

THE UNPUBLISHED CASES OF
**SHERLOCK
HOLMES**

BOOK 1



THE RIDDLE OF
GLENMORE CASTLE

TORSTEN NICODEMUS

AKTIOKRAT



PUBLISHING

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Note

Sherlock Holmes is a literary character created by

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle.

This work is based on his public domain writings and is intended as an original work of fiction that respectfully continues the world of the original stories.

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Welcome to the Highlands

This sample contains Chapters 1 and 8 from the novel in their entirety. Join Holmes and Watson on their journey to Glenmore Castle and experience not only the beginning of a case that neither of them will ever forget, but also the thrilling continuation of their adventures in the mysterious Scottish Highlands.

Chapter One

An Evening in Baker Street

It was already late in the afternoon when I mounted the steps of Baker Street, weary in both body and spirit, and with an appetite that had long since ceased to be patient. A professional visit to an old friend had proved a welcome interruption to the routine of my practice, yet it had occupied far more of the day than I had intended. I desired nothing more than a substantial dinner and the quiet comfort of our familiar rooms.

I had scarcely crossed the threshold when Mrs. Hudson appeared in the hall. She wore a freshly starched apron, and there lingered about her that contented smile which proclaimed she had only moments before left the kitchen.

“Ah, Mrs. Hudson!” I cried, laying aside my hat and overcoat. “Pray tell me, what delights await us this evening? I believe I could do justice to a banquet.”

The good lady placed her hands upon her hips and laughed softly.

“Indeed, Dr. Watson, your arrival is most timely. Have no fear—I know perfectly well what pleases your palate. I think I may safely

promise that one of your favourite dishes awaits you.”

“Indeed?” I exclaimed eagerly. “And what might that be?”

“Patience, Doctor—patience,” she replied with an amused smile.

“You shall discover soon enough. We are merely waiting for Mr. Holmes to return before I serve dinner. Until then, you must exercise a little restraint.”

I sighed with exaggerated resignation, which only provoked another quiet laugh from our worthy landlady before she returned briskly to her culinary duties.

For my own part, I made my way upstairs to our sitting-room, where the familiar armchairs, the untidy piles of newspapers, and the unmistakable fragrance of Holmes’s tobacco welcomed me home.

There I settled into my customary chair, glanced at the clock upon the mantelpiece, and listened to the gentle crackling of the fire.

Holmes, however, failed to appear.

Half an hour passed. Then another.

My stomach protested ever more insistently, whilst outside the gathering dusk transformed the streets of London into a sea of grey shadow. Alone in the sitting-room, I found myself waiting with equal impatience for my friend and for Mrs. Hudson’s promised dinner.

At length, after another involuntary sigh and a fresh reminder from my rebellious appetite, I rose and called downstairs.

“Mrs. Hudson!”

She appeared almost immediately in the doorway, still drying her hands upon her apron.

“Yes, Doctor?”

“I beg your pardon, but have you any notion where Holmes may be? You told me he expected to be home by six o’clock, yet it is now well past the hour. My appetite is protesting more loudly than any patient I have ever treated, and I fear that if we continue to wait much longer, your excellent dinner will be spoiled before it reaches the table.”

She shook her head apologetically.

“I truly cannot say, sir. Mr. Holmes left early this morning and merely remarked that he would return in good time for dinner. You must forgive me for saying so, Doctor, but punctuality has never been among his strongest virtues.”

I gave an impatient snort and was on the very point of making some observation regarding Holmes’s singular notions of time when the sitting-room door was suddenly flung open.

A broad-shouldered sailor lurched into the room.

His weather-beaten clothes bore every mark of long service at sea. Mud clung thickly to his heavy boots, a salt-stiffened scarf hung loosely about his neck, and beads of perspiration glistened upon his brow. Without offering the slightest explanation, he lurched across the room and collapsed heavily upon our sofa.

His breathing came in harsh, wheezing gasps, and for an instant I fancied I detected an unhealthy rattle within his chest. Resting his

head against the cushions, he muttered hoarsely,

“At last... a place to rest...”

“Really, sir!” cried Mrs. Hudson, pressing one hand to her breast in astonishment. “This is beyond all reason! What do you imagine you are doing in my sitting-room?”

I sprang to my feet at once.

My first impulse was to demand an explanation from the fellow, yet at the same time I endeavoured to preserve the calm judgement Holmes had so often impressed upon me.

A sailor, evidently fresh from a lengthy voyage. Thoroughly exhausted. Perhaps confused after days at sea.

Yet how had he found his way into our lodgings?

And why did he comport himself with such extraordinary familiarity?

I had already opened my mouth to inform the intruder, in language that admitted of no misunderstanding, that respectable households were not public resting places when the man suddenly burst into hearty laughter.

