

# The Adventure of the Haunted Oast House at Harrow Weald

## Chapter One by Kent Ross

July, August and even September had reminded me of my days in Afghanistan.

Fortunately those days had enabled me to stand the heat better than could many, but even for me it had been a very trying period.

Holmes was edgy throughout those months, despondent because he had nothing of any significance, there being only two of three matters of minor import.

But the weather had made a remarkable change, and with it a change in our attitudes and frames of mind.

Blowing in from the far west was a dramatic change and from barely tolerable days of heat and humidity, a storm had descended up on us with ferocity.

It broke the heat but so suddenly that the building walls that had seem hot to the touch, were now cool enough that Mrs. Hudson asked if we wanted a fire made up.

Unthinkable a day ago.

The wind came at us in great gusts and the rain that pelted the window panes seemed so ferocious that it was a wonder the panes themselves didn't shatter.

The heat wave that had lain like a tent over London was gone, but what replaced it was so fierce we did not even consider venturing outside.

The papers, even with this inclement weather, were still being printed and Holmes had had them sent up.

We were taking our leisure with pipe and papers, remarking on the weather's change and glad we had nothing that called us to exit our quarters.

Mrs. Hudson had just removed our tea when she re-appeared and at her side was Lestrade, from Scotland Yard.

Holmes sat up sharply and indicated the sofa to him.

I said, "It must be something of importance to have taken you out in this weather."

"Yes," he replied, "but I'm uncertain as to what I am hoping you can do."

"Come, come," Holmes remonstrated.

"Coming all the way over in this weather risking ague, and not wanting to explain yourself seems unconsciousable."

"Pray tell," I enjoined, "What it is that brings you out. A case, no doubt?"

"Well, yes," he went on, "But it is a matter that is difficult to explain."

"Please try," said Holmes.

"Begin with a clear statement of the facts of the case."

Lestrade hesitated and then began, "You know Lord Dunbury, near Harrow Weald? It concerns him. Well,

not exactly him, but he is the reason I desired your insights into the matter."

"And the matter might be," Holmes encouraged.

"It is a matter of death, a series of deaths actually, which may or may not be murder."

"Good heavens," I said, "Surely that can be established, can't it?"

"That's just the issue. You would certainly think so, and yet the doctors have not been able to establish the cause of the deaths."

"You mentioned deaths, How many? I have not seen a report in the papers of such a case from Harrow Weald."

"No, no you wouldn't. That's just it. Is it a case or a series of deaths from natural causes, though strangely related."

"Gad, Lestrade. Whatever can you mean," I said.

"Perhaps, Lestrade, you would be so good as to slowly, clearly and completely describe, if not the case, the situation," said Holmes with slight asperity.

"Yes, yes. I have not been clear, have I. Let me explain," he went on.

"The events center in what locals refer to as the haunted oast house on Lord Dunbury's estate."

"Haunted," said Holmes.

"Surely you would do better consulting a minister or someone who is more likely to be helpful in that realm."

"No, Holmes. You're the man for there have been three deaths that have occurred within the last year. All three have occurred in the same oast house."

"Yes, unusual, but why inquire of me?" Holmes added.

Lestrade went on, "The oast house is one of the old circular types. It has not been used to dry hops for some years now, and was simple unused except to store some incidental farming implements. It was in this oast house three of Lord Dunbury's farm labors have been found dead, but we cannot seem to ascertain the cause of their deaths. They have no apparent wounds, but they are surely dead."

"Well, of course," said Holmes, "But what is the question?"

"They were found, all three, about two months apart on the upper levels of the oast house, and they had no known reason to have been up there, and further there was no ladder or apparent way for them to get there. I wondered if you might step around for a bit of a look."

"Watson, since we have no pressing matters at the moment, perhaps we could come down next week, don't you think?"

As I was preparing to acquiesce, a knock at the door brought a message for Lestrade.

He said, "Pardon me," as he took the note, briefly looked at it, then turned to us and said, "Perhaps you could

come tomorrow. Lord Dunbury has just communicated that another person has died, not a farm worker, but one of his housemaids. She was found on the third level of the same oast house under the same circumstances. Will you come?"

"Yes, without question. Watson, which early morning train will get us there soonest?"

## Chapter 2 by Billy Fields

It had been a frightful night for the city as the storm raged against the buildings.

Mrs. Hudson had stoked the fires higher than we needed to the point where we needed some relief and the windows were opened ever so slightly to allow a breeze accompanied by the nasty rain which pounded Baker Street.

We breakfasted over some scones and bangers with coffee as we prepared for a pre-dawn trip to King's Cross.

Holmes was not very talkative, but his mood was better than previous days, at least for the moment, his mind was working on a problem, a problem which seemed all consuming at this point.

Mrs. Hudson arranged for a carriage for our fast trip to the station.

To our dismay when we descended into the streets, it was a hansom cab which would offer us little protection against the driving rain.

"Blast," Holmes shouted into the night.

"Why would anyone send such a cab on a day fit for the devil!" He kept swearing in the most foul manner even using vulgar language and calling for a growler instead of the hansom.

