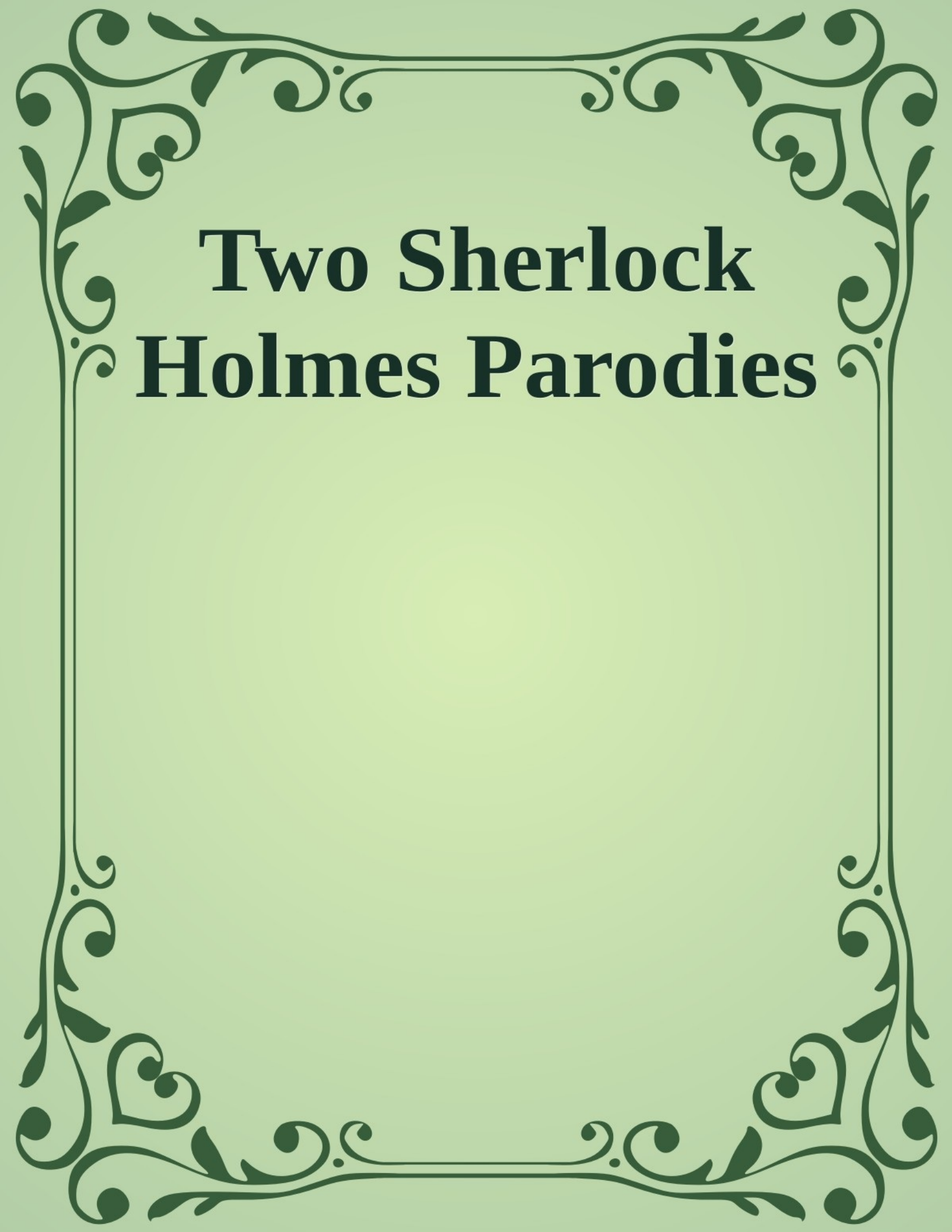


A decorative border with intricate floral and scrollwork patterns in a dark green color, framing the central text.

Two Sherlock Holmes Parodies

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The Adventures of Sherlaw Kombs and The Adventure of the Second Swag

By Robert Barr

1. The Adventures of Sherlaw Kombs

(With apologies to Dr. Conan Doyle, and his excellent book, ‘A Study in Scarlet’.)

I dropped in on my friend, Sherlaw Kombs, to hear what he had to say about the Pegram mystery, as it had come to be called in the newspapers. I found him playing the violin with a look of sweet peace and serenity on his face, which I never noticed on the countenances of those within hearing distance. I knew this expression of seraphic calm indicated that Kombs had been deeply annoyed about something. Such, indeed, proved to be the case, for one of the morning papers had contained an article eulogising the alertness and general competence of Scotland Yard. So great was Sherlaw Kombs’s contempt for Scotland Yard that he never would visit Scotland during his vacations, nor would he ever admit that a Scotchman was fit for anything but export.

He generously put away his violin, for he had a sincere liking for me, and greeted me with his usual kindness.

‘I have come,’ I began, plunging at once into the matter on my mind,

‘to hear what you think of the great Pegram mystery.’

