New Holmes for Old

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Text of the e-book of the same Title. New original stories relating to Sherlock Holmes in his older age.

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Introduction

Given that an author may have 'shuffled off this or his own mortal coil', it behoves others to continue and append to their distribution of written matter to others but only, one hopes, in a sense, of respect. The fact that authors, now deprived of their apparent 'awareness of being aware', (that is consumed by the earth from which they came in the first place), are re-written by what are called 'script writers' or have an 'adapted by' appellation added to their already birth-right (or write) appellation then one must 'take it on board' as they say, that anyone else is fair game for the perpetuity of the original writer's creations. Thus do I make myself such a perpetrator.

Arthur Conan Doyle (later 'Sir', presumably because he tipped rather well to waiters (even if it was only his hat) and found the profligacy of his writing in those who could actually navigate his writings and was paid, as Charles Dickens was, by the amount of words he used, even to the detriment of plausability and comprehension) was, I believe as enigmatic a character as was his creation of Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson and all the other characters who fed his wallet with geld for his living. No disrespect here, as I personally have respect for all writers of stories who are not to the detriment of any man, woman or child unless they want to control me. I may, indeed, respect myself for the same reasons.

But Conan Doyle left a legacy; possibly unfortunate for him (but what is he to know now?) and his Holmes' stories leave much to other imaginations as his. These I offer in my own inimitable way.

Sherlock Holmes' characters, therefore, are 'vehicles'. These 'vehicles' may be driven by many people, as in a 'car pool'. I am yet another driver, good, bad or indifferent. If this were a car rally,then let it begin...

LATEST NEWS ON SHERLOCK HOLMES et al.

After many years and stories, Moriarty, now not-so-arty (in view of his age) was carefully and currently still considering new efforts to bring Holmes and the ever-present Watson to their knees 'as long as they shall live' in this unlikely literary marriage.

Suffering apparently from snow blindness, as it had been a hard snowy winter (and sun glasses were for sun not snow, if indeed they were available), he was awaiting alleviation from his dark predicament and hoping to avoid an indictment for not failing to lodge his tax return in a tax-collector's facial orifice. So, from his hospital bed at Moorfields Eye Hospital, (where he couldn't see eye-to-eye with anyone, neither them for him), he hatched both his plans and a gastric eructation so violent the other patients were not so blind that neither their aural appendages nor their nasal cavities could fail to appreciate it in the negative on both counts.

Now much older, the stories deliberated by the also aging diarist Dr.Watson (and the author of his and Holmes' stories), were wearing rather thin, as indeed was Holmes himself. Now looking more like Basil Rathbone than Jeremy Brett, he was aging and had difficulty looking through his magnifying lens at anything smaller than the lens itself, when he could find it. He had the same problem with some of his personal

descendents, especially in cold weather. Frequent micturition was also a problem his nether garments did not fail to notice, especially when unannounced.

His violin was now a mere fiddle; his rosin no longer stroked the horse hair of his bow and the cat-gut strings had almost ceased to mew. There was dirty work ahead and Holmes was more in his slippers than out of them. Concordant with this (and dischordant with his fiddle) was that incontinence of ideas as well as his bladder and his reasoning powers also loomed.

The enigmatic Dr.Watson, was (if one was there to hear him) rapidly and creakingly advancing towards his later years and was in no fit state to write much more of Holmes' infuriating delusions, denouments and deductions (especially for the odd few quid that Holmes dropped him occasionally, along with the odd fag or two). Ever the 'where did he come from, what sort of 'doctor' was he and where does he live (and possibly with whom)?', he was failing miserably in health and the ability to put plume to papier, as it were, or in this case wasn't. His series of 'Ask John' in the Northern Echo (the only paper to take notice of him)had failed to meet the requirements of the editor and instead he was soon rejected and reduced to continue writing for Holmes.

Holmes' landlady, also, was marching (without much gusto but a modicum of gutso and in funereal time signature) with arthritic lower limbs, towards a Zimmer frame and her geriatric phalangial digits were failing to make what was once edible fodder. She could still, however, with much passing of time and some reference to only the hands of the wooden cuckoo clock (occasioned by the said cuckoo's demise from wood-worm) and the waiting perseverance of any visitors to the Baker Street premises, answer the door and with a crooked smile (occasioned by her inability to maintain correct placement in her oral cavity of a set of dentures made years before) and also with an arthritic forefinger point up the stairs to Holmes' several-roomed domain.

Thus we find the remnants of Sherlock Holmes and the others still alive in a New Ageless.

And so, the stories continue...

Before these New Adventures into the apocolypse of Old Age are revealed, we discover at least two which preceeded the former narrative from the illustrious pen of our dear friend Dr. Watson in his not famous because they were lost, 'Lost Diaries'. They follow:

1. HOLMES AND THE FRENCH MAID

Holmes, himself unrested but with his pipe resting between his teeth, his violin resting quietly in its case, and the rosin of his bow hardening from not having much use lately, was sitting in his arm-chair contemplating the arrival of an au pair French Maid who would replace his housekeeper whilst she recovered from his many ministrations of verbal abuse that he foisted upon her in his erratic behaviours during his frequent 'unsolvable' but later solved cases and his imbibing of both wine and a not so secretive act of imbibing cocaine, waited impatiently.

Not the best of friends with the opposite gender, due to his apparent but perhaps unfounded proclivities regarding those of his same sex, his contemplations remained just those. He wriggled in his chair, not seeming to cope with the notion of a strange female at Baker Street, which, encumbered outside by a fog worse than the smoke from his ubiquitous pipe was capable from within, he found himself anxious.

Watson had not arrived to placate him in his misery and he was doubly anxious. Without Watson, he was a

genius without a diarist to proclaim such.

His wriggling in his arm-chair was cause for him to rise, recharge his pipe and continue his anxieties by pacing up and down the floor (without his trusty violin) until, quite suddenly, the door-bell rang.