However, it was too late for a change in transportation so we pleaded for a fast passage to King's Cross.

Soaked from the rain which swirled past the glass, we finally arrived at our destination.

When we arrived, the station appeared abandoned except for the porters who stood at attention ready for what would have normally been a busy morning.

The weather, which had turned so violent, was keeping the casual traveler at home and turned the rest of us quite ill from its effects.

As we settled in our compartment, water dripped from our soggy outer garments.

Fortunately, the porter was able to take our cloaks to be dried.

He even brought some tea, a much-needed companion coupled with the brandy I carried in my bag.

Holmes drew his pipe, filled it and began his routine.

Since it was still dark and storming, there was nothing of the countryside to admire and little light to use for its admiration.

I turned to the early editions to see if there was any news from Harrow Weald.

The silence of the night was broken only track noise as the Great

Northern railroad coach clattered on through the bleakness.

"What do you make of it," I asked Holmes, who was preoccupied by swirling smoke from the clay pipe.

"I am baffled by parts of this situation."

Holmes drew himself up into the chair, as he often did, continuing to be disengaged from my diatribe, intent on staring.

"What is the cause of death? Who found the bodies? Why were the victims in that building," I said out of frustration, as Holmes stayed distant.

"And the entire issue of a haunted past of the oast house. Really. This supernatural faldral is silly, though I suppose good stories for a stormy night," I said.

Suddenly, lightening flashed, filling the compartment with brilliance light then as quickly we shook from the thunder.

Holmes did not move.

I regained my composure but felt some anger over him seemingly ignoring my presence, much less my questions.

"Holmes!" I demanded.

"What is it? Can't you leave me a lone for a moment," he retorted in a most disagreeable manner.

"Can't you see I am considering possibilities? I do not know any of the answers because I do not have enough information. I am not a mind reader or a conjurer. I am a machine. Surely by now you must understand how I work!"

My face was clearly contorted in some shock and dismay for this treatment at the hands of my friend, especially his tone of voice.

"Watson, old friend, forgive me. This is truly a problem, a great three-pipe problem and before it is over, you and I will have many steps to take, many questions to ask and many pipes to smoke. There are logical explanations, I am sure, but now I need facts."

### Chapter 3 by Beverly Keith

Holmes's patience definitely did not improve as we stepped from the train down onto the platform at Harrow Weald.

In a most irritated manner, Holmes exclaimed, "Watson, of all of the uncivilized places that we have ever been forced to inhabit; this one is the most barbaric of all. Are we in a barn? Look at this atrocity!"

I quickly took note to what my friend was referring.

Walking across the dirt and straw floor was a poorly attired man leading two mules in the direction of the train, over in a corner were two goats tied to a rail, and a donkey and two chickens were peering through the entrance.

Holmes continued, "This is the epitome of disgrace. This station is adjacent to one of the wealthiest estates in England. How can Lord Dunbury stand for this?"

Attempting to sooth him, I offered an explanation.

"Holmes, in general, this is a very small town, and obviously the simplest of people use this station. Lord Dunbury doesn't utilize it for his travel."

"Very astute Watson," replied Holmes, "particularly given the pleasing aroma of the live stock. Watson let us not linger any longer than necessary. I wonder if we can find a porter among the jack-asses."

Finally, we did locate a porter outside the station.

An old man of approximately eighty years was napping in a broken down, wooden, rocking chair.

"Do we dare to wake him from his much needed sleep?" inquired Holmes.

I gently touched his shoulder, not affecting his slumber in the least.

At this Holmes snapped, "This situation is becoming more intolerable by the minute," and then speculated: "Well, we could walk to Harrow Wealds, sniffing out the trail ourselves."

Fortunately, at that precise moment a driver arrived for us in a very elegant carriage.

The drive up to the main estate proved to be almost as dismal as the train station.

Although the sun was beginning to come out, the scenery in this part of England's rolling countryside proved very distressing.

There were run down shanties, animals roaming the hillsides aimlessly, and dirty children and adults doing farm labor.

The comfort of our plush carriage did little to compensate for the view.

Holmes remarked, "Watson do you think there is any possibility that things will improve?" "I would not even venture a guess at this point Holmes," I retorted.

Within the half hour we arrived at Harrow Weald, and the gate was opened to one of the most spectacular castles to be beheld in all of England.

We were greeted by the butler, and then a very tidy maid served us an outstanding breakfast that consisted of the finest English tea and imported delicacies.

This royal breakfast definitely indeed improve Holmes's spirits considerably while we waited for the Lord of the manor in his magnificent dining room.

Holmes curtly remarked, "Interesting Watson, how anyone can relax in this splendor, but yet endure all of the rubbish leading up to this grand estate." "I assure you that I am able to relax quite well Mr.

Holmes in spite of 'all of the rubbish leading up to this grand estate' as you so eloquently put it.

We turned to face perhaps the most imposing figure of a woman that we were ever to witness.

And for the first time, my good friend Holmes was rendered speechless as we looked up at this Amazon of womanhood that stood over six foot and three inches tall with blazing red hair and piercing green eyes.