‘I haven’t heard of it,’ he said quietly, just as if all London were not talking of that very thing. Kombs was curiously ignorant on some subjects, and abnormally learned on others. I found, for instance, that political discussion with him was impossible, because he did not know who Salisbury and Gladstone were. This made his friendship a great boon.

‘The Pegram mystery has baffled even Gregory, of Scotland Yard.’

‘I can well believe it,’ said my friend, calmly. ‘Perpetual motion, or squaring the circle, would baffle Gregory. He’s an infant, is Gregory.’

This was one of the things I always liked about Kombs. There was no professional jealousy in him, such as characterises so many other men.

He filled his pipe, threw himself into his deep-seated armchair, placed his feet on the mantel, and clasped his hands behind his head.

‘Tell me about it,’ he said simply.

‘Old Barrie Kipson,’ I began, ‘was a stockbroker in the City. He lived in Pegram, and it was his custom to—’

‘COME IN!’ shouted Kombs, without changing his position, but with a suddenness that startled me. I had heard no knock.

‘Excuse me,’ said my friend, laughing, ‘my invitation to enter was a trifle premature. I was really so interested in your recital that I spoke before I thought, which a detective should never do. The fact is, a man will be here in a moment who will tell me all about this crime, and so you will be spared further effort in that line.’

‘Ah, you have an appointment. In that case I will not intrude,’ I said, rising.

‘Sit down; I have no appointment. I did not know until I spoke that he was coming.’

I gazed at him in amazement. Accustomed as I was to his extraordinary

talents, the man was a perpetual surprise to me. He continued to smoke quietly, but evidently enjoyed my consternation.

‘I see you are surprised. It is really too simple to talk about, but, from my position opposite the mirror, I can see the reflection of objects in the street. A man stopped, looked at one of my cards, and then glanced across the street. I recognised my card, because, as you know, they are all in scarlet. If, as you say, London is talking of this mystery, it naturally follows that *he* will talk of it, and the chances are he wished to consult with me upon it. Anyone can see that, besides there is always—_Come in!_

There was a rap at the door this time.

A stranger entered. Sherlaw Kombs did not change his lounging attitude.

‘I wish to see Mr. Sherlaw Kombs, the detective,’ said the stranger, coming within the range of the smoker’s vision.

‘This is Mr. Kombs,’ I remarked at last, as my friend smoked quietly,

and seemed half-asleep.

‘Allow me to introduce myself,’ continued the stranger, fumbling for a card.

‘There is no need. You are a journalist,’ said Kombs.

‘Ah,’ said the stranger, somewhat taken aback, ‘you know me, then.’

‘Never saw or heard of you in my life before.’

‘Then how in the world—’

‘Nothing simpler. You write for an evening paper. You have written an article slating the book of a friend. He will feel badly about it, and you will condole with him. He will never know who stabbed him unless I tell him.’

‘The devil!’ cried the journalist, sinking into a chair and mopping his brow, while his face became livid.

‘Yes,’ drawled Kombs, ‘it is a devil of a shame that such things are done. But what would you? as we say in France.’

When the journalist had recovered his second wind he pulled himself together somewhat. ‘Would you object to telling me how you know these particulars about a man you say you have never seen?’

‘I rarely talk about these things,’ said Kombs with great composure.

‘But as the cultivation of the habit of observation may help you in your profession, and thus in a remote degree benefit me by making your paper less deadly dull, I will tell you. Your first and second fingers are smeared with ink, which shows that you write a great deal.

This smeared class embraces two sub-classes, clerks or accountants, and journalists. Clerks have to be neat in their work. The ink smear is slight in their case. Your fingers are badly and carelessly smeared; therefore, you are a journalist. You have an evening paper in your pocket. Anyone might have any evening paper, but yours is a Special Edition, which will not be on the streets for half-an-hour yet. You must have obtained it before you left the office, and to do this you must be on the staff. A book notice is marked with a blue pencil. A journalist always despises every article in his own paper

not written by himself; therefore, you wrote the article you have marked, and doubtless are about to send it to the author of the book referred to. Your paper makes a speciality of abusing all books not written by some member of its own staff. That the author is a friend of yours, I merely surmised. It is all a trivial example of ordinary observation.'

'Really, Mr. Kombs, you are the most wonderful man on earth. You are the equal of Gregory, by Jove, you are.'

A frown marred the brow of my friend as he placed his pipe on the sideboard and drew his self-cocking six-shooter.

'Do you mean to insult me, sir?'

'I do not—I—I assure you. You are fit to take charge of Scotland Yard tomorrow —. I am in earnest, indeed I am, sir.'

'Then heaven help you,' cried Kombs, slowly raising his right arm.

I sprang between them.

‘Don’t shoot!’ I cried. ‘You will spoil the carpet. Besides, Sherlaw, don’t you see the man means well. He actually thinks it is a compliment!’

‘Perhaps you are right,’ remarked the detective, flinging his revolver carelessly beside his pipe, much to the relief of the third party. Then, turning to the journalist, he said, with his customary bland courtesy—

‘You wanted to see me, I think you said. What can I do for you, Mr Wilber Scribbings?’

The journalist started.

‘How do you know my name?’ he gasped.

Kombs waved his hand impatiently.