Not having his usual house-keeper open the door for him, he struggled out of his smoking jacket and before conflagration ensued, retrieved his suit-jacket and descended carefully the stairs to the front door, which evinced the shadow of a personage beyond the frosted glass. In some trepidation, he opened the door to reveal a form exuding a fragrance that he found both enchanting and stimulating. Inviting the personage into the hall-way, he discovered to his delight that not only was the fragrance French but indeed the personage was Franch Made and to boot, a female of the opposite gender.

2. SHERLOCK HOLMES AND THE 'SUPERGRUB'

Baker Street, now devoid of bakers (who were obviously getting their oats from somewhere else except from Holmes' apartment), was again in the popular press. Headlines at the newspaper stand apparently proclaimed (according to Watson) and intoned in impressive Comic Sans MS and only obscurred by a wire mesh to prevent it from disappearing in a gust of reporters' wind down Baker Street that a new 'Supergrub' was raging its anti-disinfectant finger at Humanity:

'LATEST!
NEW SUPERGRUB
FOUND!'

Watson, had had his hat drawn down over his eyes against the drizzle and a drawn expression on his countenance, as he glimpsed the headline as he passed. The newspaper's vendor was growling an unintelligble 'Paper 'ere!' as he passed on his way to see his friend Sherlock Holmes and Watson's ears (covered by a poor imitation of Holmes' deer-stalker) benefitted its unintelligibility by not hearing it at all. Bereft of money and a carriage, he had had to walk and now, having seen what he thought the headlines indicated, did an 'about face' and returned to wherever it was that he actually lived.

Watson, still not recovered from his latest self ministrations of anti-bacterials due to what he believed was a 'cold' and without any success, was particularly concerned. Had he reached the end of his tether, cigarette packet and of his knowledge of medicine? Was he about to be devastated by this latest of Nature's demonic activities?

He had reached anxiously for his medical dictionary earlier to try to find a cure his 'cold' but it had offered no direct or indirect answers. Placebos were there none. What was the answer? After careful consideration, the answer had to become obvious; Sherlock Holmes and the imagination of his creator. He repeated his earlier mission of visiting Holmes and the seller of the common rag was still growling his earlier unintelligable and unheard retort: 'Paper 'ere!' as he passed by.

He approached the Holmes Baker Street rooms with trepidation, flat feet, the remains of his 'cold' and a persistent anxiety as his supply of Valium had reached proportions of absolute dearthity. Holmes would solve this mystery, he felt sure and a fleeting smile crossed his pallid countenance. Rapturously, and not without a modicum of zeal (and the appropriate strength of a reasonably young person) he rapped on the door and was greeted by a Doylian Mrs. Hudson who (from the late 'Upstairs, Downstairs'), having been mixing television series, answered the door.

Once opened, the door revealed an interior. The housekeeper, reminded by Watson's countenance from a picture in a local news-story which was not at all silubrious, quickly directed him to the rooms which Holmes had occupied for longer than his Series had run on television.

Climbing the stairs (for there was no option to descend them) he approached the door of his beloved Holmes and for which Holmes, desiring the diarist to continue interminably to note his words and deeds and was not wont to reject, he knocked.

Holmes, having been at odds with a particular set of notes he could not accomplish on his under-worked violin but much over-worked hypodermic, hasitly replaced both into their felt-lined cases, opened the door, and offered: 'Come.' which immediately evoked a stirring in the loins of his admirer and Watson entered.

'Holmes.' admired Watson.

'Watson.' replied Holmes, appreciating the admiration, quickly stached his pipe-tobacco into a plastic Tesco bag (a slight continuity problem) away from Watson's view, which was not difficult in view of the mess the room was in.

Having introduced each other to each other, Holmes, ever the occasional gentleman, observed that Watson was not seated and thus offered him a chair, which Watson took thankfully by the arms and placed elsewhere in the room but close enough to be heard.

Denying Watson's obvious age which was less than Holmes, Holmes asked; 'What is it, old chap?' He had very cleverly deduced that Watson was on edge, 'a man on the edge' and Watson edged closer.

'This Supergrub', Watson offered, 'I am worried about it.'

Holmes, still standing (even after several glasses of wine) and clutching his incendiary-challenged pipe, asked with erudite and brilliantly conceived confidence:

'Yes, Watson?'

'Holmes,' cried Watson on the brink of tears and insanity, 'I want you to solve this case.'

'Which case?' asked Holmes, valiantly looking for some possible leather recepticle possibly from Harrods (to add glamour to his phantasmagorical existence).

'The Supergrub, of course!' wailed Watson.

'Is it at a hospital near you?' asked Holmes in a minor mode of comiseration (the cocaine was beginning to wear off) and reliant on the fact that Watson was actually what he professed to be, a doctor or sorts, other than a scribbler of his diaries.

'Apparently so,' replied Watson, seemingly groping for a cigarette or tobacco that he did not have owing to his impecunity and hoping Holmes would relinquish his mean-mindedness and provide one or some.

Ever the sleuth, Holmes detected Watson's tobacco deprivation, relinquished his desire to hide from Watson his having a decent quantity of tobacco leaf, and offered him a cigarette from his full silver cigarette case. Watson took a white rice-papered tobacco filled cylinder and, with obvious arson in mind of the said object, ignited it from his own flint and petrol driven device and inhaled deeply, coughing as the smoke filled his already congested lungs.

The sight of Watson's obvious pleasured demeanour, now that he was puffing away like a Billy, excited him to comment: 'My dear Watson, I have nothing but a case-book full of unsolved crimes to pursue. However, I will pursue your case. The Supergrub it shall be.'

Watson was delighted and the amount of smoke delivered to the atmosphere from his cigarette and his lungs attested to this fact, as did the coughing fit that ensued.

Holmes was delighted as well. His pipe had ceased to function as he had not drawn upon it or coughed from it much for a short while and he eagerly re-filled it, having waited to see if Watson, as yet, still owned any tobacco or cigarettes of his own. Since the tobacco was not auto-combustible, he resourced a lucifer from a thin wooden-lined recepticle, stuck it against the side of the box and the ensuing conflagration resulted in the ignition of the match and the tobacco with a violent flame.

