

Further Exploits of Sherlock Holmes



This exciting anthology brings together the work of two much admired Sherlock Holmes writers. In these stories Holmes and Watson are engaged in daring exploits applying their razor-sharp intelligence in new cases.

By Matthew Booth, David Stuart Davies

This edition Digital (delivered electronically) 9781907230615

Other editions

E-book \$4.99 £3.99 €3.99. No print edition.

David Stuart Davies is the author of five novels featuring private detective hero, Johnny Hawke, and another five novels featuring Sherlock Holmes as well as several non-fiction books about the Baker Street detective including the movie volume *Starring Sherlock Holmes*.

As well as being a committee member of the Crime Writers' Association, and editing their monthly magazine, *Red Herrings*, David is the general contributing editor for Wordsworth Editions *Mystery & Supernatural* series and a major contributor of introductions to the Collectors' Library classic editions.

Matthew Booth is the author of *Sherlock Holmes and the Giant's Hand* and a scriptwriter for the American radio network, *Imagination Theatre*, syndicated by Jim French Productions, contributing particularly to their series: *The Further Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*. Matthew is an author in the MX Publishing Undershaw Preservation project, having contributed to their anthologies of new Sherlock Holmes stories.

About the book

This e-book presents ten separate Sherlock Holmes stories:

By David Stuart Davies

The Reichenbach Secret
The Adventure of the Brewer's Son
The Secret of the Dead
Murder at Tragere House

By Matthew Booth

The Dragon of Lea Lane
The Fairmont Confession
The Mornington Scream
The Riddle of Satan's Tooth
The Tragedy of Saxon's Gate
The Verse of Death

Reviews

"Captures the feel of the originals ... well-rounded tales" - *Jonathan Johnson, Librarian, USA*

"Gripping stories which capture the essence and spirit ... satisfying complex mysteries" - *Neil*

Coombes, UK reviewer

“It is a testament to the writers ... that it is difficult to see where Doyle ends and the new authors begin ... A welcome addition to the legacy of Conan Doyle” - *Tracy Colton, UK reviewer*

“These stories bring Holmes and Watson back to life in the true spirit of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle.” - *Jeannette Beech, UK reviewer*

Excerpt

This extract consists of parts of two stories, one each by **David Stuart Davies** and **Matthew Booth**

The Reichenbach Secret

David Stuart Davies

‘Stand with me here on the terrace for it may be the last quiet talk we shall ever have.’ The words are those of my friend Sherlock Holmes. They were spoken to me on that fateful evening in August 1914 just after we had captured the German spy, Von Bork. You will find details of this adventure in ‘His Last Bow’, an account I penned myself but presented in the third person in order to achieve a more dramatic effect. As it turned out it was not the last occasion on which Holmes and I had a ‘quiet talk’. That occurred some two summers later.

I had heard little of Holmes since the capture of Von Bork and then, out of the blue, I received a note from a neighbour of his informing me of my friend’s failing health. Shocked at this news, I determined to travel down from London to his retirement cottage in Sussex to see him. I was aware that this was probably the last opportunity I would have to meet with my old friend – a last chance to say goodbye.

I wired ahead to ascertain whether my visit was possible and received an instant, impish response from Holmes: ‘Please come if convenient; if inconvenient, please come all the same.’ I travelled from London by train and hired a taxi cab from the local station to take me to his cottage. The cab dropped me by a dusty lane, at the end of which I saw a whitewashed cottage almost perched on the cliffs, overlooking the sea.

I found Holmes sitting in his garden in the afternoon sun, gazing across the great blue expanse of the English Channel. He wore a pale linen suit and a sand-coloured Panama hat and for all the world looked like a retired colonial. His face, however, was pale and gaunt and those bright eyes, although still sharp and piercing, had sunk deeper into their sockets. He rose to greet me and I found his handshake as firm as ever.

‘My dear, dear Watson, by all that’s wonderful, you are a sight for sore eyes,’ he said warmly. ‘Still practising a little medicine, I see.’

‘Why, yes,’ I replied in some surprise.

He grinned and pulled up a garden chair for me to sit on. ‘Iodine stains on the fingers and the telltale shape of a thermometer case in your top pocket.’

I chuckled gently. ‘You can still surprise me with...’

