh wasn’t poisonous or anything. Alternatively, if cats and dogs were off the menu then why weren’t rabbits safe from being put in the stewpot? It didn’t make any sense. Someone had drawn an arbitrary line through the animal kingdom, saying, ‘All right, the ones over here you can eat to your heart’s content, but the ones over there you take for walks, and stroke, and care for, and bury when they die.’

He wondered, as the water found its way through every gap in his clothes, whether other countries had the same illogical rules. Were there countries somewhere where the inhabitants ate horses and dogs, but maybe considered cows sacred? If there were, it indicated that the whole thing was just subjective, if not random, but if all countries made the same distinctions then maybe there was something about humans that meant they all considered cows as food and horses as friends.

He absently patted the neck of the horse he was riding. *Could* he ever eat it? Could he sit down to a juicy steak, knowing that a few hours earlier he’d been riding the animal it had come from? Logically he didn’t see why not, but in practice he could detect a little squeamishness in his mind. Maybe if he was starving. Maybe if the two of them were caught in a blizzard, and the only way to survive was for him to cook and eat his horse. That would make sense.

As the horse clopped through the outskirts of Farnham, a disturbing thought occurred to Sherlock. If he was willing, in principle, to eat his horse, then why not his friends? If he and *Matty* were caught in a blizzard . . .

Even the thought made him feel sick, and he quickly squashed it, but a lingering doubt remained. Logically, there was a sliding scale between, say, insects and humans in terms of intelligence and general development. Fish and frogs were closer to the insects, arguably, and dogs and cats were closer to humans. Wasn’t that what Mister Charles Darwin had recently written in his book *On the Origins of Species* – a book he’d heard his Uncle Sherrinford complaining about over the dinner table some weeks before? Humans were just another type of animal, according to Darwin, with nothing

special or God-given about them. But if you factored religion out of the discussion, if you accepted that humans were just animals who could make tools and talk, then why weren't you allowed to eat people the way you were allowed to eat cows?

Too many questions, and logic did not seem to be any help. Logic was telling him that if *this* was a right then *that* was all right as well, but instinctively he knew that there was a difference. There were limits. The trouble was, he didn't know where they had come from or how to think about them properly.

And all this because he hadn't given his horse a name.

'I'll call you Philadelphia,' he murmured, patting its neck again.

He smiled. As names went, it had a whole lot of meaning attached to it. Virginia – Amyus Crowe's daughter – had named her horse Sandia after a range of mountains in America, after all, so he should be able to name his horse after an American city. The train that he, Virginia and Matty had been trapped on months ago, after Matty had been kidnapped by the agents of Duke Balthassar, had belonged to the Philadelphia Line, and the name would always remind him of what they had been through. And the short form of Philadelphia was Philly and 'filly' was another name for a young female horse, so it was also a kind of joke. It worked on all kinds of levels.

'Philadelphia it is,' he said. The horse made a whickering noise, as if it understood and approved. That, of course, really was just his imagination.

They were in the centre of town by now, and Sherlock left his horse – left *Philadelphia* – tied up next to the grain market and walked along under the brick colonnades, looking for Matty. He knew Matty's habits by now – where to find him at any time of day or night. The boy seemed to have fallen into a routine. Rather than move on in his narrowboat, looking for new towns and new opportunities, he had settled in Farnham, at least for a while. Sherlock secretly hoped it was because of him, because of their friendship. He liked Matty, and he would miss him when – if – he left.

Matty was sitting by the river, apparently watching nothing in particular, although Sherlock knew he was waiting for a barge to show up that usually delivered boxes of fish from the coast, laid out on crushed ice. Matty had found that if one of the boxes was dropped and smashed then he could steal a fish or two from the wreckage before anyone stopped him. Sherlock sometimes wondered if Matty occasionally got in the way of the men unloading the boat, making them slip and drop the boxes they were carrying, but he never asked. Best not to know.

'Hi,' Matty said. 'I was wondering if you were going to show up.'

'I'm going to London tomorrow,' Sherlock responded. He had meant to make conversation first, to find out where Matty had been and what he had done recently, but he couldn't help himself. He wasn't good with conversation. 'I've got to go to the station and get the tickets.'

'Good luck with that,' Matty muttered.