'Where do we go from here?' asked Watson, stubbing out the spent cigarette into what appeared to be an ash-tray but was in fact Holmes' deer-stalker hat which Holmes had carelessly left on the table.

'To the hospital, of course,' Holmes spat, both in terms of phlegm which had accumulated in his lungs and the fact that he had swallowed an obnoxious sluice of material from the stem of his pipe.

Watson was both amazed at Holmes' obvious want to help him and at the same time glad that Holmes would now be charged with the cost of the carriage to get them to the scene of the matter as he was in no financial state to do otherwise himself. This was of no matter to Holmes because he desperately needed Watson to recount, via the diaries, his latest Unsolveable Mystery which he had just solved and which had

concluded with the payment of enough cash to pay for his next month's rent and the possibility of his next book sale and a probable subsequent television series. He was also mindful of the fact that he had not asked Watson along at that particular time.

The hospital was shrouded in mystery and fog (as is usual in these stories and especially television series). Most of the ex-patients, due to the ministrations of the practioners of medicine therein, were shrouded in shrouds, with more to follow. A quiet gloom was settled upon the imposing building and only the cries of the helpless patients carried upon the stagnant and desperate air. Large birds of prey dirged for sustenance as they dropped quietly onto the roof-tops in the vain hope of a possible meal. None, in the hospital, at that time, gave any notice to these avian derigibles.

Secretly, down below in one of the Wards, a virtual prison of non-comfortable slumber furniture, patients were attended mostly by females wearing garments that disposed them as a form of a caring person and attended by those indisposed to normal community work. The Supergrub had apparently reared its apparent ugly form at least on only one personage. It was, however, born. The Supergrub had arrived. The nurses arrived at a girl's bed...

Her name was Elsie. She worked as a kitchen maid cum-house-maid for a male chauvanist who treated her with occasional unkind words and Chanel Number 5. Named by her mother as Elise, she had, however, frequented the East End of London so much that she had to change her name otherwise lose her status as a wanton and want-in. She realised that 'Elise' was too 'posh'. Now, she was an impatient patient at the hospital and the Supergrub had taken her down but she was unable to commit to its demands although she wanted it so badly.

When Holmes and Watson arrived at her bedside, she merely turned to them and announced: 'Get away you buggers, leave me alone!'

The enigmatic nature of the remark and the use of the expletive annoyed both Holmes and Watson and what remained of their bedside manner in respect of their respect for her unsavoury condition in visiting her in the first place, disappeared. Holmes, after all, was merely trying to establish how Elsie had became the first person to be smitten by the Supergrub. It was obvious that Elsie was not going to help them but Holmes did manage to evince the patron of her employment by quickly, briefly and quietly disguising himself in a nurse's uniform. The address was hastily scribbled on Watson's iconic pad and with sweeping gestures of: 'Let's get out of here!' and flying coat-tails, they departed the depressing ward and emerged into the drizzling sunshine and into the busy London Road.

Their carriage awaited and they climbed in, buckled their coats and hastened to the address of the proprietor of Elsie's employment.

It turned out to be yet another dingey establishment but at least the tenant was at home and harkened to the knocks upon the door. Holmes was still intoning to Watson when a rat-faced man opened it and noting the eloquence of Holmes' speech and his rather nifty attire and demeanor asked what it was they wanted.

'Not on the doorstep,' offered Holmes and the creature invited them in.

'I,' said Holmes helpfully, 'am Sherlock Holmes. You may have heard of me. This', he said, pointing to Watson, 'is Watson, my friend, diarist and to boot (which he did quite often) a doctor.'

'Glad to meet you, Mr. Holmes and Dr.Watson,' he replied, extending a thin hand to Holmes in recognition of Holmes' obvious celebrity status and the picture of him on the latest 'Cat's Whisker Times'.

'I believe,' Holmes remarked cathedrally, spreading the fingers of two hands together in imitation of a church spire and looking not a little self-satisfied , 'that you have in your employment one Elsie Gormless and one who has been struck down by an alleged Supergrub and is at present in the London Hospital in poor condition.'

Said the creature: 'That is interesting, given her failure to turn up for work this day. She did, however, now you mention it, mention something about her mother the other day. For that information, I am grateful. Now, please, if you can find a chair, be seated.'

Both Holmes and Watson, not of the unwashed, regarded the delapidated furniture and decided that, having moved a number of unexplainable items from a sofa, they could sit down, which they did.

'My name is Gregor Swannaroundabit,' offered rat-face. 'Elsie does a bit of light house-work for me. Mostly on the quiet as I do not like noise and she does not want others to know of her employment, given that she is

also paid by the Social Services in view of her pension for Incapacity for Work , if you understand my meaning.' With this elucidation of Elsie's status, he tapped the side of his nose and winked a crooked eye or crookedly winked an eye.

'Do you know how she came to be involved with a Supergrub?' queried Watson, who had been franticly writing everything down between licking his pencil point to get it to operate properly and legibly upon the pages of his note-book and looking not a little unclosely at the leaves of paper as he wrote.

'No,' offered Gregor, 'I don't. She left yesterday at about exactly 11.30 in the morning as she said she had to go and see about her mother, who was apparently in local custody for being 'over the limit' wheeling her latest but not last child around in a pram. She had apparently found a penny and went for a 'quick one' at the local hostelry. Gin apparently sends her off. Elsie was probably able to bribe the coppers...sorry police... by using her wiles I assume and a quick flash of a rather fine breast, I imagine...'

It was here that Holmes interrupted these revelations. as the mention of a 'fine' female mammary gland had awakened in him the exposing of perhaps more of the same, perhaps the revealing of two of these female accoutrements.

'So where,' asked Holmes, 'do you think she picked up a Supergrub?' Already in his mind he suspected in his inimitable and unimitatable way the answer but needed it to confirm his suspicions.

'Well,' replied Gregor, 'Perhaps it was at the police station.'