‘...my little observations. I’m please to hear it.’ He leaned forward and rang a small bell on the table beside him. ‘I am sure that you would find a cup of tea refreshing after your long journey.’ In response to the bell, his housekeeper emerged from the cottage, took my overnight bag and set about arranging for the tea.

‘Martha is no longer with you?’ I asked when the lady had returned indoors.

‘Sadly, no. She has retired and returned to her native Scotland. ‘My old bones are not up to serving you any more, Mr Holmes.’” he mimicked the faint Scottish tones of our redoubtable landlady. It was a wrench to us both to lose her. She has served me well and truly.’

‘Served us both.’

Holmes paused and gave me a thin smile. ‘Served us both,’ he said softly.

How strong are the memories of that afternoon: Holmes and I sitting in the bright sunshine, drinking our tea, the faint breeze off the sea, the hum of the bees and the conversation. The conversation, which began with talk of the war but then drifted inevitably into discussions of our past cases. As is the way with old men, we relived our youth, talking of Milverton, John Clay, the Baskerville affair and countless other cases in which Sherlock Holmes and I joined together to counteract the forces of crime. Once again we were in our Baker Street rooms, hearing the distressed pleas of a desperate client or rattling through the streets in a hansom cab on our way to Paddington, Euston or King’s Cross to catch an express which would bring us to some great house in the shires where there was another mystery to unravel.

I felt pangs of sadness when we discussed the Agra treasure business, a case which brought me my own greatest treasure, Mary, my beloved wife. At first, Holmes seemed unaware of my discomfort but, as he moved on to discuss another of our adventures, he narrowed his eyes, gave me a brief nod and patted my arm.

As we talked, I felt my heart grow light and the spirit of adventure rise within my weary bones. I marvelled at the realisation of what we had done and achieved. To think that I was the companion of the man who had turned detection into an exact science.

Suddenly my friend laughed out loud. ‘The irony of it, Watson, the irony of it.’

‘I’m sorry, I don’t quite understand.’

‘You remember how I used to rail at you about your overly romantic accounts of my cases that were published in the ‘Strand Magazine’?’

‘Indeed I do.’

‘Well, now I find my memory somewhat ... unreliable, so that I have had to purchase a whole bound set of the magazine in order that I can bring to mind all the details of those cases.’

‘He burst out laughing and I joined him.’

We sat conversing until the sun had almost set, sending warm, crimson fingers of twilight across the still, sparkling waters.

* * *

That evening we dined quietly. Holmes’ new housekeeper, Mrs Towers, a local lady who didn’t live in, provided us with a simple but appetising meal and Holmes had dug out a very good bottle of Beaune from his modest cellar. The cottage was illuminated by oil lamps, electricity not yet being available in such an isolated spot. There was also a small fire lit in the dining room to ward off the chill of an English summer evening; the flames added to the soft amber glow of the chamber which, in essence, reflected my own inner glow. Here I was with the best and wisest

friend I knew, chatting amiably about old times. For the moment I felt cocooned in this pleasantly primitive dwelling against the harsh realities of the terrible war which was being fought across the channel whose blue waters we had been gazing upon that afternoon.

Mrs Towers served us pudding, assured my friend that she would attend to the washing up in the morning and bid us both good night. By the time Holmes and I were tackling the brandy and coffee, we were in a very relaxed mood indeed.

Holmes lit his pipe and stared at me quite sternly for some moments. 'I think the time is right to confide in you a secret that I have held close to my chest for a long time – something I wished I could have told you many years ago. I tell you now, my dear Watson, so that I can ask your forgiveness.'

I looked at my companion in surprise. 'Surely, there can be nothing...'

He held up his hand to silence me. 'Pass judgement when I have finished.'

'Very well,' I said, somewhat sobered by Holmes' change in demeanour.

'You will remember with great clarity the Moriarty case.'

'Certainly.'

'The way his thugs sought to kill me and how he visited me in my Baker Street chambers to warn me off? How I fled to Switzerland and he followed me? How we fought on the brink of the Reichenbach Falls? How he fell to his death in the roaring torrent and I escaped? You remember all that?'

'As though it were yesterday.'

Holmes paused and swirled the brandy in his glass before taking a drink. 'I was fooled, Watson. We all were. I did not actually meet Professor Moriarty for the first time until a month after the Reichenbach incident.'