‘Look inside your hat if you doubt your own name.’

I then noticed for the first time that the name was plainly to be seen inside the top-hat Scribbings held upside down in his hands.

‘You have heard, of course, of the Pegram mystery—’

‘Tush,’ cried the detective; ‘do not, I beg of you, call it a mystery.

There is no such thing. Life would become more tolerable if there ever *was* a mystery. Nothing is original. Everything has been done before.

What about the Pegram affair?’

‘The Pegram—ah—case has baffled everyone. The *Evening Blade* wishes you to investigate, so that it may publish the result. It will pay you well. Will you accept the commission?’

‘Possibly. Tell me about the case.’

‘I thought everybody knew the particulars. Mr. Barrie Kipson lived at Pegram. He carried a first-class season ticket between the terminus and that station. It was his custom to leave for Pegram on the 5.30 train each evening. Some weeks ago, Mr. Kipson was brought down by the influenza. On his first visit to the City after his recovery, he drew

something like 300 in notes, and left the office at his usual hour to catch the 5.30. He was never seen again alive, as far as the public have been able to learn. He was found at Brewster in a first-class compartment on the Scotch Express, which does not stop between London and Brewster. There was a bullet in his head, and his money was gone, pointing plainly to murder and robbery.'

'And where is the mystery, might I ask?'

'There are several unexplainable things about the case. First, how came he on the Scotch Express, which leaves at six, and does not stop at Pegram? Second, the ticket examiners at the terminus would have turned him out if he showed his season ticket; and all the tickets sold for the Scotch Express on the 21st are accounted for. Third, how could the murderer have escaped? Fourth, the passengers in the two compartments on each side of the one where the body was found heard no scuffle and no shot fired.'

'Are you sure the Scotch Express on the 21st did not stop between London and Brewster?'

‘Now that you mention the fact, it did. It was stopped by signal just outside of Pegram. There was a few moments’ pause, when the line was reported clear, and it went on again. This frequently happens, as there is a branch line beyond Pegram.’

Mr. Sherlaw Kombs pondered for a few moments, smoking his pipe silently.

‘I presume you wish the solution in time for tomorrow’s paper?’

‘Bless my soul, no. The editor thought if you evolved a theory in a month you would do well.’

‘My dear sir, I do not deal with theories, but with facts. If you can make it convenient to call here tomorrow at 8 a.m. I will give you the full particulars early enough for the first edition. There is no sense in taking up much time over so simple an affair as the Pegram case. Good afternoon, sir.’

Mr. Scribbings was too much astonished to return the greeting. He left in a speechless condition, and I saw him go up the street with his hat

still in his hand.

Sherlaw Kombs relapsed into his old lounging attitude, with his hands clasped behind his head. The smoke came from his lips in quick puffs at first, then at longer intervals. I saw he was coming to a conclusion, so I said nothing.

Finally he spoke in his most dreamy manner. 'I do not wish to seem to be rushing things at all, Watson, but I am going out tonight on the Scotch Express. Would you care to accompany me?'

'Bless me!' I cried, glancing at the clock, 'you haven't time, it is after five now.'

'Ample time, Watson—ample,' he murmured, without changing his position. 'I give myself a minute and a half to change slippers and dressing-gown for boots and coat, three seconds for hat, twenty-five seconds to the street, forty-two seconds waiting for a hansom, and then seven minutes at the terminus before the express starts. I shall be glad of your company.'

I was only too happy to have the privilege of going with him. It was most interesting to watch the workings of so inscrutable a mind. As we drove under the lofty iron roof of the terminus I noticed a look of annoyance pass over his face.

‘We are fifteen seconds ahead of our time,’ he remarked, looking at the big clock. ‘I dislike having a miscalculation of that sort occur.’

The great Scotch Express stood ready for its long journey. The detective tapped one of the guards on the shoulder.

‘You have heard of the so-called Pegram mystery, I presume?’

‘Certainly, sir. It happened on this very train, sir.’

‘Really? Is the same carriage still on the train?’

‘Well, yes, sir, it is,’ replied the guard, lowering his voice, ‘but of course, sir, we have to keep very quiet about it. People wouldn’t travel in it, else, sir.’

‘Doubtless. Do you happen to know if anybody occupies the compartment in which the body was found?’

‘A lady and gentleman, sir; I put ‘em in myself, sir.’

‘Would you further oblige me,’ said the detective, deftly slipping half-a-sovereign into the hand of the guard, ‘by going to the window and informing them in an offhand casual sort of way that the tragedy took place in that compartment?’

‘Certainly, sir.’

We followed the guard, and the moment he had imparted his news there was a suppressed scream in the carriage. Instantly a lady came out, followed by a florid-faced gentleman, who scowled at the guard. We entered the now empty compartment, and Kombs said:

‘We would like to be alone here until we reach Brewster.’

‘I’ll see to that, sir,’ answered the guard, locking the door.

When the official moved away, I asked my friend what he expected to find in the carriage that would cast any light on the case.

‘Nothing,’ was his brief reply.

‘Then why do you come?’

‘Merely to corroborate the conclusions I have already arrived at.’