"Now, now dear, I'm sure that Mr. Holmes did not mean to offend."

We then turned to look down on a man that stood no more than five foot three inches in stature.

"Mr. Holmes you must forgive my wife; all of these mysterious deaths in the last year have left her nerves a bit shaky. As for the dilapidated condition of the property on the drive up here, you must understand how difficult it is to get tenant farmers to take any pride in our property."

"Especially, since they have outlawed using the whip on them." Lady Dunbury kindly inserted.

"However, Mr. Holmes, my Sophia, generously began a wonderful merit program for our best workers here at Harrow Wealds."

"Let me explain Horace; yes Mr. Holmes about eighteen months ago I sent word to all of our workers that the ones who worked doubly hard and yielded Harrow Wealds the most profit would be rewarded by being permitted to live in the most lavish servant accommodations on the property."

"And exactly how many workers had the ambition to take advantage of your generosity Lady Dunbury?"

"Well, only the three gentlemen found dead Mr. Holmes."

"Exactly, where are the lavish accommodations located Lady Dunbury?"

"Oh, well, Mr. Holmes, we hadn't gotten far enough to decide on where they were to be. Mr. Holmes our plans were altered dramatically, but I fully intended to keep up my end of the bargain. After all it was good business."

"Lady Dunbury, you obviously have brilliant business abilities, and your generosity is unequaled in all of England," replied Holmes.

"Of course it is Mr. Holmes, and for the past year all of my hard work has been sabotaged by these unexplainable deaths."

"Dear Lady Dunbury, I do so wish to solve this mystery for you so that you may return to business as usual; therefore, I must enlist your patience for a while longer in order to obtain the facts in these ghastly deaths."

Holmes's kindness to Lady Dunbury did indeed produce an unimaginable softness in her...

"Why, certainly, Mr. Holmes my husband and I will be delighted to answer all of your questions"

"Lord and Lady Dunbury, I have been informed that the bodies of your servants have mysteriously appeared on the top floor of the Oast House?"

"Yes, Mr. Holmes it is a real mystery considering that there is no longer a stair case going to the top floor, and it is more than forty feet up from the main floor."

"I assume that the three laborers found dead on the upper floor were good size men?" Lady Dunbury quickly replied.

"Certainly, they were Mr. Holmes. They did the heaviest of the manual labor around here-profits have certainly taken a beating in the last year." Holmes continued, "Lord Dunbury what is the history of the Oast House?"

"Well Mr. Holmes it has been in my

family for over a hundred years. My great grand parents built it when they first laid claim to this land. They were financial concerns then, therefore, they were forced to permit the servants to live on the upper floor. At that time it did have a concealed stair case leading from the keeping room to the upper floor, but it has long since been gone."

"Lord Dunbury, How long has it been since anyone lived in the Oast House?"

"Uh, I'm not sure," replied Lord Dunbury, but I think it's been over forty years since it was occupied by servants."

"You're not sure?" inquired Holmes, "Well, you see, I've never actually been in the Oast House myself; I depend on the servants to keep me informed of it's condition. Of course when drying the hops, no one lived in it."

"You've never been in the Oast House Lord Dunbury?" Holmes persisted.

"I'm not sure I understand"

"Oh for heavens sakes," Lady Dunbury adamantly replied.

"My husband is scared to death of the ghost that supposedly lives in that house. About forty-five years ago one of Horace's uncles, Uncle Beckley, was supposedly found dead under the same mysterious circumstances that our laborers have been found dead over the past year, and it was rumored that a scorned servant girl was responsible for his death."

"How was that Lady Dunbury?"

"It's been said for years now that the servant girl and Horace's uncle were

very close, you do understand? He abruptly threw her over when an opportunity arose for him to marry within his own class. Totally understandable to anyone with breeding."

"Yes, of course," Holmes replied.

"Well, he was suddenly found dead, and the cause of death could never be clearly be determined. He was only twenty eight years old, and then suddenly, the servant girl was gone without a trace."

"Mr. Holmes you know how jealous these lower classes can be of the wealthy, and since that time, it has been believed that the tart haunts the place, seeking revenge on all men who dare to enter." She added, "I, of course, have never been afraid to enter the place. On occasion, our headman escorts me down to this supposed haunted house. To check out the inventory, you see."

"Mr. Holmes, my Sophia is always so brave."

"Really, Lord Dunbury. How is that?"

"Oh, Sophia always has Mr. Brown, the headman, escort her after dark. She has no fear."

Holmes remained silent a minute then replied.

"Most interesting, however, wasn't the last victim a woman?"

"Yes Mr. Holmes," replied Lord Dunbury, "it is quite bizarre."

"Watson, I think it's time we pay a visit to this Oast House."

**Chapter 4** by Jerry Riggs

Holmes and I were asked by Lady Dunbury to wait for her in the game room while she changed into more suitable attire for accompanying us onto the grounds.

Before she repaired to her rooms, she ordered her husband to remain with us, ostensibly for the purpose of entertaining us.