'What! But you told me that he came to see you in London.'

Holmes shrugged. 'I believed that he did. I was a gullible fool. Someone came to see me. He told me that he was Moriarty and he bore a close approximation to the description that I had been given of the scheming professor – a description which also turned out to be false. In truth, the man who came up the seventeen steps of 221B was an impostor hired by Moriarty. Had I my wits about me at the time, I should have realised that. The great man was not going to place his own person in such danger by visiting his arch-enemy in his lair. He could not know what I would or could have done. Moriarty did not take those kinds of risks, so he sent along a consummate actor to play him. The message was genuine: it was the messenger who was a fake.'

'I cannot believe that you were taken in by this charade.'

Holmes shook his head sadly. 'But I was, my friend. The phrase is 'hook, line and sinker', I believe. But the fellow played his part well. Even now my flesh begins to creep when I consider that encounter. The trick worked beautifully, as Moriarty knew it would. He had a powerful intellect and created his own certainties out of mere possibilities. One more brutish attack from his agents and I came to realise that my best plan was to leave the country until Scotland Yard moved in on the Professor's organisation.'

Holmes smiled. 'And what a pleasant time we had of it – until we reached Rosenlauri.'

‘But you were aware of the shadow cast over our sojourn.’

‘Yes. I tried to protect you from it, but I knew that your sensibilities would alert you to the danger we were in. It was I who arranged for the boy to bring you the message about the dying Englishwoman at our hotel. I knew your stout heart could not refuse such a patriotic summons.’
‘You wanted me out of the way.’

‘I wanted you out of danger. I believed I was about to face my nemesis by the Reichenbach Falls. I feared the worst. But what I didn’t know – what, as a detective, I failed to deduce – was that we were being trailed by trained assassins in the pay of Moriarty, under the leadership of Colonel Sebastian Moran. And not, as I assumed, by Professor James Moriarty himself.’

I took a gulp of brandy. My mind and my senses were now clear and alert. All feelings of drowsiness and inebriation had been expelled by my friend’s narrative. Although these revelations were shocking and new, they only presented a fresh interpretation which was frighteningly plausible.

‘Where was Moriarty?’ I asked at length.

‘That comes later. Suffice it so say that he too had left London for the safety of foreign shores. You see, he was far more concerned about preserving his own life and salvaging what he could of his organisation than dealing with an irritant like me.’

‘More than an irritant, surely? It was your work which brought about the collapse of his empire.’ Holmes grinned broadly. ‘You still have a way with words and the use of a telling phrase, Watson. You are correct, of course, but Moriarty was far too intellectual to lower his sights to personal revenge. I must be removed, there was no uncertainty about that, but for a long time it was not a personal vendetta. That would be too...’

‘Emotional – and emotion clouds the intellect.’

‘Yes. You see we were twins – of a kind.’

I leaned forward on the table and gazed at my friend for some moments before I spoke. ‘Then who... who did you meet on the path above the Reichenbach Falls?’

For an instant, Holmes seemed to be overcome by a strange emotion. He closed his eyes and lowered his head. ‘In truth,’ he replied at length, ‘I do not know. He was yet another agent of Moriarty. Not the same man who visited me in Baker Street but of similar appearance. At the time, I really believed that this was the Professor Moriarty, the Napoleon of Crime, but he was not. However, I soon discovered that this fine fellow was skilled in martial arts. Never have I fought so hard and so desperately as I did on that precipitous ledge overlooking that yawning chasm. Our struggle was exactly as I reported it to you in your consulting rooms on my return to London three years later.’

‘With your knowledge of baritsu you managed to overbalance him and he fell over...’

‘That terrible abyss,’ he mouthed my own words back at me.

I did not smile.

‘You see why I found it hard to tell the truth.’

‘But these are lies upon lies. You kept me in the dark for three years – three whole years –’

believing you to be dead and now you are telling me that you never met Moriarty at all and did not bring about his death.'

'I am not saying that. The truth is always darker and more complex than we would have it.'

'Is it?' I replied tersely, reaching for the brandy bottle and pouring myself another drink.