'You could come,' Sherlock said, defensively, but he wasn't sure whether the invitation from Mycroft extended that far.

'To the station? Thanks, but I've already seen it.'

'To London!' Sherlock said in exasperation.

'You won't get me back up in the Smoke.' Matty shook his head. 'I still remember what happened last time. After you an' Ginnie were kidnapped by that Baron Maupertuis bloke, I had to travel all the way back here to Farnham with her father. He tried to teach me to read!' His voice rose aggrievedly. 'He told him I didn't *want* to read, but he kept trying to tell me about "a before e except after c" and stuff. An' then we had to sail to France to try and find the two of you, an' he just kept at it. Wouldn't stop.'

'I think he just likes to teach,' Sherlock said. 'And you were the only audience.'

'Well, I'm not making that mistake again.'

'Have you seen Virginia?' Sherlock asked.

‘Not for a few days now.’

‘You want to go and look for her?’

Matty shook his head, eyes still fixed on the canal. ‘No, I’d rather eat.’

‘I could buy you a pork pie,’ Sherlock offered.

Matty looked tempted, but he shook his head. ‘You won’t always be around,’ he said. ‘I can’t rely on anyone else to feed me. I got to do it myself, an’ that means I got to keep my skills sharp. I got to make sure I can snaffle a cauliflower or a ham hock without anyone noticing.’

‘It’s all right,’ Sherlock said quietly. ‘It’s not charity, it’s friendship.’

‘Feels like charity,’ Matty mumbled. ‘And I don’t accept charity. Not ever.’

Sherlock nodded. ‘I understand.’ He looked around. ‘I’m going to head across to the station. See you later?’

‘Depends on when lunch turns up,’ Matty said gloomily.

Sherlock walked off, not sure where exactly he was going. He felt edgy. He wanted to be on his way back to London, but he knew that he had to wait until the next day for that. Mycroft had been very specific.

He wandered along the High Street for a while, past taverns that were already doing a roaring trade even though it was barely after midday, past baker’s shops with windows piled high with bread, past stalls twisted into knots and covered with seeds, past shops selling vegetables and fruit, or tools and seeds, or clothing ranging from the rough to the exquisite, pressing through crowds of locals who were buying, or selling, or just standing around idly, gossiping.

‘Sherlock!’ a voice called.

He turned, surprised. For a moment he didn’t recognize the tall, slim man with long black hair who was smiling at him from the other side of the road. Or rather, he knew that he *knew* him, but he wasn’t sure where from. His gaze scanned the man’s clothes and hands in the way that Amyus Crowe had taught him, looking for signs of his profession, but apart from a worn area on the left shoulder of the man’s patched corduroy jacket and the smattering of orange dust beneath his fingernails, there were no clues.

Except . . .

‘Mister Stone!’ he shouted, at the same moment that his brain supplied the information that the man was a violinist down on his luck, based on the signs on his clothing.

Rufus Stone’s smile stretched wider, revealing the gold tooth that Sherlock remembered from the long voyages out to and back from New York, where the man had been teaching him the violin to help pass the time.

‘I keep telling you,’ Stone shouted as he started to cross the road, dodging the carts that clattered past and avoiding the piles of manure that had been left by the horses that pulled them. ‘One of my employers call me “Mister Stone”, and there have been fewer of those over the past months than there are teeth in a chicken’s beak.’

‘What happened to you after we docked in Southampton?’ Sherlock tried to keep a petty tone out of his voice, tried to make it just an ordinary question, but he had thought that the violinist was going to head for Farnham after they docked and set himself up as a tutor.

Stone winced. ‘Ah, there I have a confession to make. I was all ready to move my life down to the rural area of the world, but I got sidetracked and went to Salisbury for a few weeks instead. Suffice to say there was an actress, and a vacancy in the Salisbury Playhouse pit orchestra, and the chance to gaze up at her beautiful face all evening as I played and she acted her little heart out.’

‘What happened?’ Sherlock asked.

‘She parcelled that same heart up and gave it to the leading man, of course,’ he replied, wincing. ‘As they always do, of course, buoyed up by the admiring glances of their followers in the pit. I later found that we’d all joined because of her, and we were all receiving less than standard rates just for

the privilege of being there.’ He sighed theatrically. ‘Ah well. We live and learn. So – do you think that this part of Hampshire is still looking for a good violin tutor?’