But it was as clear to me as it was to Holmes that this was for no other reason than to see that we should not be left alone in the house.

Whether this was to avert some perceived danger of my private detective friend and I - in the absence of Inspector Lestrade - from making off with the dining-room silver, or to ensure that we should at no time be at liberty to speak freely between ourselves or turn so much as the slightest glance of enquiry in any direction without being closely watched ourselves, I could only guess.

It took no guesswork on my part, however (nor yet with what little grasp of those methods that I flatter myself to have gleaned from my long association with my old friend), to know that Lord Dunbury - terrified little man, squirming inside the folds of his frogged, velvet smoking-jacket - was obliged to his task, against his will.

Amidst the usual driveling small talk about beastly weathers, enquiring after our journey in the train, etc., he cast quick, furtive glances over Holmes's shoulder at the great imposing oil portrait of his domineering wife, hung above the mantelpiece.

The artist had captured her likeness very well (if ever a man could boast

that he had captured her at all): posed in such a fashion as to show her features to their best effect.

It is no secret that feminine pulchritude has turned my head on more occasions than I can number.

And yet, despite Her Ladyship's over-imposing stature, she possessed those other endowments, which - on any other woman - would tend to make men forget the color of her eyes.

Not so with Lady Dunbury, whose piercing green eyes seemed to peer out from the canvas and demand accountability from her husband for his every thought, even in her absence from the room.

Against the tiresome ebb-and-flow of Lord Dunbury's babble, calculated to hold off a moment's pause, into which the subject of the deaths of the three laborers and the housemaid might be introduced, Holmes took out his tobacco pouch, filled his pipe, and struck a match.

"Oh, you can't smoke, Mr. Holmes," Lord Dunbury said, "I'm sorry."

"Don't you smoke?" asked Holmes.

"No."

"Curious. You wear a smoking jacket, but you don't smoke."

"I used to. But Sophie - Lady Dunbury - forbids it, so I gave it up."

"But are you not hereditary lord of the manor? Have you no say in the enjoyment of your own set of vices?"

"Alas, Mr. Holmes," Sir Horace replied with a tremulous chuckle, "though I am native here, and to the manor

born, it is a custom more honour'd in the breeding than the observance."

Holmes smiled with a mixture of sympathy and appreciation for our host's jocose deconstruction of Hamlet (and, with one bushy eyebrow raised suggestively in my direction, I read in the sideways glance of my friend, with what timeliness he implied in the choice of a quote from that particular play, with the unfolding tragedy at hand).

"Dear me," Holmes remarked, returning his pipe to his coat pocket, "but how often I have seen, that while an Englishman's home is his castle, an English nobleman's castle is not his home. Should you chance to call at our rooms in Baker Street, you will always find a box of cigars in the coal scuttle, and a slipper full of good, strong, black shag tobacco. You are welcome to them both."

"You are very kind, sir," said Lord Dunbury.

Genuinely moved by the gesture of good fellowship, he drew himself up in his chair, and forgot his former deference towards the portrait of his wife.

Holmes took advantage of this opening to avail himself of the data he so longed for to catalogue the series of deaths in the oast house.

To this purpose, he drew out a pocket almanac.

First turning to the page for that month, September, he leafed backwards to every other month, which were the sequences of each death, beginning with March.

"I should just like to see whether I might find a common denominator to

each of these tragic incidents," Holmes explained.

"It strikes me as significant that they had occurred in what appears to be something of a pattern. Can you, Lord Dunbury, recollect the specific date upon which each of the deaths took place?"

"Certainly."

"Capital! And with each instance, if you would, please give the full name of each victim, beginning with March."

"That was on the seventh. The victim was Joseph Lovat, tenant farmer and joiner."

Holmes referred to the notation beside the date on the page of his almanac, "'Moon on the Equator. And for the next, the month of May?"

"The sixth; James Smyth, tenant farmer and ton for St. Mary's at Harrow-on-the-Hill."

"Moon at Perigee."

"Peri- what?"

"Perigee, Lord Dunbury: the point in the Moon's orbit that is closest to the Earth. Now, July-"

"The first; Mansfield Parke, tenant farmer and miller."

"Moon at Perigee, again. Now, September?"

"The twenty-eighth, just yesterday. Tilly Raines, seasonal field-laborer and daily woman for odd jobs about the house."

"Moon on the Equator. I say there is a pattern to these deaths," said Lord

Dunbury, "either with the Moon at Perigee or on the Equator. What's the meaning of it, some occultist fixation with the Moon?"

"More likely it has to do with the fact that these orbital positions of the Moon occur either on a night of a New Moon, or a night or two after, when the night should have been very dark indeed," explained Holmes.

"And you said that this Tilly Raines was a daily woman? Lestrade described her as a housemaid."

"In a manner of speaking, she was." It was Lady Dunbury who answered, framed in the doorway, her long, rous flaming hair braided, and draped in front of her.

She was fetchingly attired in form-fitting Norfolk jacket, snug jodhpurs and riding boots, and menacingly brandished a brass-knobbed stick in her hands, like a Zulu with a knobkerrie.