'The account I gave you of my escape was true. After my opponent had dropped into the swirling waters below me, I knew I could not retreat down the path without leaving tracks. My only resort was to attempt to scale the cliff wall behind me. I struggled upwards and at last I reached a ledge several feet deep and covered with green moss where I could lie unseen. I felt I had reached the end of my dramatic adventures for that day when an unexpected occurrence showed me that there were further surprises in store for me. A huge rock, falling from above, boomed past me, struck the path and bounded over the chasm. For an instant, I thought it was an accident; but a moment later, looking up I saw a man's head silhouetted against the darkening sky; and another stone struck the ledge within a foot of my head. The meaning was plain: another of Moriarty's minions was on the scene. I had to act quickly unless I wished to remain an easy target. I scrambled back down on to the path. I don't think I could have done it in cold blood. It was a hundred times more difficult than getting up. But I had no time to think of danger, for another stone sang past me as I hung my hands from the edge of the ledge. Half way down I slipped but, by the blessing of God, I landed, torn and bleeding, on the path. I took to my heels, did ten miles over the mountains in the darkness, and a week later I found myself in Florence, with the certainty that no one on the world knew what had become of me.'

'This much I know.'

'Then it is time I told you what you do not know.'

The Dragon of Lea Lane

Matthew Booth

I have remarked elsewhere that from the years 1894 to 1901, Mr Sherlock Holmes was a very busy man. During those years, he distinguished himself in a number of investigations which I have subsequently made public. By way of an example, the terrible death of Black Peter will no doubt recall itself to students of these demonstrations of my friend's peculiar talents. I also remain hopeful that I will gain approval in time to provide full details of the terrible affair of the Kensington Plague, the solution of which was given to Holmes by close examination of a dead man's handkerchief.

Another enquiry recalls itself to my mind, which was so remarkable in its details and displayed my companion's gifts so acutely, that I feel these chronicles would be incomplete without some record of it. I refer to the brutal murder of Lawton Fields, and the terrible truth surrounding the Dragon of Lea Lane.

It was in the latter part of the second week in October 1895, that we were sitting together at the breakfast table when our landlady brought in a telegram. Holmes tore it open, perused it, before tossing it to one side. He rose from his chair and paced up and down the sitting room, although it was evident from his expression that the contents intrigued him. He rang for the landlady, scribbled a response to the telegram, and ordered her to dispatch it at once. As she closed the door behind her, he turned swiftly to me.

'Cast your discerning eye over that, friend Watson,' said he, pointing to the telegram. 'When you have done so, get your hat and coat and meet me downstairs.'

Such curt instructions were not uncommon from him when the possibility of a problem presented

itself to him, and he had walked briskly from the room before I had even had the opportunity to digest the contents of the telegram. It was itself a terse communication from our old comrade, Inspector Lestrade, and ran as follows.

‘TERRIBLE BUSINESS AT WHYTEDAILE, LARGE VILLA IN NORWOOD. MURDER. PROMPT ASSISTANCE REQUIRED. MUCH IN YOUR LINE. SEND REPLY, WILL MEET AT LOCAL STATION. LESTRADE.’

Within a quarter of an hour, I was seated beside my companion in a hansom, rattling through the early morning streets towards our destination. The sun had yet to rise, and the lamps were still lit, giving a dull orange tint to the grey buildings which lined the London thoroughfares. Early risers and working men were making their way through the darkened streets to wherever their day was to take them. For ourselves, we had no notion of the business upon which Lestrade had engaged us. Holmes, with his usual reticence, refused to speculate upon the purpose of our journey. We were fortunate in catching a train promptly, and were in Norwood in an acceptable time. At the station, we had no difficulty in recognising the small, alert bulldog of a man, who hurried forward to greet us warmly. He shook Holmes’ hand with reverence.

‘It is good of you to come, Mr Holmes. I apologize for the brevity of my telegram.’

‘It was rather short on detail, Lestrade.’

‘I thought it best to tell you the full facts as we drive to the house. It is only a fifteen minute journey.’

He had hired a dog cart, and we climbed into it, leaning back in the seats, while Lestrade sat opposite us, checking off the points of his tale on the figures of his left hand.

‘Whytedale is a large villa situated on Lea Lane, a little under a mile from here. It is owned by Mr John Carlton, whose name may be familiar to you as one of the most respected art historians of recent years.’

‘His name has not escaped my notice,’ said Holmes. ‘His analyses of the works of Caravaggio, though eccentric, were not devoid of some interest.’