‘And might I ask what those conclusions are?’

‘Certainly,’ replied the detective, with a touch of lassitude in his voice. ‘I beg to call your attention, first, to the fact that this train stands between two platforms, and can be entered from either side. Any man familiar with the station for years would be aware of that fact. This shows how Mr. Kipson entered the train just before it started.’

‘But the door on this side is locked,’ I objected, trying it.

‘Of course. But every season ticket-holder carries a key. This

accounts for the guard not seeing him, and for the absence of a ticket. Now let me give you some information about the influenza. The patient's temperature rises several degrees above normal, and he has a fever. When the malady has run its course, the temperature falls to three-quarters of a degree below normal. These facts are unknown to you, I imagine, because you are a doctor.'

I admitted such was the case.

'Well, the consequence of this fall in temperature is that the convalescent's mind turns towards thoughts of suicide. Then is the time he should be watched by his friends. Then was the time Mr. Barrie Kipson's friends did *not* watch him. You remember the 21st, of course. No? It was a most depressing day. Fog all around and mud under foot. Very good. He resolves on suicide. He wishes to be unidentified, if possible, but forgets his season ticket. My experience is that a man about to commit a crime always forgets something.'

'But how do you account for the disappearance of the money?'

'The money has nothing to do with the matter. If he was a deep man,

and knew the stupidity of Scotland Yard, he probably sent the notes to an enemy. If not, they may have been given to a friend. Nothing is more calculated to prepare the mind for self-destruction than the prospect of a night ride on the Scotch express, and the view from the windows of the train as it passes through the northern part of London is particularly conducive to thoughts of annihilation.'

'What became of the weapon?'

'That is just the point on which I wish to satisfy myself. Excuse me for a moment.'

Mr. Sherlaw Kombs drew down the window on the right hand side, and examined the top of the casing minutely with a magnifying glass. Presently he heaved a sigh of relief, and drew up the sash.

'Just as I expected,' he remarked, speaking more to himself than to me. 'There is a slight dent on the top of the window-frame. It is of such a nature as to be made only by the trigger of a pistol falling from the nerveless hand of a suicide. He intended to throw the weapon far out of the window, but had not the strength. It might have fallen

into the carriage. As a matter of fact, it bounced away from the line and lies among the grass about ten feet six inches from the outside rail. The only question that now remains is where the deed was committed, and the exact present position of the pistol reckoned in miles from London, but that, fortunately, is too simple to even need explanation.'

'Great heavens, Sherlaw!' I cried. 'How can you call that simple? It seems to me impossible to compute.'

We were now flying over Northern London, and the great detective leaned back with every sign of *ennui*, closing his eyes. At last he spoke wearily:

'It is really too elementary, Watson, but I am always willing to oblige a friend. I shall be relieved, however, when you are able to work out the ABC of detection for yourself, although I shall never object to helping you with the words of more than three syllables. Having made up his mind to commit suicide, Kipson naturally intended to do it before he reached Brewster, because tickets are again examined at that point. When the train began to stop at the signal

near Pegram, he came to the false conclusion that it was stopping at Brewster. The fact that the shot was not heard is accounted for by the screech of the air-brake, added to the noise of the train. Probably the whistle was also sounding at the same moment. The train being a fast express would stop as near the signal as possible. The air-brake will stop a train in twice its own length. Call it three times in this case. Very well. At three times the length of this train from the signal-post towards London, deducting half the length of the train, as this carriage is in the middle, you will find the pistol.'

'Wonderful!' I exclaimed.

'Commonplace,' he murmured.

At this moment the whistle sounded shrilly, and we felt the grind of the air-brakes.

'The Pegram signal again,' cried Kombs, with something almost like enthusiasm. 'This is indeed luck. We will get out here, Watson, and test the matter.'

As the train stopped, we got out on the right-hand side of the line. The engine stood panting impatiently under the red light, which changed to green as I looked at it. As the train moved on with increasing speed, the detective counted the carriages, and noted down the number. It was now dark, with the thin crescent of the moon hanging in the western sky throwing a weird half-light on the shining metals. The rear lamps of the train disappeared around a curve, and the signal stood at baleful red again. The black magic of the lonesome night in that strange place impressed me, but the detective was a most practical man. He placed his back against the signal-post, and paced up the line with even strides, counting his steps. I walked along the permanent way beside him silently. At last he stopped, and took a tape-line from his pocket. He ran it out until the ten feet six inches were unrolled, scanning the figures in the wan light of the new moon. Giving me the end, he placed his knuckles on the metals, motioning me to proceed down the embankment. I stretched out the line, and then sank my hand in the damp grass to mark the spot.

‘Good God!’ I cried, aghast, ‘what is this?’

‘It is the pistol,’ said Kombs quietly.

It was!!