She had come in as surreptitiously and unexpectedly as before, and those serpent-like green eyes flickered malevolently at her husband and Holmes for this unsanctioned interview.

Holmes met her gaze with daggers of his own from those cold, steely eyes of his, while Lord Dunbury withered away into his chair once more.

I, who had said nothing in all that time, silently thanked the Lord above for having escaped her notice, and secreted my pad and pencil, with which I had been taking shorthand notes until then, and attempted to make myself as small and inconspicuous as her husband.

"In a manner of speaking, indeed,"

agreed Holmes dryly, not missing a beat in his enquiry.

"The late Miss Raines, I expect, was only too glad for the work between planting and harvest that would just allow her to live on her little allotment with hardly any wages at all. She would come cheap as a daily; doing any of the work required in the household to help your small resident staff, which are all you can afford to keep. One can only wonder what she would have thought, had she known that you can hardly pay wages to your regular household staff, let alone furnish that lavish accommodation which she and the three laborers who died before her had worked so hard to attain."

The startled Lady Dunbury stammered, groping for the words to justify herself.

"I, I had fully intended..."

"No doubt, no doubt. But keep in mind where good intentions alone can lead. Keep in mind as well, that while you depend on your tenants for revenue and profit, they depend on you for their living, and now four of your best tenants are dead. If you persist in coming the heavy over Dr. Watson and me, you'll find you have no other friend to protect you and your husband from either Inspector Lestrade (who considers you both as persons of interest in the case), or your own tenants, from whom it is no secret that you would prefer the use of the lash to keep them down, over any empty incentives for them to improve their lot in life." That being said, as coldly dispassionate as ever I have heard Holmes speak, he smiled pleasantly up at the blanched face of our hostess to add, "And now, Lady Dunbury, I'm simply dying to have a look at that oast house of yours."

The clouds had given way to reveal a clear, cerulean September morning sky over a wooded country lane whose trees had begun to turn to autumn flame.

Lady Dunbury walked in silence between us, her stride kept apace with Holmes's own brisk stride, and I was hard-put to keep abreast of them, for I was much out of training, and my crippled leg soon forced me to bring up the rear.

The crisp air brought some of the roses back into her face, but the pallor remained.

Clearly Holmes's masterful speech and demeanor had affected her, and more than a few times I caught sight of her turning her head to look at him walking beside her, with a mixture of trepidation and curiosity at his stolidity and his perception of everything above and below, and on every side.

We turned into a disused compound about a quarter of a mile from the castle, where shrubberies and vines had overgrown the ruined outbuildings, and the grass had not been mown for many a year.

There stood, on an eminence in the center of the compound, the oast house.

The side building that housed its keeping rooms was so obscured with overgrowth that all we could make of it were the remnants of the roof.

Half its slates had broken and slid off, exposing the garret to the weather.

An owl looked down at us from its nest inside.

But looming ominously above and at the end of it was the oast oven itself: a round tower more than forty feet tall, and crowned with a great conical-shaped cupola that looked like a witch's hat.

We opened the door at the front of the oast oven's tower.

Its ground floor was full of barrows, spades, pitchforks, and every other manner of implements for farming.

In the center of the room lay the great round charcoal brazier, which had once been used to toast the hops that had lain in loose mounds on the slatted floors in the stories above.

Looking above us, we could see through the slats of the first story overhead.

At the side of this was a round, covered hatchway, just large enough for a man to pass through, but with no way to get up to it.

"That is where the winding stairway once had been," Lady Dunbury said.

She pointed to a narrow, rickety wooden ladder leaning against the wall beneath the hatchway.

"This is the only way up to the upper stories, now."

"And that must be how the three laborers and the maid gained access to the place at the top story, where they met their deaths," said Holmes.

"But the ladder had been found lying here on the ground each time that we found one of them dead on the top story," replied Lady Dunbury.

"Well, that proves murderous intent," reasoned Holmes.

"I should like to have a look at the place where these victims lay, now. Afterwards, we shall just go to the mortuary to have a look at the late Tilly Raines."

"No need, Mr. Holmes. She's waiting for you," Lady Dunbury explained, pointing with her finger towards the stories above, "up there."

"What?" I gasped.

"Inspector Lestrade had thought it best to preserve the scene and the placement of Tilly's body for you both to examine, just as she'd been found."

"Well," said I, "that's rather irregular, still, it might be of some use to the investigation."

And so we climbed, but Lady Dunbury begged to stay behind.

It had been enough, she had said, to discover the corpse in the first place.

At each successive story, we drew our ladder upwards to the next hatchway; a tiresome business to be sure, especially in anticipation of what awaited us at the end.

At last we climbed through the last hatchway onto the top story, and there, lying prostrate in the middle of the slatted floor, was the desiccated body of Tilly Raines.

I immediately set to work on the examination of the corpse, which showed no marks from a violent attack or injury due to any accident.

But this was anything but a natural death.

Despite the discoloration in the leatheriness of the dried skin of her face, I thought I detected cyanosis around her mouth and lips.