‘I wouldn’t know too much about that, Mr Holmes, I must confess. What I do know is that Mr Carlton lives in the villa with his wife, Victoria, and a small number of domestic staff, including the maid, a girl by the name of Sarah Harte.

‘Mr Carlton is writing a learned book on the influence of art in modern culture and society, and in order to assist him, he employed a man called Lawton Fields, fresh from the university, who seemed eager to develop a relationship with his famous employer. His duties were varied, but consisted of mainly of researching references and illustrations, and taking dictation when necessary. His references were excellent, and for the last six months, the two men have worked closely together. It all came to an end at about ten o’clock last night, however, when the maid, tidying away after dinner, heard a terrible shriek from the hallway. This is a long, narrow passageway leading from the front door and stretching the length of the house. A stairway extends from the centre of it, and on either side of it there are doors leading to various rooms including the dining room, the study, and the drawing room. Do I make myself clear?’

‘Perfectly so.’

‘Mrs Carlton had retired to the drawing room, and her husband was reading some proofs in the study. On hearing the scream, Sarah, the maid, ran from the dining room into the hallway, and found Lawton Fields lying on his back, his body convulsing violently. Seconds later the master

and mistress came into the hallway, disturbed also by the cry. Fields gripped Sarah with such force that she was unable to move, and was much distressed, as you can imagine.'

'The man spoke to her?'

'Just so, Mr Holmes. She is prepared to swear to the words.'

'And they were?' prompted Holmes eagerly.

Lestrade shook his head, as though he himself did not believe the maid's story. 'She says he muttered, 'The dragon – my God, the dragon.'

It seemed a fantastic revelation and I found myself sharing Lestrade's scepticism. I looked across at Holmes but his face was impassive.

'She is certain?' he asked.

'Positive. The proximity of her to his lips convinces her that there is no doubt as to the words themselves.'

'And this remarkable statement of a dragon was heard by Mr and Mrs Carlton?'

Lestrade shook his head. 'They heard nothing. The man whispered the words in to the maid's ear.' 'Quite so. Does she offer any explanation?'

'No. There is an obvious explanation for them, however.'

Holmes gave a wave of his hand. 'Speak plainly, Lestrade.'

The little official gave a sharp intake of breath and sighed heavily. 'Mr Lawton Fields was stabbed in the chest, as I have told you. The weapon used, however, was an ornate silver letter opener, which belonged to John Carlton himself. It was kept in the study.'

'I see no connection.'

The handle is delicately carved,' continued Lestrade, 'into the shape of a resplendent dragon.' Our conversation had continued throughout the course of our journey, and by the time Lestrade had given us his final revelation, we found ourselves at the villa gates, where we alighted from the trap. Whytedale was a large modern villa of white brick, consisting of three storeys, each with latticed windows which peered out from sprawling ivy. It stood in its own grounds, set back from the road, and with the exception of the policeman standing at the wrought iron gates, betrayed no evidence of the violence which had been committed within it. We walked up a grassy pathway, lined with laurel bushes, and stopped at the large wood-panelled door. Holmes pointed to the door with his stick.

'Was this door locked last night?'

'Yes, Mr Holmes. Mrs Carlton herself did so.'

'And you have left everything undisturbed for our inspection?'

'I have touched nothing, although John Carlton is not too happy about his secretary lying in the hallway still, as you can imagine.'

Holmes gave a snort of derision. 'Well, his inconvenience cannot hinder the course of justice.'

Some of these rich men must be taught that the world cannot always bend to their desires.'

Lestrade led us into the long hallway of which he had spoken. It was a lofty passageway, with wooden floors, and an impressive spiral staircase winding heavenward from the centre. The inspector had been as good as his word in leaving everything untouched, for the door to the study was ajar, and on the opposite side of the hallway, two doors also stood open. These no doubt led to the drawing room and the dining room of which we had heard. The walls were lined with excellent portraits of cavaliers and noblemen from the previous century, as well as a particularly striking image of the crucifixion, all of which paid testament to the occupation of the owner of the house. These details I noticed afterwards. For now, my attention was directed to the tragic figure which lay on its back in the centre of the passageway. It was the body of a man no more than thirty years of age, whose face had once been handsome, before a terrible death agony had twisted it beyond the recognition of those who had known him in life. He wore an evening suit, his starched shirt front stained crimson by his loss of life. One arm was stretched out to the left, and the other lay across his stomach. From the centre of his chest there protruded a magnificently carved letter opener, whose blade was thrust into the man's body to the ornate hilt. The design on the handle, cast in silver, was of the creature of legend known as a dragon, its head raised in almost noble fashion, and its huge wings coiled around its body.