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Journalistic London will not soon forget the sensation that was caused by the record of the investigations of Sherlaw Kombs, as printed at length in the next day's *Evening Blade*. Would that my story ended here. Alas! Kombs contemptuously turned over the pistol to Scotland Yard. The meddlesome officials, actuated, as I always hold, by jealousy, found the name of the seller upon it. They investigated. The seller testified that it had never been in the possession of Mr Kipson, as far as he knew. It was sold to a man whose description tallied with that of a criminal long watched by the police. He was arrested, and turned Queen's evidence in the hope of hanging his pal. It seemed that Mr. Kipson, who was a gloomy, taciturn man, and usually came home in a compartment by himself, thus escaping observation, had been murdered in the lane leading to his house. After robbing him, the miscreants turned their thoughts towards the disposal of the body—a subject that always occupies a first-class criminal mind before the deed is done. They agreed to place it on the line, and have it mangled

by the Scotch Express, then nearly due. Before they got the body half-way up the embankment the express came along and stopped. The guard got out and walked along the other side to speak with the engineer. The thought of putting the body into an empty first-class carriage instantly occurred to the murderers. They opened the door with the deceased's key. It is supposed that the pistol dropped when they were hoisting the body in the carriage.

The Queen's evidence dodge didn't work, and Scotland Yard ignobly insulted my friend Sherlaw Kombs by sending him a pass to see the villains hanged.

2. The Adventure of the Second Swag

The time was Christmas Eve, 1904. The place was an ancient, secluded manor house, built so far back in the last century as 1896. It stood at the head of a profound valley; a valley clothed in ferns waist deep, and sombrely guarded by ancient trees, the remnants of a primeval forest. From this mansion no other human habitation could be seen. The descending road which connected the king's highway with the stronghold was so sinuous and precipitate that more than once the grim baronet who owned it had upset his automobile in trying to negotiate the dangerous curves. The isolated situation and gloomy architecture of this venerable mansion must have impressed the most casual observer with the thought that here was the spot for the perpetration of dark deeds, were it not for the fact that the place was brilliantly illumined with electricity, while the silence was emphasised rather than disturbed by the monotonous, regular thud of an accumulator pumping the subtle fluid into a receptive dynamo situated in an outhouse to the east.

The night was gloomy and lowering after a day of rain, but the very sombreness of the scene made the brilliant stained glass windows stand

out like the radiant covers of a Christmas number. Such was the appearance presented by 'Undershaw', the home of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, situated among the wilds of Hindhead, some forty or fifty miles from London. Is it any wonder that at a spot so remote from civilisation law should be set at defiance, and that the one lone policeman who perambulates the district should tremble as he passed the sinister gates of 'Undershaw'?

In a large room of this manor house, furnished with a luxuriant elegance one would not have expected in a region so far from humanising influences, sat two men. One was a giant in stature, whose broad brow and smoothly shaven strong chin gave a look of determination to his countenance, which was further enhanced by the heavy black moustache which covered his upper lip. There was something of the dragoon in his upright and independent bearing. He had, in fact, taken part in more than one fiercely fought battle, and was a member of several military clubs; but it was plain to be seen that his ancestors had used war clubs, and had transmitted to him the physique of a Hercules. One did not need to glance at the Christmas number of the *Strand*, which he held in his hand, nor read the name printed there in large letters, to know that he was face to face with Sir

Arthur Conan Doyle.

His guest, an older man, yet still in the prime of life, whose beard was tinged with grey, was of less warlike bearing than the celebrated novelist, belonging, as he evidently did, to the civil and not the military section of life. He had about him the air of a prosperous man of affairs, shrewd, good-natured, conciliatory, and these two strongly contrasting personages are types of the men to whom England owes her greatness. The reader of the Christmas number will very probably feel disappointed when he finds, as he supposes, merely two old friends sitting amicably in a country house after dinner. There seems, to his jaded taste, no element of tragedy in such a situation. These two men appear comfortable enough, and respectable enough. It is true that there is whisky and soda at hand, and the box of cigars is open, yet there are latent possibilities of passion under the most placid natures, revealed only to writers of fiction in our halfpenny Press. Let the reader wait, therefore, till he sees these two men tried as by fire under a great temptation, and then let him say whether even the probity of Sir George Newnes comes scathless from the ordeal.

‘Have you brought the swag, Sir George?’ asked the novelist, with some trace of anxiety in his voice.

‘Yes,’ replied the great publisher; ‘but before proceeding to the count would it not be wise to give orders that will insure our being left undisturbed?’

‘You are right,’ replied Doyle, pressing an electric button.

When the servant appeared he said: ‘I am not at home to anyone. No matter who calls, or what excuse is given, you must permit none to approach this room.’

When the servant had withdrawn, Doyle took the further precaution of thrusting in place one of the huge bolts which ornamented the massive oaken door studded with iron knobs. Sir George withdrew from the tail pocket of his dress coat two canvas bags, and, untying the strings, poured the rich red gold on the smooth table.

‘I think you will find that right,’ he said; ‘six thousand pounds in all.’

The writer dragged his heavy chair nearer the table, and began to count the coins two by two, withdrawing each pair from the pile with his extended forefingers in the manner of one accustomed to deal with great treasure. For a time the silence was unbroken, save by the chink of gold, when suddenly a high-keyed voice outside penetrated even the stout oak of the huge door. The shrill exclamation seemed to touch a chord of remembrance in the mind of Sir George Newnes. Nervously he grasped the arms of his chair, sitting very bolt upright, muttering:—

‘Can it be he, of all persons, at this time, of all times?’