‘I think so,’ Sherlock replied. ‘There’re a couple of good schools around, and quite a few big houses in the vicinity.’

‘And what about you?’ Stone asked. ‘Have you been keeping up with your lessons?’

‘I’ve been looking around for a cheap violin,’ Sherlock admitted. ‘Which reminds me – where are yours?’

‘I have secured lodgings nearby. My possessions – such as they are – and my violin are in my room. Which reminds *me* – I’m on an errand for my landlady and I need to stay in her good books. If I don’t bring back a chicken within the next hour then I suspect I’ll be out on the street – again. Tell me where can I find you, so we can continue our lessons?’

‘Holmes Manor,’ Sherlock said. ‘Give me a day or two to broach the subject with my brother and my uncle, but I think they’ll be fine about it.’

Stone smiled, and extended a hand. ‘It’s a pleasure to renew our acquaintance, Mister Holmes,’ he said as Sherlock took it. His hand was warm and dry, and Sherlock noticed that he didn’t press hard when he shook. Perhaps he was worried about damaging his fingers. ‘I will see you soon.’

He turned, and within moments was swallowed up by the crowd.

Absurdly pleased to see Rufus Stone again, Sherlock turned and moved off to get his horse.

The station was on the outskirts of the town. No trains were scheduled for that time in the early afternoon, so the place was deserted as he dismounted and approached the ticket office.

‘Two tickets to London,’ he said to the elderly man behind the counter. ‘Leaving on the train at nine thirty tomorrow morning. One adult and one child, second class.’

The ticket seller raised an eyebrow. ‘Afford two second-class tickets, can you?’ he grunted. ‘Or are you going to tell me you’ll pay me tomorrow, after your pocket money comes in?’

Sherlock slid a handful of coins across the counter. Mycroft had been keeping him supplied with postal orders and, as he didn’t spend very much, he’d built up quite a large balance. His brother hadn’t indicated how he should pay for the tickets, or included any additional money in his letter, so Sherlock presumed that Mycroft wanted him to pay out of his own money. Another small step towards adult responsibilities.

‘Two tickets,’ the ticket seller grunted. ‘One adult and one child. Second class.’ He passed two small slips of cardboard across the counter, along with a smaller pile of coins. ‘And change.’

‘Thank you.’ Sherlock dropped the tickets into one pocket and the coins into another, and turned round. He was just in time to see a figure in dark clothes step into an alley that ran alongside the station. He thought it was a woman.

A chill ran down his back. Was Mrs Eglantine following him, checking up on him? Had he humiliated her so much that she was looking to take some kind of revenge? He moved quickly down the slope to the hotel, stepping out into the road before he got to the alley, just in case whoever it was was waiting there for him, but when he got past the corner of the building the alley was empty. He checked the walls, but there were no doors the figure could have gone through. It had apparently vanished.

Had he imagined it? Had his brain conjured up a figure out of thin air? Or was there a simple explanation – a local woman who had decided to take a short cut around the hotel to wherever she was going?

Sherlock moved into the alley, and bent down to check the ground. There were footprints, leading away. The toes were pointed and the heels small, judging by the impressions left in the mud. And there were no traces of patches or holes in the soles, indicating that they were either new or well cared for, or both.

He checked over the ground again, and walked a few yards further down the alley, but there was nothing else to see.

Thoughtfully, he mounted Philadelphia and set off for Amyus Crowe's cottage to give him his ticket.

There was activity inside the cottage when he arrived, and Virginia's horse was in the paddock cropping the grass. He felt his mood lighten as he dismounted and approached the open door.

Virginia wasn't in the main room, but Amyus Crowe was sitting in an armchair, looking through a book. He glanced up as Sherlock came in, gazing at the boy over the top of his half-glasses. 'Did you get the tickets?'

'I did.' Sherlock paused. 'I met Rufus Stone,' he added. 'He was in Farnham.'

'Obviously.' Crowe pursed his lips. 'Strange that he should turn up here, just where you happen to be living.'

'I'd told him where I live. I'd said he might want to come to Farnham to teach the violin.'

'Very charitable of you,' Crowe conceded, his faded blue eyes studying Sherlock. 'Ah can see why you get out of that, but ah fail to see the advantage to Mister Stone.'