'The dragon of Lea Lane,' I could not help but say.

'A remarkable instrument,' said Holmes, kneeling down beside the body and peering at the dragon through his lens.

'Its splendour is diminished by what it has been used for,' I remarked.

Holmes beckoned me closer to the body. 'Observe the depth to which the blade has been plunged. It took some force to do that. A man's doing, would you say?'

'A suitably enraged woman, if she were strong enough, might well be able to inflict a similar wound.'

Holmes rose to his full height, and placed his fingers to his lips. He shook his head like a man who is far from convinced, but was prevented from elucidating, for we heard footsteps coming from the great staircase which towered above us. I had no difficulty in recognising a man who is master of his own house. He was a tall, noble man, around forty, with the first glimpse of the blanching of the hair at his temples which shows a man's journey through life. His thick, dark moustache had delicately waxed tips, and a short Imperial beard gave his strong chin a jutting prominence of patrician determination. He wore a sombre black suit, with a claret coloured satin waistcoat and corresponding cravat which enhanced the elegance of his ensemble. He looked from one to the other of us and after a moment's consideration approached my companion.

'You are Mr Sherlock Holmes? My name is John Carlton. My wife, Victoria.'

Mrs Carlton was a woman of equal nobility to her husband. Her face was proud, her features delicate, although the poise of her head gave some intimation of arrogance. She held her husband's arm, and when she gave a slight inclination of her head by way of greeting, I could not help but wonder at the grim determination behind her eyes that the tragedy which had occurred would not blight her reputation.

'I understand you are known for speed and discretion, Mr Holmes,' her husband was saying. 'I trust you will endeavour to employ both in this matter.'

Holmes adopted his brisk, business-like tone. 'I shall certainly do everything I can to assist a swift conclusion to this tragedy, Mr Carlton. It would help me to do so if I could clarify a number

of points with you.’

Carlton gave a grunt of irritation. ‘If you must, you must, but I have told the police everything I know.’

His wife released her arm from around his. ‘For heaven’s sake, John, have sense. The sooner we co-operate, the sooner this can be behind us.’

‘This is our private sanctum, Victoria, damn it! How sordid it is to have something so unaesthetic as murder over our threshold.’

She turned to face my companion. ‘Forgive my husband, Mr Holmes. Unless someone wishes to talk about art with him, or congratulate him upon his collection, he tends to have no interest in them.’

Sherlock Holmes smiled, although his eyes were fixed on the art historian. When he spoke, however, his manner was cordiality itself. ‘I can appreciate dedication to one’s pursuits. Mr Carlton, I wonder if you could give me an account of what happened last night.’

‘Perhaps we can go to my study,’ he said. ‘Looking at that thing in front of me is hardly conducive to conversation.’

‘Certainly,’ replied Holmes. ‘Lestrade, I should like to speak to the maid. Perhaps you would be kind enough to fetch her? Thank you. Now, Mr Carlton, I am at your disposal.’

With a dismissive nod of his head, John Carlton led us across the hallway to the study. It was a small, cluttered room, lined with shelves of leather-bound volumes. There were display cases in the corners of the room, each one filled with artefacts and curios ranging from bronze sculptures to ancient drawings on parchment, the exhibits in Mr Carlton’s personal museum of art. A large desk stood in the centre of the room, with papers strewn across it, and various notes scribbled on bits of scrap paper. Behind the desk was a leather-backed chair in which Carlton now sat. There were other, small chairs in the room but he did not invite any of us to sit.

Mrs Carlton was the first to speak. ‘I must apologise for the disarray in this room but John forbids me to clean it. I tried this morning but he wouldn’t let me near the place.’

‘They are not interested in that, Victoria.’

Sparkling Books Limited, 85 Great Portland Street, London W1W 7LT, United Kingdom
Registered at Cardiff no. 05955447 Member of Independent Publishers Guild
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