Holmes positively glowed inside, whilst Watson, ever the detectively challenged, could only stare ahead of him but as it was at the sight of Gregor cracking open a bottle of Stout with his blackened teeth (what remained of them), he turned quickly away before feeling the need to unload the contents of his stomach onto the threadbare carpet and awaited the erudition of the genius Holmes.

'Aha!', expostulated Holmes, quickly. 'I grasp the notion that indeed, that Elsie did not go to the police station to see about her mother but that she went there to tell them of your activities that she had seen whilst in your employment. She went there, in fact to 'grass' upon you!'

Gregor stood his full five feet two (trying to make it five feet three), and glaring at Holmes he confirmed Holmes' suspicions that this man was the perpetrator of various clandestine misdemeanors and activities as he had evinced by the unexplainable items he and Watson had removed from the sofa (and not before Homes had run his experienced eye over these items and after which, they sat down) and was according to Holmes' interpretation of the contents, probably liable for a long sourjourn in a tiny, damp cell below the grounds of Pentonville Prison.

From all this, Holmes had deduced, and which was later reproduced and reduced via the contents to Watson's diary, that upon the leaving of Scotland Yard and the kind policeman who managed to stache Elsie's 'fine breast' back into her blouse and appeared later with a smile on his face, Elsie had in fact been struck not with any Supergrub, but was now struck by a dilemma because she was now to become a 'SuperGrass' and available to the police for the forseeable future. Her appearence in the hospital was due to her decent into the vapours since she was not able to realise this new occupation because of her association with Gregor, her current beau and the one to whom she owed a few more favours, before she could accomplish a new and more lucrative occupation in the company of those who might look after her welfare better than the Welfare State had already, including the 'kind policeman'.

In retrospect and because this author now knows the ending, Holmes had also noticed that Watson was having problems with writing all the previous down in his notebook and knowing Watson's often shortsighted outlook, was convinced that he was requiring new spectacles and probably a hearing aid as well, for all he knew.

In the event, apparently, Watson, in his endeavours to read the newspaper headlines on the bill-board without his new quadrifocal lenses had evidently misread the headlines of the paper mistaking 'Supergrub' for 'Supergrass'.

It is a function of 'older age' that we remember the past more than the present. For example, we can remember when we couldn't find father's car keys when we were seven years old and wanted desperately to drive his 4000Z BMW at 240 miles per hour down the local roads to Southend-on-Sea perhaps but can not, for the life of you now, remember where you put them down a couple of minutes ago as you are now sixty-odd years old.

3. THE TALE OF THE LOST KEYS

Holmes, with a steadily weeping left eye but occluding his sight from both occular organs was desperate. How could he not find his eye-glasses when he needed them? His foot had snapped an already broken pipe on the floor, for he was ever the epitome of a disastrous mess which he had accumulated over the years and had still failed to rectify. In a word (or phrase, in this case) he was living in a 'complete mess'.

He was living in this mess because he had never been in the army and had no notion as to what a mess was. Then, in his inimitable way, even now, stumbled onto something: his spectacles. Though appearing to his blurred vision as complete, when he managed to find his nose to put them upon, the visual universe disintegrated into a number of crystaline fragmented features that resembled opaque crazy-paving that his presipitous mind might have rendered a complete picture when younger but now, was dissolved into similar fragments of any reality that might once have been.

Unthwarted by this, however, he continued looking for the keys he so needed to open the safe where he kept his hypodermic. Earlier stories/series revealed that he kept the device in a drawer but later he was impelled (and imperilled) to keep it under safe lock and key, if you get the health and safety drift.

A not-so-sudden (to his failing hearing) knock on the door sounded. Setting his timer by the adventurous notion of cocking his eye to one side to get a clearer picture of the hands through a piece of broken frosted glass that was once a perfectly formed piece of lens, he waited for his house-keeper to open the door.

Eventually, that same day, the door was opened to reveal a perfectly formed decrepit Watson, who, upon seeing the house-keeper and remembering perfectly his earlier bed-side manner of a by-gone age, exclaimed: 'Hello!' to which the house-keeper, also remembering a past long gone, and belying the dislike of the man, said: 'Come in.'

Watson, almost deaf, but forever trying to be a gentleman, did so. He evaded her still-rudimentary blood-shot eyes and, remembering the past so well, as we have previously encountered, he climbed the stairs to Holmes' rooms where, in recognition of familiar practices, he knocked upon the now de-varnished (and unremembering) wood of the door.

A dark-grey stick accompanied Homes (he was not yet registered blind) to the crystaline door and he opened it, revealing the geriatric charms of his friend for so many aeons, stories, films, television series and all else that now follows celebrity status.

'Watson, dear chap,' he offered, but Watson, devoid of an aide to his hearing (but hoping a young one would appear wearing nothing but a battery) responded not. His acoustic propensities lay only in the maximum from the volume control of a radio or a hearing aid of which he had neither.

Holmes winced. He knew nothing of the meaning of the word but he was not the writer of this story. 'What was the key to Watson's hearing?' he heard himself say. 'How can I get him to hear the latest of the results of my latest Unsolvable Mystery? What was my last Unsolvable Mystery?'

Suffer the reader no longer. The keys were found. They were on the old piano, both black and white which suffered the same out-of-tuneness as this story.

Holmes, the continuing stories...

4. THE SIGHTING OF HOLMES AND THE HEARING OF WATSON

Fortuitous it is, that our dear Dr. Watson had a sudden writer's inverted relapse into the present world. It is from his latest pen (A new Waterman with ink flowing around a tiny sphere and finding its way onto paper via the pressure from any semi-lucid creature with a knowledge of the written language spoken by his peers, mentors and/or teachers and even Holmes himself).

Watson had found the ball-point pen, if not the point of the stories he was revealing by its frantic movements across the pages of his 'soon-to-be' diaries of his esteemed friend, Holmes. Even the name 'Holmes', had sharpened his pencil more than once.