With one swift movement he tore away a magnificent false beard, wiped the perspiration from his forehead, and pushed his sailor’s cap back upon his head.

“Come now, Watson,” he exclaimed, his voice still rough, yet instantly recognisable, “surely you are not about to turn your exhausted companion out into the street?”

I stared at him in complete disbelief.

“Holmes!”

“My dear fellow,” said he, rising somewhat stiffly to his feet. “Who else?”

His face was pale, his cheeks noticeably hollow, and his clothing bore every sign of hard usage. It required little observation to conclude that he had spent the day in one of those darker quarters of London where respectable citizens seldom ventured.

“You must forgive me, Mrs. Hudson,” he continued with a slight inclination of his head. “I fear my little masquerade alarmed you rather more than I had intended. Nevertheless, I assure you it proved entirely necessary.”

Mrs. Hudson, though still plainly indignant, contented herself with muttering something about “most outrageous behaviour” before withdrawing, shaking her head as she disappeared down the passage.

I, however, continued to regard my friend with scarcely concealed astonishment.

Holmes lowered himself into his armchair with unusual heaviness. The faint smile upon his lips did little to disguise the pallor of his face, while his eyes were shadowed by unmistakable fatigue. A harsh cough escaped him, sounding as though he had spent the entire night wandering through the damp fogs that drifted from the Thames.

“You are ill, Holmes,” I said bluntly.

“Nonsense,” he replied with a dismissive wave of the hand. “Nothing more than a trifling cold. Hardly worth mentioning.”

“A trifling cold?” I returned sharply. “I have scarcely seen you these past several days. You leave the house at four o’clock each

morning and, if you return at all, it is seldom before two the following night. Look at yourself—exhausted, pale, and burdened with a cough that tells me far more than your reassurances ever could. You will work yourself into an early grave, Holmes. It is by no means the first occasion upon which I have been obliged to urge you to rest.”

Holmes appeared about to answer, but another violent fit of coughing interrupted him. When at last it subsided, he shook his head impatiently and reached for his pipe. After a moment’s hesitation, however, he quietly laid it aside again.

“Well, Watson,” said he at length, “you are right—in a fashion. Yet what alternative had I? A case led me into the Docklands, and I fear I have already said more than prudence permits.”

He lowered his voice until it became almost conspiratorial.

“But believe me, had I failed to observe the number of grains of rice concealed within the salt cellar of a waterfront tavern, the affair could never have been solved.”

“Grains of rice?” I repeated, utterly bewildered. “Good heavens, Holmes! Into what extraordinary abyss have you thrown yourself this time?”

The faintest trace of amusement touched his lips, but he merely smiled and relapsed into the familiar silence with which he so often surrounded his investigations. My concern, however, only deepened.

At that very moment the door opened once more, and Mrs. Hudson entered bearing a large tray, which she deposited upon the table with quiet determination.

“There we are,” she announced, casting over us that incomparable glance which combined a housekeeper’s firmness with a mother’s concern. “A fine roast of beef, Yorkshire pudding, and roasted potatoes. And for you, Doctor, your favourite apple pie to finish. I trust that will satisfy those troublesome appetites.”

“Mrs. Hudson,” I cried warmly, “you are an absolute treasure.”

Holmes, however, merely raised his eyebrows faintly.

I noticed that his hand trembled ever so slightly as he lifted his spoon. After no more than two mouthfuls, he gently pushed his plate away, plainly unable to continue.

I must confess that Mrs. Hudson had surpassed herself once again. The roast beef was as tender as only she could prepare it; the Yorkshire pudding was perfectly risen and golden, while the apple pie would have done credit to the finest inn in England.

“Mrs. Hudson,” I declared with sincere admiration, “I can only offer you my highest compliments. Your cooking is a blessing alike to body and spirit.”

She accepted the praise with her customary modest smile.

Holmes, meanwhile, sat with his head bowed in silence. He had eaten scarcely anything, and throughout the meal his cough had grown noticeably worse. The dullness in his eyes troubled me far more than he seemed willing to admit.

“Holmes,” I began, allowing all the authority of my profession to enter my voice, “you are going to bed at once.”

“My dear Watson,” he answered wearily, though with that familiar trace of obstinacy I knew so well, “there are matters which

simply cannot wait. I have papers to examine, and—”

“Enough!” I interrupted firmly. “I am a physician, and where your health is concerned, my judgement takes precedence. You are ill, Holmes, and unless you rest, you risk something far more serious than an ordinary cold. I insist that you retire immediately and get some sleep. Tomorrow morning I shall concern myself with restoring you to health.”

For several moments he regarded me without speaking.

There was resistance in his eyes, certainly, but also profound weariness—and, oddly enough, something almost resembling the wounded expression of a reprimanded schoolboy.

At length he gave a quiet sigh.

“Very well, Watson.”

Slowly he rose from his chair and, without another word, disappeared into his bedroom.