'He has to live somewhere,' Sherlock pointed out, uneasy at Crowe's obvious lack of pleasure at the news that Rufus Stone was in the area. 'And he's better off living where there are people who want to play the violin.'

'As you do.'

'As I do.'

Crowe put his book on his lap and removed his spectacles. 'Music is a distraction, Sherlock,' he said, not unkindly. 'It ain't a fit pastime for a man who is tryin' to fill his brain with things of use. Just think how much space in your brain would be taken up by learnin' all the notes for some fancy piece of music. That space could better be used for memorizin' the marks left by animals, or the shapes of people's ears, or the traces left on their hands and their clothes by whatever it is that they do to get through the day. Not music, son. Music ain't no use to anyone.'

'I don't agree,' Sherlock said, feeling strangely disappointed by Amyus Crowe's dismissal of something he was finding himself more and more interested in. He remembered his thoughts while riding into town, about the difference between animals and humans – or the lack of difference. 'Yes, I could memorize all those things – I could learn all about edible fungi, and telling about the state of a man's marriage by the stains on his hat, but why? What's the point? That just turns me into some kind of super-predator, able to track its prey through nearly invisible signs. Surely it has to mean something? Surely there has to be more to life than just being a better kind of animal?'

'And music is the thing that separates us from animals?' Crowe asked, eyes guarded.

'One of them.'

Crowe shrugged. 'Can't say ah've ever had much time for it. For me, bein' human means looking after my kin, lookin' after myself an' tryin' to ensure that the people around me look after each other. If that makes me just another animal, then that's what ah am.'

'But what's it all for?' Sherlock found himself asking. 'If there's nothing that makes us feel . . .' he struggled for the right word, '*uplifted*, then what's the point in doing anything at all.'

'Survival,' Crowe said simply. 'We live to survive.'

'And that's it?' Sherlock asked, disappointed. 'We keep going so that we can keep going? We live to survive and survive to live?'

'That's about it,' Crowe confirmed. 'As philosophies go it ain't pretty, but it has the advantage of bein' succinct and largely undeniable. Now, you stayin' here for food or you goin' back to *your* kin?'

Sherlock suppressed the arguments he had been marshalling, disappointed that Crowe had changed the subject so abruptly but also glad that the two of them weren't going to have a confrontation. He

liked Amyus Crowe, and he didn't want them to fall out over something as simple as music lessons.
'Is Virginia around?'

'She's out back, gettin' water for Sandia. Go lookin' for her, if you want.'

As Sherlock turned towards the door, Crowe's voice rumbled: 'Might interest you to know that Rufus Stone is also the name of a village near Southampton. Maybe it's a coincidence . . . or maybe he was short of a name at some point, and settled on one that was floatin' around his mind cos he'd seen it on a road sign somewhere. Just a thought.'

A thought that Sherlock found unsettling. He also thought it was rather petty of Amyus Crowe to have raised it.

He found Virginia outside. She had bought a bucket of water around, and Sandia was drinking from it enthusiastically.

'What has your father got against Rufus Stone?' he asked.

'And hello to you as well.' She glanced sideways at him. 'You really telling me you don't know?'

'I really don't,' he admitted.

She shook her head. 'I've said it before and I'll say it again: for a clever lad you can be really stupid sometimes.'

'But it doesn't make any sense!' he protested. 'I thought your father would be *glad* that I was making new friends and finding new interests.'

Virginia turned full on to him and stood, hands on hips. 'Let me ask you a question. If your father were still in this country, instead of being in India, what would he make of my father? Would they get on?'

Sherlock frowned, thinking. 'I doubt it,' he said finally. 'They come from different social strata, for one, and . . .'

He trailed off, unsure how to put the thought into words.

'And what?' she prompted.

'And in a way, your father is doing what my father would be doing if he were here.' Sherlock felt awkward just voicing the words. 'Teaching me stuff. Taking me out for walks. Giving me advice.'

'Right. He's acting like a father to you.'

He smiled at her uncertainly. 'You don't mind?'

She smiled too. 'It's nice having you around.' She looked away, then back again. 'An' you're right – your pa would be jealous that you were spending time with someone who was treatin' you like the son. Especially if that person was teachin' you things that *he* couldn't teach you.'