No more the frantic scrabbling for a pencil sharpener. No more the casual depositing of shredded wood shavings upon the floor in a frantic effort to scribble Holmes' erudite words (most of which he could not spell).

No more the erasure with a lump of rubber of uninitiated compound nouns and mis-spelled weird Victorian names conjured by the author of both Watson and Holmes. He simply scratched through them and continued writing.

Watson had now also invested (by way of a small legacy from a recently very faded away aunt he never knew) in a typewriter of which he was in the process of deciphering the quaint layout of the qwertyuiop. With both these tools, he would eventually and whilst his ill-health got worse, be able to recount more of Holmes' inevitable stories if only he could hear them.

Holmes was, at this time, at least, worse off than Watson. His visit to an occultist was not a happy one. Almost unable to see the chart presented to him in the darkened room, he was thus not able to elucidate even the largest of the letters presented to him. It was only when the optician moved most of the furniture in the room to allow Holmes to sit much closer to the boxed and illuminated letters (and cranked up the wattage of the lamps) that he was able to circumnavigate them and 'home in' on the capital 'E' at the very top and the largest letter available.

'E', he squirmed, the optical mechanical device that was thrust onto his face was trying to find its own way down his nasal phalanx towards his mouth. The appropriate lens for this preceeding revelation had popped out of the frame but not before the optician had not popped out for a quick hugging of a brandy bottle from which he took a quick and not unimaginably small refreshment for his nerves.

Upon his returning, Holmes was still searching for the elusive 20/20 (as far as he was concerned, at least) and visionary lens, which, like his feet, was and were firmly planted on the floor with the lens underneath.

In the event, his prescription for lenses to cope with his failing occular senses, would have made a nonsense of the Mount Palamar two hundred inch Telescope, or even Loewenhoerk's first microscope. His once all-seeing and keen eyesight was now reduced to a cane only slightly darker than white.

Moriarty, meanwhile, having given up the recumbrance of his bed at the Moorfield's Eye Hospital and given up his 'eyeing' of several of the prettier nurses, was determined to get back to his lodgings, both at the bank and his residence. He was determined not to be a Changed Man as he got closer to the reaper of grim fame. He was determined not to shuffle off from any coils, especially those electrical ones that might be accommodated to remove Holmes and Watson from the planet, whatever their declining proclivities and youth.

Moriarty, ever the arch fiend, thus returned to his lodgings under the arches of London Railway.co.uk.

As he made his way through the inevitable mist and fog (it was the Summer season) he was already, having gestated the notion of an Electric Finale, devising a means of ridding himself of his association with Holmes and Watson so that he could get on with his life. His constant appearance in Holmes stories had annoyed him and he wanted out.

Electricity is a strange thing. It can be both positive and negative. Moriarty's vision of Holmes and Watson

was just that, positively negative or even negatively positive. He had not yet worked out the connotation of such a theory. He did deduce, however, that Watson was determined to obtain an aid to his failing hearing faculties of some kind and that Holmes was in desperate need of a pair of spectacles capable of some semblence of vision before his total loss of it was totally apparent to all and for which a certain trained breed of Labradors were advertised.

He had come upon the word 'prosthetics' during a stay at the London Hospital when he had earlier fractured his knee-cap cow-towing to a government official because he had not paid the final bill for candle-grease at his last lodgings. This resulted in his embarkation onto the local library (a large van parked close by) to research the strange word. Having absorbed the works of an Encylopaedia of Knowledge, Expert Edition, he discovered that the word referred to the aiding of declining physical and sensual apparatus and that these were devices for disposing aid to those so indisposed by them.

Thus began Mory's Hearing and Visual /Occular Company (or H.A.V.O.C.) which he wanted to reek.

At first in small rooms next to where he was living and singing 'Under the Arches', his solo company and himself, expanded (in girth and profit) and he was able to extend his operations (though not legal surgery) into a premises not far distant from the Holmes' (and occasionally Watson's) rooms.

Holmes, now desperate for eyes (or even one) to see clearly with, observed (with difficulty, of course) this new establishment and was wont to try the efficacy and its products. He intoned the same to Watson who never seemed to have anywhere else to live, eat, or smoke anything that was his. The fact he had none, was not a deception for Holmes. However, the matter arises; Holmes and Watson decided together, with Holmes's permision, to visit the establishment to find out what was the matter, both of hearing device and any spectacles. Of the hearing device and the spectacles that remained are the continuance of this story in yet another paragraph of this missive.

Moriarty was no idiot. He was the idiot. Not Dostoyevski's but still the idiot. He had arranged for a male assistant because he knew that at least Holmes was not of a feminist nature and he was unsure about Watson. He, himself, that is, Moriarty, was never in evidence (except in a court of law) at his establishment.

Both Holmes and Watson had already decided that they would not even tell each other of the respective problems that they had but both knew of them; they were not new to either. Although they went inevitably together, they appeared to the assistants as having arrived both at the same time but separately.

Eventually, they both received their 'prosthetics', Holmes with a rather spiffy pair of self-adjusting multifocal spectacles powered by a tiny but powerful battery which Moriarty had had designed and that, under the right circumstances could emit a frightful current to the brain.

Watson, on the other ear, had a small earpiece connected to a powerful receiver and battery pack which he would have to wear under his waistcoat. It was capable of nearly 150 decibels at its loudest which should, again under the right circumstances, clearly blow Watson's mind away and certainly his rather new and dapper toupee.

So the die (or dying) was cast and Moriarty needed only to activate the devices at his leisure and pleasure as he had ensured that they could both be activated remotely.

However, it was not Moriarty's time and/or luck, which were both challenged by the events following his later activation of his remote device.

As far as Holmes was concerned, it actually had the effect opposite of the requirements of its progenator Moriarty; that of electro-convulsive shock therapy and had brought back to his brain some semblence of its former deductive, constructive and productive, self. Therefore, as far as Moriarty was concerned, his Holmes project, for now at least, had backfired, and was not at all destructive but at the same time instructive. Although the pure white cane and the possibility of a guide dog (although he would rather have had the scout version) loomed, he was into better spirits in more ways than one.