Doyle glanced up with an expression of annoyance on his face, murmuring, to keep his memory green:—

‘A hundred and ten, a hundred and ten, a hundred and ten.’

‘Not at home?’ cried the vibrant voice. ‘Nonsense! Everybody is at home on Christmas Eve!’

‘*You* don’t seem to be,’ he heard the servant reply.

‘Me? Oh, I have no home, merely rooms in Baker Street. I must see your master, and at once.’

‘Master left in his motor car half an hour ago to attend the county ball, given tonight, at the Royal Huts Hotel, seven miles away,’ answered the servant, with that glib mastery of fiction which unconsciously comes to those who are members, even in a humble capacity, of a household devoted to the production of imaginative art.

‘Nonsense, I say again,’ came the strident voice. ‘It is true that the tracks of an automobile are on the ground in front of your door, but if you will notice the markings of the puncture-proof belt, you will see that the automobile is returning and not departing. It went to the station before the last shower to bring back a visitor, and since its arrival there has been no rain. That suit of armour in the hall spattered with mud shows it to be the casing the visitor wore. The blazonry upon it of a pair of scissors above an open book resting upon a printing press, indicates that the wearer is first of all an editor; second, a publisher; and third, a printer. The only baronet in England whose occupation corresponds with this heraldic device is Sir George

Newnes.'

'You forget Sir Alfred Harmsworth,' said the servant, whose hand held a copy of *Answers*.

If the insistent visitor was taken aback by this unlooked-for rejoinder, his manner showed no trace of embarrassment, and he went on unabashed.

'As the last shower began at ten minutes to six, Sir George must have arrived at Haslemere station on the 6.19 from Waterloo. He has had dinner, and at this moment is sitting comfortably with Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, doubtless in the front room, which I see is so brilliantly lighted. Now if you will kindly take in my card—'

'But I tell you,' persisted the perplexed servant, 'that the master left in his motor car for the county ball at the Royal—'

'Oh, I know, I know. There stands his suit of armour, too, newly blackleaded, whose coat of arms is a couchant typewriter on an automobile rampant.'

‘Great heavens!’ cried Sir George, his eyes brightening with the light of unholy desire, ‘you have material enough there, Doyle, for a story in our January number. What do you say?’

A deep frown marred the smoothness of the novelist’s brow.

‘I say,’ he replied sternly, ‘that this man has been sending threatening letters to me. I have had enough of his menaces.’

‘Then triply bolt the door,’ advised Newnes, with a sigh of disappointment, leaning back in his chair.

‘Do you take me for a man who bolts when his enemy appears?’ asked Doyle fiercely, rising to his feet. ‘No, I will unbolt. He shall meet the Douglas in his hall!’

‘Better have him in the drawing-room, where it’s warm,’ suggested Sir George, with a smile, diplomatically desiring to pour oil on the troubled waters.

The novelist, without reply, spread a copy of that evening's *Westminster Gazette* over the pile of gold, strode to the door, threw it open, and said coldly:—

‘Show the gentleman in, please.’

There entered to them a tall, self-possessed, calm man, with clean-shaven face, eagle eye, and inquisitive nose.

Although the visit was most embarrassing at that particular juncture, the natural courtesy of the novelist restrained him from giving utterance to his resentment of the intrusion, and he proceeded to introduce the bidden to the unbidden guest as if each were equally welcome.

‘Mr. Sherlock Holmes, permit me to present to you Sir George—’

‘It is quite superfluous,’ said the newcomer, in an even voice of exasperating tenor, ‘for I perceive at once that one who wears a green waistcoat must be a Liberal of strong Home Rule opinions, or the editor of several publications wearing covers of emerald hue. The

shamrock necktie, in addition to the waistcoat, indicates that the gentleman before me is both, and so I take it for granted that this is Sir George Newnes. How is your circulation, Sir George?’

‘Rapidly rising,’ replied the editor.

‘I am glad of that,’ asserted the intruder, suavely, ‘and can assure you that the temperature outside is as rapidly falling.’

The great detective spread his hands before the glowing electric fire, and rubbed them vigorously together.

‘I perceive through that evening paper the sum of six thousand pounds in gold.’

Doyle interrupted him with some impatience.

‘You didn’t see it *through* the paper; you saw it *in* the paper. Goodness knows, it’s been mentioned in enough of the sheets.’

‘As I was about to remark,’ went on Sherlock Holmes imperturbably, ‘I

am amazed that a man whose time is so valuable should waste it in counting the money. You are surely aware that a golden sovereign weighs 123.44 grains, therefore, if I were you, I should have up the kitchen scales, dump in the metal, and figure out the amount with a lead pencil. You brought the gold in two canvas bags, did you not, Sir George?’

‘In the name of all that’s wonderful, how do you know that?’ asked the astonished publisher.

Sherlock Holmes, with a superior smile, casually waved his hand toward the two bags which still lay on the polished table.