Holmes, meanwhile, had surprised me by taking out his pipe and lighting it: a strange departure from his usually active routine in rooting out clues.

"Watson, look," he said, directing my attention to the cloud of blue tobacco smoke, which hovered, listless, just over his head.

"The overhead ventilator should be drawing that out, but it's bunged completely shut. And do you feel that sudden, pleasant warmth rising up from beneath us? Hullo, what's this?"

Holmes was looking downwards at the floor.

Tilly's skirts stirred slightly in the warm updraft and, to my horror, looking through the four stories of slatted flooring underfoot, I saw the red-orange glow of burning charcoal in the brazier on the ground floor! Nausea and shallowness of breath gripped us as carbon monoxide rapidly poisoned the air we breathed.

We staggered to the hatchway.

The ladder was gone! Suddenly I felt my head begin to swim.

A voice, echolike, called me: "Watson! Watson!"

## **Chapter 5** by Patricia Blocker

A sudden shaking of my arm lifted me from my fog and I stared up at Holmes.



His handkerchief covered his mouth and nose but you could see the ashen blotches on his face.

The smoke was affecting him as it had me; only his strong will had kept him moving.

Holmes pulled me up and guided me to the hatchway where he pointed to a floor slat.

"Quick, Watson! I felt a loose board here earlier. If we can pull it out, we might be able to open up the cowl." Holmes and I clenched the slat and Holmes cried "Now pull Watson, pull! This could be our only chance." The slat moved slowly, shivered and then came steadily up from the floor.

Holmes grabbed the slat and moved to push it against the blocked cowl.

My breath held as I watched.

A tremor and then the slat broke through.

The cowl was free and air flowed inside.

Holmes and I sat down and took deep even breaths.

My head cleared and I could think again.

"My God, Holmes, what is the meaning of this?"

Holmes replied "Murder it has been and murder they tried, still we are not safe yet. We need to get to the ground."

We walked to the hatchway and looked down where the fire looked to be out and the smoke had almost stopped.

Our dilemma was short lived however as we heard voices from below.

"Mr. Holmes, are you and Dr. Watson alright?" Holmes and I looked down to see Lord and Lady Dunbury.

Holmes yelled back to say that we were alright but that the ladder was gone and we couldn't get down.

Lady Dunbury answered the ladder was at the bottom and that she would have it brought up.

Holmes spent this time opportunity making a quick inspection of the room we were in.

He pointed out how the edges of the cowl were warped with age but that the edges of the cloth used to block it were fairly well preserved.

Holmes bent over the hatchway and looked carefully at the floor below us.

"Watson, look at the floor below".

I looked and saw that it was heavy with dust but curiously, you could see several outlines where a ladder had lain and footprints.

By this time, we could hear the noise of a ladder coming up from the hatchway and we could see someone coming upward.

The person was the same one that had picked us up at the station.

He stepped onto the floor below us, pulled up the ladder, and passed it to us above.

I climbed down carefully and Holmes followed me as we climbed down to the floor below.

We then began the arduous task of going downward through the other floors, our rescuer going first, me next and Holmes last.

Lord and Lady Dunbury met us outside the oast house where Lord Dunbury exclaimed "Thank goodness, you are not hurt.

We had come to see if anything was needed and we saw the smoke."

Lady Dunbury added "Yes, we feared for your lives. Who could have started the fire and how could the ladder get down here? Oh, I suppose you did not have time to look around up there before the fire?"

I looked intently at her face and didn't see any fear or worry in those green eyes.

I noticed there was a large fresh bruise on her left hand.

She saw me looking and quickly put her hands in her pockets.

Holmes interjected, "Time enough for everything. There are questions to be asked and answers to be given but first I think Watson and I need rest. I still feel quite faint from the smoke." I tried to keep the surprise from my face.

I couldn't remember when I had last heard Holmes acknowledge such personal weakness.

Lord Dunbury motioned us to follow us to the manor where he instructed the butler to show us to the game room.

The butler left but soon returned with port and scones.

With a slight bow, he closed the door and left.

Holmes and I settled into deep leather chairs with glasses of port.

Lady Dunbury's portrait again glared at us as if it knew we were unwelcomed home invaders and enemies to fear.

Holmes put his hand in his pocket, pulled out his handkerchief, and opened it.

Inside was some tobacco ash.

Holmes said, "Turkish, I believe and not too old. Perhaps if we hadn't been concentrating so much on climbing that old ladder, we might have smelled it. I found it on the floor where we saw the dust ladder; I was able to do a quick search while you were climbing down. Yes, Watson, it is indeed a three-pipe problem. Ah, if only we could only smoke! I think it is time we call in Lestrade".

## Chapter 6 by C.S. Williams

Holmes looked about to certain himself that we were indeed alone.

Respectful of Lady Dunbury's wishes my friend refrained from smoking, yet he still went through the motions with an empty pipe, out of habit, I suppose.

"Watson, do you have your service revolver with you?"

"After all these years with you I never leave home without it. It's in my bag. Shall I get it?"

"By all means. We have made someone terribly frightened, if only by our presence, and that someone

means to be rid of us."