For Watson, in the event also, the manufacturer's hearing aid failed to match Moriarty's requirements and in fact worked in the opposite direction, thus impelling his ear-drums to operate in more than perfect silence and

Watson to seek the next best thing (and much less expensive) which was a hearing trumpet. However, this made listening to Holmes' relaying (with new vigour) his interminable stories and typing the results, (now slightly more than five words per minute after a great deal of practice and loss of his fingernails), to say the least, difficult.

5. THE CASE OF THE NORTY NIGHTIE

For once, 221b was devoid of the atmospheric conditions so beloved of film-makers reproducing the Victorian Era; of apparent fog, drizzle, damp and the odour (in Holmesian literature) of Victorian London, and of Moriarty, who had sunk beneath his cloud of greying hair and ever present clouds of despair occasioned by his inability to further perpetrate the demise of his arch-enemies, Holmes and Watson and the creature who land-ladied for them.

In Holmes' rooms, a sun, as glazed as his vision without his spectacles and the spectacles of his latest stories, (of which there were none), shone through the fading curtains which had not been replaced for more years than anyone could remember. Even the author of this particular narrative can not remember if indeed the curtains were ever mentioned in Holmes' stories. No matter.

Holmes, after having completed his inspection (by way of what little sight he had remaining) of the proceeds of a letter and his usual injection of cocaine, was not merely reminiscing on his past achievements but was remonstrating with himself for the fact that he had not had a 'Case of...'. a 'Tale of...' or 'An Affair of...'for some long time and it was due time that something happened in that respect, if it had any of its own. Both the selling of his stories and television series had fallen recently to levels that could only bring about the demise of his income and his standing, which was becoming ever difficult due to his age and and his frequent trips to the decanter in a short space of time. After all, there were payments to be made to the traders, his landlady and Watson who was so impecunious that he had become almost a tramp, at least in the sight of those who sighted him. Holmes deferred an opinion as he still required Watson to write his stories down and forgave the shredded trouser bottoms and faded plimsoles. Holmes, of course, as we know, was unable to write because he could only read observations. The secret is out.

As usual, Watson was on his way to Baker Street (courtesy of Billy Joel as usual). And no, it was a pleasant day for a change and allowed Watson's shredded trouser bottoms a chance to dry out, as did his plimsoles; those as previously mentioned in the above paragraph.

He approached the door of Holmes residence as usual...the door opened (by Holmes' even more decrepit landlady than usual)...shown upstairs...and so on. Watson and the reader have been here many times...

Inveigled into sitting, since Holmes could not bear the site of Watson's bare ankles as his holes had less sock than previously, Watson attempted to recline in a proffered chair but was mistaken in the notion that it had a back to it, (which had demised to the floor upon his leaning on it, through a more than moderate infection of woodworm) and fell gluteus maximus over mammary gland onto the carpet. Recovering quickly (for his age) he attempted the manouvre again and was successful in planting aforesaid gluteus maximus into a position on the chair where the same result would not reccur.

Having taken a deep breath after writing the above, the author will now proceed to enable the reader to gain some sanity and after a short and worthwhile break may return to this narrative at any time suitable.

Our out-patients from any sort of 'Rest Home', 'Old People's Home', 'Hospice for the Elderly', Holmes and Watson, were now able (in an ensuing peace) to accommodate their respective occular and auracular devices to the extent where they could both see and hear each other. Whether they were tired of the same scenario after all the years they had been thrust together by their creator, is of no import.

'Holmes.' offered Watson

'Watson.' applied Holmes to this introduction, though none was really necessary as they both knew each

other quite well.

Thus they were engaged in conversation (of sorts) and an amicable friendship as long as their stories are written and the author co-operates.

'I have received a letter', went on Holmes, 'a letter calling for our services in a matter of some importance.'

'Aha!' replied Watson a pleasant grin on his countenance. 'I knew one would arrive soon, it has been so long.'

'Quite.' Holmes offered with brevity. 'It comes with a piece of material which I can only assume, having never seen one, from a garment worn by a female before retiring to her slumbers. It is of black silk with some fine herring-bone lace, obviously expensive. It is, however, not enough to get you excited, especially at your age.'

Watson's brief encounter with a grin, left for pastures new. However, he was a little excited at the prospect of perhaps a sheckle or two for his possible peregrinations with Holmes and the possibility of getting in some more typing practice, for he had begun to enjoy this new-found activity.

'Where to next?' asked Watson.

'Well', replied Holmes, the sight of Watson's shoes and lack of sock, devaluing rapidly and the ensuing odour from both, 'to the nearest Department Store to acquire some new podal accoutrements for your lower ankles, I think. And hoping for a positively superbe outcome monetarily from our lastest adventure, I will entrepreneur the cost.'

Watson, aware of his sad feat of endeavouring to cover his feet from sight, was delighted. His World was turned anew upon the excitement of a New Adventure, Tale or Story, although an 'Affair' was probably out of the question at this time. He was delighted also by his apparent elevation to a place of purchase of said items and from a more luxurious emporium that the local charity shop. His inner self wept with joy.

Holmes, with ever the need to 'get on with it' rose from his own chair and proceeded to dress for travel.

Needless to bore the reader the accomplishments of their sourjourn to the Department Store, they managed to find suitable materials for the more savoury appeal of Watson's lower appendages.

Next on their agenda, was a trip to the village of Upper Lower Norty, which, in the event of a later television series will probably be depicted as a large mansion with a 4 litre blown Bentley parked upon the crunchy gravel outside, so that both would be in the camera's eye, as it were. In fact, it was a small, rather delapidated cottage with moss, rather than ivy, covering the exterior.

That being said, the owner was a delightful and cheery female who invoked feelings in Holmes that he had never recognised before but bade him to be positively charming to her.

After the usual bon homi introductions and the inevitable 'she invited them in' scenario, they accomplished much of this in short time and were soon sitting in her front room with the beautiful mid-day sun shining through the clear and clean leaded-light windows upon a rather threadbare but bearable rug. It was almost like Baker Street in the afternoon of a summer's day with a venal quantity of cocaine swimming in the afternoon blood.