A bright light of understanding seemed to explode like a star in Sherlock's head. 'And *your* father jealous of Rufus Stone because he thinks Rufus is acting like a father to me?' The thought was so big and so momentous, that it seemed to fill his entire mind. 'But that's *stupid!*'

'Why?'

'Because Rufus is nothing like a father. He's more like a much older brother, or a young uncle, or something. And besides, me learning the violin from Rufus doesn't mean I don't value your father's lessons any the less. The two things are completely separate. It's just . . . illogical!'

She gazed at him, and shook her head. 'Emotions ain't logical, Sherlock. They don't follow rules.'

'Then I don't like emotions,' he said rebelliously. 'They don't do anything but cause confusion and hurt.'

The words hung between them for a long moment, vibrating like a struck bell.

'Some emotions are worth having,' she said softly, turning away. She bent down and picked up the bucket. 'At least *I* think so, even if you don't.'

She walked off, towards the rear of the house. Sherlock stared after her until she vanished around the corner. He felt like something big had just happened, but he wasn't sure what it was.

After a while, he walked over to his horse. He hadn't even told Virginia that he'd named Philadelphia, he brooded. ~~Maybe he didn't know very much about emotions, but he knew enough to suspect that this wasn't the time to go back and tell her.~~

He headed back to Holmes Manor, his head spinning with conjectures about Amyus Crowe, Virginia, Rufus Stone and his father, now so far away. He didn't like these conjectures. They were complicated, grown up and illogical. Emotional.

When he got back he sought out his Uncle Sherrinford, and told him about Mycroft's letter. He didn't exactly ask permission to go to London, but he didn't exactly tell Sherrinford that he was going, regardless of what was said. He just left the impression that it was a fait accompli. Fortunately, his uncle was in the middle of drafting another of the religious sermons which he sold to vicars all around the country for a few shillings apiece, and his distraction meant that he was more than happy to accept what Sherlock wanted to do, as long as it was what Mycroft wanted as well.

The next morning, when he awoke, the sun was just clearing the trees and the sky was blue from horizon to horizon. The worries of the night before seemed trivial in the bright sunshine. He quickly dressed and, after a rushed breakfast of porridge and toast, asked if one of the carts could run him to the station. It was better than leaving his horse tied up there for hours while he was in London.

Amyus Crowe was waiting for him on the platform, impressive and almost monumental in his white suit and white hat. He nodded to Sherlock.

'Think we got off on the wrong tack last afternoon,' he rumbled. 'Ah regret if ah sounded a mite terse an' unreasonable.'

'It's all right,' Sherlock said reassuringly. 'If you believe something, you ought to say it. Not doing so is hypocritical.'

Crowe made a sound deep in his throat. 'Ginnie's mother liked opera,' he said quietly. 'Big one, a German named Wagner, she was. After she died, ah could never stand the sound of an orchestra, not the sound of a singer.'

'I understand,' Sherlock said quietly.

'Then you're a wiser man than ah am.'

Fortunately, the train arrived before the conversation could get any more awkward.

The two of them sat in a decent compartment by themselves. The seats were upholstered and comfortable. Steam from the engine rushed like low cloud past the window, and Sherlock watched through gaps as the countryside unfolded before them.

A ticket collector checked their tickets just past Woking. As he left the compartment, sliding the door shut as he went, Crowe said: 'What did you make of the man that just left?'

Knowing the way Crowe's mind worked, Sherlock had been expecting a question like that.

'His shoes were freshly shined,' he said, 'and his shirt had been ironed. Either he's got a maid or he's married, and as I don't expect a ticket collector to be able to afford a maid to iron his shirts then I assume it's more likely that he's married.'

'Good so far,' Crowe rumbled.

'His wife is older than him,' Sherlock ventured.

'How can you tell?'

'He's in his thirties, but his collars are of an old-fashioned design. They're like my uncle's. They aren't worn, so it's not as if he's been wearing them for years. It must be that whoever is responsible for his clothes prefers the older style of collar, so if it's his wife then she must be older than him.'

'You forget the possibility that he may have a younger wife who hails from an old-fashioned family, but yours is the most likely explanation,' Crowe conceded.

'And he is slightly blind in his right eye,' Sherlock finished triumphantly.

Crowe nodded. 'Indeed. What gave it away?'