“That is more sensible,” I murmured as the door closed behind him.

A moment later I rose myself.

One fact had become unmistakably clear.

Things could not continue in this fashion.

Never before had I seen Sherlock Holmes so utterly worn down. No criminal in London, however cunning or dangerous, had ever reduced him to such a condition as his own relentless disregard for his health.

If Holmes would not protect himself, then I should have to do it for him.

Already the outline of a plan had begun to form in my mind.

He must be removed from London—from the choking fogs that rose from the Thames, the foul alleys of Whitechapel, and the endless demands of the docks. A journey, far from the city that consumed him, offered the only hope of restoring both his strength and his spirits.

And I silently resolved that, whatever objections Holmes might raise, on this occasion he should not escape my determination.

With that resolve firmly fixed in my mind, I reached for my coat and quietly left Baker Street.

Before the night was over, the first preparations would already be under way.

Chapter Eight

Like Two Thieves in the Night

Holmes turned once more towards the house.

For my own part, I found myself torn between two opposing convictions: the duty of a physician, which demanded openness and truth, and the unfailing logic of my friend, whose methods, however questionable they sometimes appeared, had so often led us unerringly to the correct conclusion.

A curious light shone in Holmes's eyes as we crossed the gardens.

"Watson," said he quietly, "we must gain access to Lady Ellington's room. The answers lie there—not in the idle chatter of our fellow guests."

"You surely cannot mean to break in?" I exclaimed.

"Break in?" Holmes repeated with an air of mild offence. "My dear fellow, let us instead describe it as a necessary reconstruction of the truth."

He glanced at me.

"And you are going to assist me."

A few minutes later we found ourselves standing near the reception hall.

The elderly porter sat motionless upon a stool behind the desk.

Mounted upon a large panel of polished oak behind him hung the room keys, each catching the light as though inviting attention.

“Watson,” Holmes murmured without moving his lips, “occupy the gentleman for five minutes.”

“Talk about anything you please.”

“So long as he remains entirely interested in you.”

“I shall attend to the remainder.”

Before I could raise the slightest objection, he had gently propelled me towards the desk.

With what I confess was very little inspiration, I began enquiring about births in the neighbouring village and whether the local doctor was frequently summoned to difficult confinements.

The porter, who proudly informed me that he was himself the father of seven children, entered into the subject with remarkable enthusiasm.

His eyes positively shone.

Meanwhile Holmes moved.

I scarcely perceived him at all.

He crossed the hall with the silence of a passing shadow.

There came only the faintest whisper of metal against wood.

Nothing more.

A moment later Lady Ellington's key had vanished from the board and was resting, no doubt, somewhere within Holmes's coat pocket.

"Excellent, Watson," he whispered as he reappeared beside me a few moments later.

"Join me in ten minutes."

"And do try to look as though you have just endured the most tedious conversation of your entire life."

Holmes inserted the key into Lady Ellington's lock.

The mechanism yielded with scarcely a sound.

He crossed the threshold.

Then stopped.

His keen grey eyes narrowed almost immediately.

"Interesting..." he murmured.

"Most interesting."

The curtains remained tightly drawn, leaving the room bathed in a gloomy half-light.

Several drawers stood partly open.

A chair had been pushed awkwardly aside.

One travelling case leaned against the wall at an unnatural angle.

It was not the disorder left by ordinary theft.

Rather, it suggested a hurried but purposeful search.

A few moments later I entered, quietly closing the door behind me.

The condition of the room brought me to an abrupt halt.

“Holmes!” I whispered in alarm. “Good heavens! Anyone will see immediately that someone has been searching this room. If we leave it in this condition, we shall be taken for burglars.”

Holmes cast me only the briefest glance.

“Compose yourself, Watson.”

“It was not we who created this disorder.”

He looked slowly around the room.

“Someone preceded us.”

“And that individual was searching for something very specific.”

“Then surely there is no point in continuing the search,” I protested.

“Nonsense.”

Holmes drew another drawer fully open.

“Who has informed you that our predecessor actually discovered what he sought?”

Without waiting for my reply, he bent over the writing desk before moving methodically to the bookshelves.

One after another he examined the volumes with extraordinary thoroughness.

I followed his example with considerably less enthusiasm, muttering beneath my breath as I searched through books and magazines whose significance entirely escaped me.

Then—

The handle of the door rattled violently.

An instant later came an emphatic knock.

“Hello?”

“Is someone in there?”

I started as though an electric current had passed through me.

“My God, Holmes!” I hissed. “This is the end of us! We are caught!”

My imagination instantly painted the most dreadful consequences.

“We shall be branded common criminals!”

“My medical licence will be ruined!”

“Our reputations destroyed!”

“We shall spend the remainder of our lives in prison!”

Holmes raised one hand for silence.