'It's my 'nightie'', she wailed after offering them a cup of tea and scones smothered in butter and strawberry jam which she had had the forsight to make herself before their arrival. 'It was stolen from me and shredded into pieces and a bit at a time was placed before me, every time I turned around. The thief apparently has some access to my place of residence. I can't understand it. But that is how I was able to send a piece to you.'

Holmes (not cut up by this revelation) appeared to be staring into space and indeed he was. Watson, on the other hand, who was intrigued with all this new material was carefully writing it down on his iconic pad for later transference via his typewriter to yet another pad of paper for later publication. The cup of tea and the scones were left untouched; this was his real bread and butter. He awaited Holmes' interpretation of this data.

Inevitably, it came.

'Was anything else taken?' he asked, sensibly.

'Indeed not', she replied, 'Just the 'nightie'.'

Happenchance, a small white dog appeared and manufactured its way to Watson's new shoes and began to imbibe the new smell into its nostrils and began to chew at them, at which point, Watson, although

endeavouring to keep writing, struggled to resist so that his scribblings went quite astray, much as the dog. Holmes was not adverse to recognising the implications of a minor dog to understand what its implication might be for the 'nightie' referred to in this narrative.

'How long', he asked, 'have you had this creature ?' (referring, of course to the canine)

'Not long,' she replied.

'Was it', again asked Holmes, 'before or after you bought the 'nightie'?'

'Well, perhaps before, I do not know', she said, separating the words 'do not' so as not to appear 'common'.

'I therefore deduce', said Holmes with his usual flair for the inevitable, 'That it was the dog which chewed your 'nightie' and that in fact it was never stolen but rather disassembled into ragged parts which it used for its bedding and which I observed, as is my wont, from the moment I entered your charming cottage.'

6. HOLMES AND THE 'FISHER OF MEN'

Holmes, by all accounts, (including those at his bank) but more specifically his lack of apparent penchant for the religious, had heard only of the 'Fisher of Men' from his brief sourjourns into establishments supposedly built for the purpose and prepared for the pursuance of religious doctrines and an apparent hope of some salvation/resurrection (whatever they were) before a final Apocolypse of the creature Man as part of his heritage into the unknown and brought about by the peregrinations of a quadruple of equestrians who would perpetrate the matter. Other than that, he had only delved into the Bible, (an apparent fictional novel written by mostly unseen and unheard of scribes writing, as Watson had done, fictional diaries of fictional people on rare occasions and over the centuries), for the odd word or phrase that would trigger his fortuitous (given Watson and his novel and story revenus) and profound knowledge of the English language as a possible scenario, for his next adventure attributed to an historical but actual figure know as Arthur to his friends and Mr. Doyle to his bank manager.

The biblical version of this enigmatic and unrealistic personage (apparently a 'fisher of men') was rampant on the scene of a great deal of his enquiries into men's souls yet he still failed to understand the notion of what this personage was, in fact in 'fishing for men' doing and for what reason. Of reason, his reasonable mind could only conjecture.

However, the 'fisher of men's' 'birthday' was apparently due tomorrow.

Holmes drew the curtains at Baker Street and the gas-lamp shone on the multicoloured decorations that Watson and he had so diligently hung around the rooms. A tree, however, was not to be found at this late hour and the late thinking of purchasing such a device and for whatever inexplicable reason would one want a tree in the house in the first place? An Advent calendar hung crookedly on the wall, neither he, nor Watson understoud what it meant at all and the little doors revealing whatever was underneath, were closed.

'Watson,' began Holmes, his only interest in cracking open a new bottle of sherry.

'Holmes,' interuptedly replied Watson, his new brogues reflecting the light from the open fire and the result of his payment for the 'Norty Nightie' Affair.

'Watson,' Holmes repeated, hoping not to be interrupted this time. 'I am looking for the 'fisher of men.' It is to be our greatest challenge, barring Moriarty, of course. 'I am still unsure how the word is spelled, 'fisher' or 'fissure'. The sound is the same but I am unsure if the meaning is.'

The statement was as enigmatic as its character. Watson, sipping at the glass of sherry proffered by Holmes and feeling the immediate glow of its alchololic content, responded:

'Holmes, the churchman at St. Beadles. He is the man to see.'

'Does he fish?' asked Holmes, wonderingly. 'Does he cast his eye or his rod over his flock and hope to gather them to his...?'

Here he left off. The notion of a fisherman and a shepherd, rolled into one was enough for any man, let alone Holmes. vicars, and even the 'Fisherman Himself' seemed to have fish and lamb on their minds let alone their plates and could not distinguish between them. Certainly they were environmentalists, if nothing else.

His boggled mind was assuaged by his swallowing a quantity of sherry too quickly, that left some tears in his eyes for a few minutes afterwards.

Watson could not bring himself to reply. He managed to draw a cigarette from his cigarette-case and, after incendiarising the tip began to puff adequately to satisfy his immediate needs. Holmes immediate needs were to reconcile the fisherman/shepherd's incongruous dichotomy.

After some consideration and a considerable amount more of the sherry (which, getting lower and lower in the decanter was contemplating its own apocolypse) Holmes started to question himself.

For this, Watson was grateful; the unfumigating cylindrical composition of tobacco and the results of the pressing of grapes into a beverage of unsurpassed delicacy, were beginning to make him feel tired, if not a little squiffy.

Holmes, on the other hand, continued his private ventures into the unknown until he exploded with vociferic vehemency:

'Watson, I've got it!'

'You have?' offered Watson, his consciousness from being partially inebriated and his hearing-aid battery failing him.

Holmes had grabbed the latest edition of the Bible, and turning with a not but a similarity to déja vu, to the correct page, had seemingly found the answer.

He immediately called in his landlady from downstairs, charged a glass with an 'over the limit' measure for her and upon her later arrival, he held out a glass to her and Watson and with Noelist grace:

'Watson! Mrs. Hudson!' he exclaimed, 'It says here that: 'Thy rod and thy staff shall comfort me...".