‘Oh, I’m tired of this sort of thing,’ said Doyle wearily, sitting down in the first chair that presented itself. ‘Can’t you be honest, even on Christmas Eve? You know the oracles of old did not try it on with each other.’

‘That is true,’ said Sherlock Holmes. ‘The fact is, I followed Sir George Newnes into the Capital and Counties Bank this afternoon, where he demanded six thousand pounds in gold; but when he learned this

would weigh ninety-six pounds seven ounces avoirdupois weight, and that even troy weight would make the sum no lighter, he took two small bags of gold and the rest in Bank of England notes. I came from London on the same train with him, but he was off in the automobile before I could make myself known, and so I had to walk up. I was further delayed by taking the wrong turning on the top and finding myself at that charming spot in the neighbourhood where a sailor was murdered by two ruffians a century or so ago.'

There was a note of warning in Doyle's voice when he said:—'Did that incident teach you no lesson? Did you not realise that you are in a dangerous locality?'

'And likely to fall in with two ruffians?' asked Holmes, slightly elevating his eyebrows, while the same sweet smile hovered round his thin lips. 'No; the remembrance of the incident encouraged me. It was the man who had the money that was murdered. I brought no coin with me, although I expect to bear many away.'

'Would you mind telling us, without further circumlocution, what brings you here so late at night?'

Sherlock Holmes heaved a sigh, and mournfully shook his head very slowly.

‘After all the teaching I have bestowed upon you, Doyle, is it possible that you cannot deduct even so simple a thing as that? Why am I here? Because Sir George made a mistake about those bags. He was quite right in taking one of them to ‘Undershaw’, but he should have left the other at 221B, Baker Street. I call this little trip ‘The Adventure of the Second Swag’. Here is the second swag on the table. The first swag you received long ago, and all I had for my share was some honeyed words of compliment in the stories you wrote. Now, it is truly said that soft words butter no parsnips, and, in this instance, they do not even turn away wrath. So far as the second swag is concerned, I have come to demand half of it.’

‘I am not so poor at deduction as you seem to imagine,’ said Doyle, apparently nettled at the other’s slighting reference to his powers.

‘I was well aware, when you came in, what your errand was. I deduced further that if you saw Sir George withdraw gold from the bank, you also followed him to Waterloo station.’

‘Quite right.’

‘When he purchased his ticket for Haslemere, you did the same.’

‘I did.’

‘When you arrived at Haslemere, you sent a telegram to your friend, Dr Watson, telling him of your whereabouts.’

‘You are wrong there; I ran after the motor car.’

‘You certainly sent a telegram from somewhere, to someone, or at least dropped a note in the post-box. There are signs, which I need not mention, that point irrevocably to such a conclusion.’

The doomed man, ruined by his own self-complacency, merely smiled in his superior manner, not noticing the eager look with which Doyle awaited his answer.

‘Wrong entirely. I neither wrote any telegram, nor spoke any message,

since I left London.'

'Ah, no,' cried Doyle. 'I see where I went astray. You merely inquired the way to my house.'

'I needed to make no inquiries. I followed the rear light of the automobile part way up the hill, and, when that disappeared, I turned to the right instead of the left, as there was no one out on such a night from whom I could make inquiry.'

'My deductions, then, are beside the mark,' said Doyle hoarsely, in an accent which sent cold chills up and down the spine of his invited guest, but conveyed no intimation of his fate to the self-satisfied later arrival.

'Of course they were,' said Holmes, with exasperating self-assurance.

'Am I also wrong in deducting that you have had nothing to eat since you left London?'

'No, you are quite right there.'

‘Well, oblige me by pressing that electric button.’

Holmes did so with much eagerness, but, although the trio waited some minutes in silence, there was no response.

‘I deduct from that,’ said Doyle, ‘that the servants have gone to bed. After I have quite satisfied all your claims in the way of hunger for food and gold, I shall take you back in my motor car, unless you prefer to stay here the night.’

‘You are very kind,’ said Sherlock Holmes.

‘Not at all,’ replied Doyle. ‘Just take that chair, draw it up to the table and we will divide the second swag.’

The chair indicated differed from all others in the room. It was straight-backed, and its oaken arms were covered by two plates, apparently of German silver. When Holmes clutched it by the arms to drag it forward, he gave one half-articulate gasp, and plunged headlong to the floor, quivering. Sir George Newnes sprang up standing

with a cry of alarm. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle remained seated, a seraphic smile of infinite satisfaction playing about his lips.

‘Has he fainted?’ cried Sir George.

‘No, merely electrocuted. A simple device the Sheriff of New York taught me when I was over there last.’

‘Merciful heavens! Cannot he be resuscitated?’

‘My dear Newnes,’ said Doyle, with the air of one from whose shoulders a great weight is lifted, ‘a man may fall into the chasm at the foot of the Reichenbach Fall and escape to record his adventures later, but when two thousand volts pass through the human frame, the person who owns that frame is dead.’

‘You don’t mean to say you’ve murdered him?’ asked Sir George, in an awed whisper.