“Lower your voice, Watson.”

He regarded me with faint amusement.

“You are trembling like an aspen leaf.”

Whilst I continued staring anxiously towards the door, Holmes calmly withdrew a slender leather-bound volume from one of the shelves.

He opened it.

Rapidly turned several pages.

Between two leaves rested a carefully folded sheet of paper.

He drew it out.

Read it.

For scarcely a second.

Then a rare flash of satisfaction crossed his face.

“Ah.”

“That will suffice.”

Without another word he slipped the document into the inner pocket of his coat.

Outside, whoever stood beyond the door had now begun trying a key.

The handle rattled once more.

Holmes nodded quietly towards the balcony.

“This way, Watson.”

“No discussion.”

“The balcony?” I whispered in horror.

“You cannot seriously intend—”

“I do indeed.”

A faint smile appeared.

“After you, my dear fellow.”

“I have every confidence in your balance.”

With a groan of resignation I obeyed.

My heart pounded so violently that I fancied the entire household must hear it.

Carefully I climbed over the stone balustrade and edged my way along the narrow ledge towards the neighbouring balcony.

Holmes followed.

Despite his illness he moved with astonishing lightness.

Almost gracefully.

Then, just as I lost my footing for a terrifying instant, I felt his hand seize my sleeve.

His grip was firm.

Yet beneath that firmness I detected the slightest tremor.

A revealing reminder that his strength had by no means returned.

“Forward, Watson,” he breathed.

“Quickly.”

He pulled me safely onto the neighbouring balcony.

Behind us we heard the unmistakable sound of the bedroom door being thrown open.

We slipped silently through the adjoining balcony doors and closed them behind us.

For several moments we stood motionless in darkness.

My heart hammered painfully against my ribs.

Cold perspiration stung my eyes.

Beyond the wall we heard voices.

Footsteps.

Furniture being moved.

More than once I became convinced we had been discovered.

Indeed, I could almost have sworn I heard someone trying the balcony door itself.

But the danger passed.

Gradually the voices subsided.

Holmes listened for another few moments before giving a quiet nod.

“Come.”

Like two shadows, we slipped from the room, crossed the corridor, descended the staircase, and at last reached the peaceful silence of the lower floor without attracting the slightest attention.

“The library, Watson,” Holmes whispered.

“There we shall not be disturbed.”

A few minutes later we stood between the lofty bookshelves beneath the pale light of a solitary lamp.

The room smelt pleasantly of old leather, dust, and polished oak.

I was still wiping the perspiration from my forehead when Holmes calmly withdrew the folded paper from his pocket.

Holding it carefully between his fingers, he looked at me with unmistakable satisfaction.

“And this,” said he quietly,

“is the key to the whole affair.”

Holmes unfolded the paper and laid it carefully upon the table before us.

I drew the lamp nearer.

Several lines of beautifully formed handwriting immediately became visible.

The script was almost calligraphic in its elegance, yet possessed an unmistakable air of solemn purpose.

Holmes began reading aloud.

Where the shadows fill the hall,
Beneath iron, stone, and number all,
Where coloured glass divides the sky,
Truth falls silent, light replies.
Take one step, then count to three,
Where voices of the ancestors be.
What is hidden waits once more—
There unlock the third great door.

I stared at the verses in complete bewilderment.

“Holmes,” I exclaimed, “this is utter nonsense! A collection of rhymes without sense or reason. Surely no more than someone’s foolish amusement.”

“Nonsense?” Holmes repeated, one corner of his mouth lifting slightly.

“On the contrary, Watson.”

“What appears to you meaningless is, in fact, a most traditional form of riddle—precisely the sort of ceremonial puzzle once employed by ancient families to preserve their secrets.”

He tapped the page gently.

“Can you not see?”

“Every line carries significance.”

“If you ask me,” I replied, “it reminds me of those cryptic prescriptions favoured by medieval physicians—symbols, incantations, and lofty phrases, but precious little substance.”

Holmes smiled.

His eyes, however, never left the page.

“‘The hall’,” he said thoughtfully, “can scarcely refer to anything other than the great banqueting hall.”

“‘Iron, stone, and number’—the coats of arms, the carved statues, and the great grandfather clock.”

“‘Where coloured glass divides the sky’ must surely indicate the stained-glass skylight.”

He traced the final lines slowly with one finger.

“This is not poetry.”

“It is a set of directions concealed within verse.”

“And if we follow them...”

His fingertip came to rest upon the final line.

“...they will lead us to the place where the truth can hide no longer.”

For my own part, I remained unconvinced.

To me it still appeared little more than an elaborate game.

Yet Holmes’s expression admitted no possibility of doubt.

He had already recognised in those mysterious verses something I was still entirely unable to perceive.

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Thank you for reading this sample. We hope you're just as eager to discover what happens next as Holmes and Watson are!