‘He has shaved the left side of his face and neck carefully, but the right side still has stubble visible. I deduce that he has difficulty in seeing out of his right eye.’

‘Excellent. You are picking up the skill of observation very nicely.’

‘Did I miss anything?’ Sherlock asked, smiling.

Crowe shrugged. ‘Several points, in fact. The man has been married before, but his wife died. His current marriage is childless, which causes his wife some distress. Oh, and I believe he is pilfering money from the railway company, but that is a stretch.’

Sherlock couldn’t help laughing. ‘How can you tell all that?’

‘Practice,’ Crowe said, smiling. ‘That and natural talent. One day you’ll be able to do it too.’

Sherlock shook his head. ‘I doubt it,’ he said with a laugh. ‘I really doubt it.’

CHAPTER THREE

The journey to Waterloo seemed shorter than Sherlock remembered. Crowe was on good form all the way, making deductions about the various people who came and went in their carriage and on the stations they passed. Sometimes, just to tease Sherlock, he engaged the people in conversation and got them to talk about the things he'd already told Sherlock. The earlier discomfort between them over the subject of Rufus Stone seemed to have vanished.

When the train had heaved its way into Waterloo and slowed to a halt at the platform, the two of them descended and walked through the station to find a hansom cab.

Sherlock had experienced the bustle of Waterloo Station before, but as he and Amyus Crowe made their way through a particularly dense crowd of men in top hats he found himself imagining that he was moving through a grim landscape of industrial chimneys rising up from dark factories. The steam from the trains that drifted around the station just made the comparison worse. Irritated, he tried to push the image to one side. He didn't often get flashes of imagination like that, and he didn't like it when he did. There was no logical way to get from top hats to smoky industrial landscapes. That was a poetic comparison, not an analytical one. Amyus Crowe would not approve.

Although Rufus Stone probably would. The thought made him pause uncomfortably.

Crowe hailed a hansom cab outside the station. They had no luggage, as they were just up for the day, so they climbed inside and set off.

The cab was little more than a box on two wheels, with the driver sitting on top and the horse attached to the front with a leather harness and reins. It jerked and rattled terribly on London's bumpy roads.

'The Diogenes Club,' Crowe called up to the driver.

'Where's that, guv?' the man called back.

'Head for the Admiralty,' Crowe shouted. 'Ah'll direct you from there.' Settling back down in his seat as the cab started off, he said conversationally: 'The club's only been in existence for a year or so. Seems your brother was one of the founders, or so he tells me. Named after the Greek philosopher Diogenes of Sinope. Diogenes was one of the founders of the Cynic philosophy, or Cynicism, as it has become known.'

'I've heard the word "cynics",' Sherlock said, 'but I'm not exactly sure what it means.'

'Cynics suggested that the purpose of life was to live a life of virtue in agreement with nature, which meant in practice rejecting all conventional desires for wealth, power, health and fame, and living a simple life free from all possessions. Can't fault them for that, although it does more or less rule out any industrial progress in a society. The Cynics also believed that the world belonged equally to everyone, and that suffering was caused by false judgements of what was valuable and by the worthless customs and conventions which surrounded society.' He paused. 'Not sure how that applies

to your brother, or the club, but you ought to know that the Diogenes Club has one very strict rule. Nobody is allowed to talk on the premises. Not one word. The only exception is the Strangers Room, which is where ah assume your brother will be meetin' us. If not, we're in for an uncomfortable day.'

The cab clattered across Westminster Bridge, and Sherlock's attention was caught by the various boats being rowed along or across the dirty brown mass of the water. 'Were Diogenes and Plato alive at the same time?' he asked, remembering the book that his brother had given him as a gift when he sailed to America – Plato's *The Republic*.

'They were,' Crowe answered, 'and they didn't get on. Ah'll tell you the story sometime.'

At the north side of the river the cab turned left, then right on to a broad, tree-lined avenue. At the top of the avenue, Sherlock recognized Trafalgar Square, with its memorial to Lord Nelson. He'd seen that the last time he'd come to London.

A few seconds later, the carriage stopped. The two of them descended to the pavement, and Crowe paid the driver the few pence fare.

They were still on the broad, tree-lined avenue, but at the top, where it curved round to form another road. A small door was set into a wall ahead of them. A brass plaque by the side of the door read *The Diogenes Club* in copperplate script.