‘Well, the term you use is harsh, still it rather accurately sums up the situation. To speak candidly, Sir George, I don’t think they can

indite us for anything more than manslaughter. You see, this is a little invention for the reception of burglars. Every night before the servants go to bed, they switch on the current to this chair. That's why I asked Holmes to press the button. I place a small table beside the chair, and put on it a bottle of wine, whisky and soda, and cigars. Then, if any burglar comes in, he invariably sits down in the chair to enjoy himself, and so you see, that piece of furniture is an effective method of reducing crime. The number of burglars I have turned over to the parish to be buried will prove that this taking off of Holmes was not premeditated by me. This incident, strictly speaking, is not murder, but manslaughter. We shouldn't get more than fourteen years apiece, and probably that would be cut down to seven on the ground that we had performed an act for the public benefit.'

'Apiece!' cried Sir George. 'But what have I had to do with it?'

'Everything, my dear sir, everything. As that babbling fool talked, I saw in your eye the gleam which betokens avarice for copy. Indeed, I think you mentioned the January number. You were therefore accessory before the fact. I simply had to slaughter the poor wretch.'

Sir George sank back in his chair wellnigh breathless with horror.

Publishers are humane men who rarely commit crimes; authors, however, are a hardened set who usually perpetrate a felony every time they issue a book. Doyle laughed easily.

‘I’m used to this sort of thing,’ he said. ‘Remember how I killed off the people in “The White Company”. Now, if you will help me to get rid of the body, all may yet be well. You see, I learned from the misguided simpleton himself that nobody knows where he is today. He often disappears for weeks at a time, so there really is slight danger of detection. Will you lend a hand?’

‘I suppose I must,’ cried the conscience-stricken man.

Doyle at once threw off the lassitude which the coming of Sherlock Holmes had caused, and acted now with an energy which was characteristic of him. Going to an outhouse, he brought the motor car to the front door, then, picking up Holmes and followed by his trembling guest, he went outside and flung the body into the tonneau behind. He then threw a spade and a pick into the car, and covered everything up with a water-proof spread. Lighting the lamps, he bade

his silent guest get up beside him, and so they started on their fateful journey, taking the road past the spot where the sailor had been murdered, and dashing down the long hill at fearful speed toward London.

‘Why do you take this direction?’ asked Sir George. ‘Wouldn’t it be more advisable to go further into the country?’

Doyle laughed harshly.

‘Haven’t you a place on Wimbledon Common? Why not bury him in your garden?’

‘Merciful motors!’ cried the horrified man. ‘How can you propose such a thing? Talking of gardens, why not have buried him in your own, which was infinitely safer than going forward at this pace.’

‘Have no fear,’ said Doyle reassuringly, ‘we shall find him a suitable sepulchre without disturbing either of our gardens. I’ll be in the centre of London within two hours.’

Sir George stared in affright at the demon driver. The man had evidently gone mad. To London, of all places in the world. Surely that was the one spot on earth to avoid.

‘Stop the motor and let me off,’ he cried. ‘I’m going to wake up the nearest magistrate and confess.’

‘You’ll do nothing of the sort,’ said Doyle. ‘Don’t you see that no person on earth would suspect two criminals of making for London when they have the whole country before them? Haven’t you read my stories? The moment a man commits a crime he tries to get as far away from London as possible. Every policeman knows that, therefore, two men coming into London are innocent strangers, according to Scotland Yard.’

‘But then we may be taken up for fast driving, and think of the terrible burden we carry.’

‘We’re safe on the country roads, and I’ll slow down when we reach the suburbs.’

It was approaching three o'clock in the morning when a huge motor car turned out of Trafalgar Square, and went eastward along the Strand.

The northern side of the Strand was up, as it usually is, and the motor, skilfully driven, glided past the piles of wood-paving blocks, great sombre kettles holding tar and the general *débâbris* of a re-paving convulsion. Opposite Southampton Street, at the very spot so graphically illustrated by George C. Haité on the cover of the *Strand Magazine*, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle stopped his motor. The Strand was deserted. He threw pick and shovel into the excavation, and curtly ordered his companion to take his choice of weapons. Sir George selected the pick, and Doyle vigorously plied the spade. In almost less time than it takes to tell it, a very respectable hole had been dug, and in it was placed the body of the popular private detective. Just as the last spadeful was shovelled in place the stern voice of a policeman awoke the silence, and caused Sir George to drop his pick from nerveless hands.

‘What are you two doing down there?’

‘That’s all right, officer,’ said Doyle glibly, as one who had foreseen every emergency. ‘My friend here is controller of the Strand.

When the Strand is up he is responsible, and it has the largest circulation in the—I mean it's up oftener than any other street in the world. We cannot inspect the work satisfactorily while traffic is on, and so we have been examining it in the night-time. I am his secretary; I do the writing, you know.'

'Oh, I see,' replied the constable. 'Well, gentlemen, good morning to you, and merry Christmas.'

'The same to you, constable. Just lend a hand, will you?'

The officer of the law helped each of the men up to the level of the road.

As Doyle drove away from the ill-omened spot he said:—

'Thus have we disposed of poor Holmes in the busiest spot on earth, where no one will ever think of looking for him, and we've put him away without even a Christmas box around him. We have buried him for ever in the *Strand*.'