"If I had known we would be in danger so quickly I would have already had it on my person. But dash it all, Holmes, we were only going to look at an old oast house. Whoever would have thought someone would try to murder us there in broad daylight?"

"Alas, my dear, Watson, I should have suggested you arm yourself before we went there. After all, it has been the scene of five murders."

"Five? But there were only four, the three tenant farmers and that poor daily maid whose pitiful remains are still up there."

"You forget, Watson, the original murder, Uncle Beckley Dunbury. We were told he died exactly the same as the others."

"By Jove, you're right, Holmes!"

"At least we have solved the how. Now we must uncover the who and the why. Once we discover the one, it should lead us to the other. At this juncture we neither know what the victims were doing up there, nor how they were discovered. The top of the oast house is such an out-of-the-way location that no one should have thought to look up there, at least for the first victim. After that it would occur to someone to look. So the question remains, how was the first victim's body discovered?"

"You mean you know how these murders were committed?" I gasped.

"Come, Watson. Think. You and I were almost the victims of it ourselves."

"Of course! Asphyxiation! After our misadventure I should have seen it myself."

"I'm sure you would have reached the same conclusion once the shock had worn off, Old Fellow. Are you feeling better now? I may have an errand for you."

"An errand, Holmes?"

"Yes, Watson. One particularly suited to you. I wish you to call upon the local doctor and make an inquiry. He should be more open to one of his own profession. First, request to see the death certification of Beckley Dunbury. Once you have the exact date of his death, look through the doctor's medical records for any pregnancies around that date, and get the name or names of the patients."

"Certainly I'll go, but why? What would a murder some forty-five years ago have to do with these four murders now?"

"Everything, Watson. I'm convinced of it."

"Then I shall go straightway. Still, it's highly unlikely that the same doctor would still be practicing."

"Perhaps not...it would be useful if he were, but surely if the old doctor has retired he would have given his medical records to his successor."

"True. And if he is still alive, shall I call upon the old doctor as well?" "Good thinking, Watson. If he is still alive, perhaps he can add more information than a simple medical record."

"Should I stop at the telegraph office on the way, or will you send a

messenger to wire Lestrade?"

"Make your visit first, Watson. Then, if you have a name, ask Lestrade to find out if there is any record of the woman and her child before coming to join us...and caution him to be swift, there may be more lives at stake. It is a gamble, but there is a likely chance an unwed pregnant girl may have run off to London. While you are out, I intend to take another look at that oast house."

"Do be careful Holmes. Our would-be murder may still be lurking about. I shall go at once. I'll ask Barrows to show me to our room so I can change out of these smoky togs, and procure my revolver while dressing."

So saying I rang for the butler.

A moment or two later he appeared, tall, nearly as thin as my companion, neatly trimmed salt-and pepper hair, bulbous nose showing the first reddish signs a drinker, and an expressionless face.

Only his sapphire blue eyes sparkled with interest.

I thought, in passing, I would hate to play cards with that man.

"Ah, Barrows. Be so kind as to show me to our rooms; I need to change. Oh, and could you tell me the name of the local Doctor? I wish to pay a courtesy call. Please ask Jefferson to have a carriage ready."

"That would be Dr. Kennelworth. I shall inform Lady Dunbury at once that you wish a carriage. This way, Dr. Watson..."

The rain clouds had gone, replaced here and there by small wispy white ones scudding along across the azure

autumn sky by a stiff breeze like tufts of cotton.

Still, the rain had ushered in a damp chill that made me huddle inside my tweed jacket.

Dr. Kennelworth's home was a typical whitewashed country cottage with a stone fence and white picket gate.

The small lawn was neatly trimmed and there were beds of bright fall flowers.

I thought it looked not unlike a Winslow Homer painting.

Charming.

I knocked upon the door with the large brass lion's head knocker, and straightway I was greeted by a young woman of perhaps thirty years.

She was slightly plump with rosy cheeks, merry eyes of periwinkle blue and a dazzling, friendly smile that instantly put me at ease.

Her ash blonde hair was done up in the Gibson style.

"May I help you?"

"I was looking for the Doctor." I presented my card.

"That would be my husband." She glanced down at my card.

"Gerald, there's a Dr. Watson here to see you."

Returning to me she greeted, "I was just brewing some Earl Grey. Would you care for a cup with us, Doctor? It's a chilly day out there."

"That would be appreciated. Thank you."

A handsome young man much the same age as his wife came toward me, hand extended in greeting.

His hair was dark, but his skin was even fairer than his wife's.

"Dr. Watson? Are you perchance THE Dr. Watson?"

"Guilty."

"I've read of your adventures with Sherlock Holmes in The Strand. What can I do for you?"

Mrs. Kennelworth busied herself pouring three cups of tea into delicate flowered china cups.

"I'm sure you are aware of the mysterious deaths at Dunbury Hall," I began.

"Yes. I examined the bodies. Not a mark upon them. I've been stumped. I wish I could tell you more."