Crowe rapped on the door with the head of his cane. A few moments later, it swung open. He led the way in, ducking his head to miss the low lintel. Sherlock followed.

They were standing in a narrow hall with oak-panelled walls and a marble floor. A stairway led up to the first floor, and an open door to one side gave access to what looked like a large room full of green leather armchairs. The silence was so oppressive that Sherlock could almost feel it pressing on his ears. The ticking of a clock somewhere in the shadows echoed around the hall.

The man who had opened the door was small and weaselly. He was dressed immaculately in a blue footman's uniform and had the look of a former soldier. Sherlock was no expert, but the man held himself rigidly upright, and his boots were shined to a degree where Sherlock could probably have seen his face in them. Crowe handed him a card. He glanced at it, nodded, and then gestured to Crowe and Sherlock to follow him through the room that led off the hall, the room full of green armchairs. The armchairs were occupied by men reading newspapers, and the footman led a winding course to a door on the far side of the room. He knocked on the door.

A few people lifted their heads from their newspapers and glared at the source of the noise.

Sherlock listened, but heard no response. He mentally kicked himself: if nobody was allowed to speak in the club then he could hardly expect anyone to call 'Enter!' The footman was obviously waiting for the door to be opened.

Nothing happened. The footman knocked again.

This time there was a scuffle from inside the room. Something thudded against the door. A bolt was thrown, and the door opened.

Mycroft Holmes stood in the doorway, blocking the room beyond with his large body. He looked confused.

He brought his hand up, as if to touch his forehead, and he seemed just as surprised as Sherlock and Crowe and the footman to find that he was holding a knife.

Mycroft stared at the knife as if he had never seen it before. He turned his head to look back into the room. As he did so, he stepped sideways, and Sherlock could see past him.

The room was lined with wood panelling, like the rest of the club, but it had no windows. In the centre of the room was a large table. Upholstered chairs were arranged symmetrically around it.

A man sat in one of the chairs. Judging by the spreading bloodstain on his shirt, and the way his sightless eyes stared at the chandelier hanging from the high ceiling, he was dead.

'Mycroft?' Sherlock said.

A ripple of surprise ran round the club room, followed by hisses of disapproval at his flagrant breaking of the rules, but he didn't care. He just wanted to know what had happened.

The footman backed away, eyes wide. Crowe snapped his fingers at the man, then mimed blowing a whistle. The footman nodded, turned, and ran off.

Crowe grabbed Sherlock's arm and pulled him into the Strangers Room, shutting the door behind them. Sherlock noticed that the back of the door was heavily padded, presumably to keep the noise of conversation from drifting into the club room. Mycroft backed away, his eyes still confused, his hand still holding the knife.

'I don't . . . understand,' he said hesitantly.

'Mister Holmes,' Crowe snapped, you need to concentrate. What happened? Tell us everything.'

'I was . . . waiting for you,' Mycroft replied. His voice gained strength as he spoke. 'I had predicted your time of arrival based on the train timetable and the usual traffic between Waterloo Station and the club at this time of day. There was a knock on the door. The footman – Brinnell – delivered a card on a tray. Apparently a man wanted to see me. I didn't know who he was, and I was about to send him away when I noticed that some words had been scrawled on the back of the card. They were words that . . . that I had come into contact with during the course of my employment. Words of significance. I indicated to Brinnell that he should bring the man here, to the Strangers Room.'

He paused, frowning, as if he was attempting to remember something difficult.

'I waited here,' he continued. 'There was a knock on the door. Rather than call out, I went to the door to open it. That is the custom, here in the Diogenes Club. It avoids undue speech, which most members find unpleasant. A man was standing outside –'

'That man?' Crowe asked, indicating the body slumped in the chair.

'Yes,' Mycroft said, wincing. 'That is the man. I gestured to him to come in. He did so. I shut the door behind him, and . . .'

He trailed off. His hand – the one not holding the knife – rose as if he wanted to touch something on his head. 'That's all I remember until I heard another knock on the door. I thought I was having one of those moments that the French call *déjà vu*, where you believe that something is happening to you that has happened before. I opened the door, expecting to find Brinnell and the visitor outside, but it was you. Both of you. I was confused. I turned round, expecting to find the visitor behind me.' Mycroft indicated the dead body in the chair. 'I did,' he continued, a touch of the dryness with which Sherlock was so familiar creeping back into his tone, 'but not in the manner I expected.'