7. THE AFFAIR OF HOLMES AFFAIR

*

With Watson's age approaching more towards his auto coil-shuffling, the demise of his own relatives in the now ghoulish shapes of very faded aunts and whose subsequent demise left him being the beneficiant beneficiary of some very fortunate cash, he had decided to take a break from his Pitman's Typing Course and was luxuriating in the splendours of Leigh-on-Sea, at the Grander Hotel, somewhere on the coast of Essex. A helpful Peter Boat Inn and within the smell of cockles and winkles, which were not his favourite sea-food but nevertheless surprised his palate by being rather nice, was a little distance away.

Back in Baker Street, Holmes was less 'cockling and winkling' and rather more with 'cocking and winking' his eye at the letter he was reading by the fortuitous deliverance of yet another missive from the author of a previous message regarding her shredded nightie...

It was here that the affair began to unveil. as it were.

**

Holmes, his lower appendages failing him, fell (happily for his readers) into the arm-chair which had been the seat of so many of his telling tales to his somewhat avenging angel Watson, who sadly at this moment was not available for comment or scribbling.

'How can Watson be so insignificant as to disappear on a holiday, when perhaps our greatest challenge is yet to become another novel?'

The rhetorical question remained unanswered, as did the door-bell. He needn't have worried. Yet another purveyor of religious material came and went, leaving nothing but a 'Watchtower' magazine to cover their persistent tracks.

Nevertheless, he indulged in the reading of a letter recently received but being of a somewhat cramped and literate style was disposed to re-read and re-read it, spectacles permitting and given the heat from the open fire which caused the bridge of said spectacles to slip down his nose. He read, somewhat blurredly:

'Dear Mr. Holmes,

I thank you for solving the case of the Norty Nightie, for me. I do however have another problem with which I would like to discuss with you.'

It was signed: Edith True

Holmes, not averse to the wiles of women, and though doubting their actual charms apart from bodily accoutrements no one with any sort of reasonable mind could not comprehend as such, was aghast. He was also agape and indeed stultified, that her response to his enigmatic solving of her case should result in a return to her moss-covered but clean premises.

Apparently, after the publication detailing the mystery, Edith True had had a call from BBC 9, that because of her famous guest, her house was in line for a 'Make over' programme they were planning. At this time it had not been instigated, hence the moss was still in place.

Anyway, of late, his landlady had failed miserable to apply the Hoover to his carpets and was at this moment somewhere else doing something for some-one else about which he had no knowledge and he was left in the dust, so to speak.

Mind you, he had only received a simple letter. Where was Mycroft? Even Holmes' brilliance was insignificant to that of his elder brother. Brother? He was a bother to be sure, without the 'r'. It was certainly 'go it alone' time and Holmes was not averse to that, merely adverse.

Holmes contemplated travel without his diarist. How could he record this latest venture? Was this an Adventure, or a Miss-adventure? He was unsure but with a helpful infusion from his hypodermic, he grasped the bull by the horns and descended into trying to grab a handful of dilemmas.

***

Upper Lower Norty seemed the same as when he and Watson had previously arrived. The snow was gone where it should have been. The flowers dead where they were once alive and birds did not sing when they did previously. The moss was ever greener, as was his knowledge of the fair gender.

The door opened upon his knock as if by remote control but that was in the hands of the occupier, who, having lavishly coated her visage with more than a modicum of facial enhancement, welcomed him in. Holmes was enchanted by her appearance. Whether Older Age had mellowed him or melodied him is open to question and interpretation. Nevertheless, his demeanor betruthed his feelings.

'Hello, again.' he intoned with a depth of feeling unknown in many of his stories.

He was remembering his boyish childhood and his trying to grasp the rudiments of 'chatting up a bird'. His only success in this was determining that other chaps were getting it, whilst he had to remain deciding when or where they were but never achieving the same level of competence as they did; hence his dislike of women, in particular. Maybe Mycroft was right. Maybe the morning 'tent game' was sufficient at his Public School and for anyone else not congruent with the facts of boy-girl relationships.

Be that as it may, here was Holmes in the presence of a rather charming lady. It was a new experience and he was rather glad that Watson was not around to experience it with him.

****

'Ms. True,' he offered, 'How may I help you?'

He was guided to a chair into which he sat, his walking cane by his side.

'Please call me Edith.' she replied, applying her hands to the cushion behind Holmes' neck in an effort to assuage his obvious discomfort at having four cushions on a small arm-chair.

'Then,' returned Holmes to his self-initiated introduction, 'I shall call you Edith.' However, this being totally out of character at this time, he retracted this and said: 'No. I shall call you Miss True, as in business I like to stick to those matters alone. I hope you will not mistrue this change of appellation.'

'Indeed, not, Mr. Holmes,' she replied, a smile gliding across her enchantingly camouflaged lips. 'I, indeed,

also like to stick to the matter in hand. By the way, would you like coffee, or tea, or perhaps a little sherry?'

Holmes winced in the half of the chair he was allowed to occupy, the cushions having obviously been there for a long time and were no about to move home. The thought of 'coffee' or 'tea' slightly nauseated him, however the thought of a 'little sherry' was appealing enough except for the quantity offered. However, he had, as was his wont, espied a rather large decanter full of the stuff and deduced that he could always refill his glass given his hostess' obvious thrill at having him there in the first place and hoping it wouldn't be the last.

'A little sherry, my dear, thank you,' he responded with adequate charm.

His glass in his hand he offered once more his initial proffered question:

'How may I help you?'

*****

Edith True had once been a school-teacher but now, in the run-up to her sixties, had belayed (an appropriate word in view of her father's skill in the dockyards and his nautical proclivities and language) any notion of continuing this occupation and many of her pupils regarded the fact of her early resignation as a sign that not all things were wrong with the world. Although she had taught in the tortuous torture of what was to become Inner London, she regarded 'living in the

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