'Mister Holmes,' Crowe said, 'for the sake of completeness, and because it is undoubtedly a question the police will ask, did you kill that man?'

'I have no recollection of killing that man,' Mycroft said carefully.

'Ah would suggest that you give a simple "no" next time the question is asked. Not that it will do you much good.' Crowe sighed. 'Do you know a good solicitor?'

'The Diogenes retains one,' Mycroft replied. 'Brinnell can give you the man's details.'

'Then whatever happens in the near future, rest assured that we will engage the Diogenes' solicitor, and we will work to get you released.'

Mycroft turned to look at the body. 'That may be difficult,' he said painfully. 'There is precious little evidence, and what little there is seems to implicate me.'

'You did not kill him,' Sherlock said firmly. 'I don't know much about what happened in here, but I know that.'

Mycroft smiled slightly, and patted Sherlock on the shoulder. 'Thank you,' he said. 'I think you needed to hear that.'

A commotion outside alerted them to the arrival of the police.

'Ah suggest you put the knife on the table,' Crowe said. 'It never looks good to be holdin' a weapon'

when the police arrive.'

Mycroft stepped towards the table and set the knife down on it just as the door burst open, and a group of blue-uniformed men entered. Crowe stepped forward, covering Mycroft's movement.

'There's been a murder,' he said. 'The body is over by the table, as is the knife that was probably used in the execution of the crime.'

'And who are you?' the lead constable asked.

'My name is Amyus Crowe. Who are you?'

'A foreign gentleman,' the policeman remarked, looking pointedly at his companions. 'Were you here when the crime was committed?'

'Ah asked you for your name,' Crowe said, voice civil but with an edge of iron.

'I am Sergeant Coleman,' the policeman said, drawing himself up. 'Now perhaps you could answer my question.' He paused. 'Sir.'

'Ah was outside the door,' Crowe said, 'with the young man there. The footman can bear that out.'

'And what is the young man's name?'

'Sherlock Holmes,' Sherlock replied.

'Then who was *in* the room?' the sergeant pressed.

Crowe hesitated, wincing slightly. 'Ah believe this gentleman was in the room.' He indicated Mycroft with a nod of his head.

The sergeant stepped forward. 'Is this true, sir?' he asked Mycroft.

Mycroft nodded. 'I was in the room,' he said clearly.

'What is your name?'

'Mycroft Siger Holmes.'

'And did you kill this man, sir?'

'I did not kill this man.'

Sherlock noticed Crowe's lips twitch slightly at the firmness in Mycroft's voice. The sergeant looked taken aback.

'I'm afraid, sir, that I must place you under arrest. You will be taken to Scotland Yard, where you will be questioned under oath.' He glanced over at the corpse, then towards one of the constables. 'Send someone for the pathologist. Old Murdoch is on duty today. Get him to come and fetch the body. And bring that knife. We'll be showing it to the judge, all right.'

The words were like the tolling of some huge, discordant bell to Sherlock's ears. He watched in horror as Mycroft was taken by the shoulder and manoeuvred out of the Strangers Room, through the club room and into the hall. One of the constables took the knife gingerly by the handle and carried it away.

'Mister Crowe . . .' Sherlock started.

'No time,' Crowe snapped. 'Ah understand you're emotional. That's to be expected. Trouble is, we're to clear your brother's name and save him from jail then we need to move fast, and we need to move with complete precision and accuracy. Emotion, right now, will slow us down an' cloud our judgement. Do you understand what I'm saying?'

'Yes,' Sherlock breathed.

'Suppress whatever grief and shock you're feelin'. Imagine that you're wrappin' it up in a blanket, tyin' it tight and stowin' it in the back of your mind. Ah ain't askin' you to forget about it forever, just for now. You can retrieve those emotions later, when it's safe, an' wrap yourself in them for as long as you want. Just not *now*.'

'Yes. All right.' Sherlock closed his eyes and tried to do what Crowe was suggesting. He tried picturing his roiling mixture of emotions as a fiery ball hanging inside his mind, and then he tried to imagine a fireproof cloth as black as night wrapping itself round that fiery ball. Ropes and chains

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