"Well, Holmes and I may have figured that one out. Asphyxiation by carbon monoxide. Someone lured or carried the victims up there, sealed off the air vent, removed the ladder and lit a fire in the roasting brazier."

"Amazing!" my young colleague remarked, his walnut brown eyes focused on me.

"How did you figure it out?"

"The hard way," I replied.

"Holmes and I were up there to examine poor Tilly Raines and the killer-or killers-attempted to kill us the same way. We were fortunate enough to be able to unblock the

vent before it was too late."

"My God! Are you all right?"

"Yes, thank you."

"Is that why you've come to see me? To enquire about the murders?"

"In a manner of speaking. I did want your observations on the current murders, but Holmes wished me to consult you upon another matter. There was a similar death some forty-five years ago, the current Lord Dunbury's Uncle, Beckley Dunbury. Obviously that was before your time, but we were hoping that perhaps you had your predecessor's records that may shed some light on the matter. Holmes is convinced that there may be some connection between that murder, the subsequent disappearance of the servant girl who was alleged to have been his mistress, and these current deaths. Do you have those records?"

"I do, and you are certainly welcome to look through them if it would help. Imagine! I'm going to be of service to the famous Sherlock Holmes, Rebecca!" I swear, the young fellow was absolutely bubbling with enthusiasm.

"If there is anything at all I can do for you and Mr. Holmes, don't hesitate to ask."

"That's most generous of you."

"You might want to speak to Dr. Attenborough too. This was his practice before he retired."

"He's still alive?" I had hardly hoped for this stroke of good fortune.

"Very much so. And he lives nearby."

"Then I shall most certainly call upon him." Once we had finished our tea and I had repaid my host and hostess by recounting one of Holmes and my minor adventures which I had not as yet set to paper, which I dubbed The Adventure of the Purloined Pearl my young colleague led me to pair of file cabinets.

"They're organized by year and then by patient. Dr. Attenborough was very thorough in his notes. Forty-five years ago, you say?"

"Or thereabouts. I don't have the exact date. In fact that is one of the things I need to ascertain. Holmes is of the opinion that the serving girl who disappeared was probably pregnant with Beckley Dunbury's child."

"Oh my!" interjected Rebecca Kennelworth.

"That must have been scandalous."

"Apparently. According to Lady Dunbury, Beckley threw her over for a woman with position and-given that at the time, the Dunburys were in dire financial straits-money. Not long after the wedding Beckley was found dead in the oast house and shortly after his death the girl departed. Perhaps she was murdered as well, but no body was ever found. Whether she fled from grief or because she was with child, no one seems to know. Thus far we don't even know her name. That is another reason I need to see your records."

"Ah! Here we go! 1852. Dunbury, Beckley, Esquire. Died August 3, 1852. Is that what you need?"

"Partly. Now see if you can find a pregnancy diagnosed in July or early August of that year. I can't give you a

name; in fact that's what I'm trying to discover."

"Hmmm." Gerald Kennelworth unconsciously chewed at his lower lip as his dark brown eyes scanned the crabbed writing.

Then he looked up and grinned.

"You found it," I smiled.

He beamed.

"There was only one pregnancy I could find that fit the time frame you described. See this 'D' in the upper left-hand corner? That was Dr. Attenborough's notation that the bill was to be paid by Dunbury Estate. That certainly seems to bear out your suspicions."

"And the patient's name...?"

"Nancy Ashcroft." "Thank you so much for your help.

Is there anything I can do for you?" My host laughed.

"There certainly is. When Mr. Holmes solves this case and you write it up for The Strand be sure to include us. Rebecca and I are both such fans of your stories."

"We certainly are!" agreed his wife.

"We'll be looking forward to it."

"We haven't solved the case yet," I reminded them.

"Oh, you will. You always do. Gerald and I have every confidence in you."

"Thank you. I won't forget you. And now I must be on my way. You say Dr. Attenborough lives nearby?"

"Just a quarter mile down this very lane. Do you need more explicit directions?"

"It depends on whether Jefferson knows where it is." We said our polite good-byes and Jefferson, a taciturn little man, perhaps a bit sullen in demeanor, did indeed know the location of the elder physician's home.

He clucked to his chestnut geldings and we were off.

Meanwhile Holmes was setting about business of his own.

He began by requesting to see Lady Dunbury.

Barrows quickly returned and Holmes was ushered into the Lady's parlor.

"How may I help you, Mr. Holmes," she asked, looking up from some correspondence she was reading at her oak secretary.

"I am about to make another visit to the oast house, but first I have a few questions."

"First, I have one of my own. You said earlier that our finances had taken a beating of late. However did you know that? Had someone told you?"

"It was rather obvious, really. You have reduced your house servants to a minimum, and while everything is kept in good repair, there doesn't seem to be anything new anywhere in the house, save perhaps your portrait. Even your clothes and shoes, while well-maintained, are not new. That and the overall rundown condition of your unmown fields and outbuildings."

"I see. It sounds so simple when you explain it."

"A mere observation."

"Very well. You had a question?"

"First of all, Lady Dunbury, you seem to be familiar with the oast house, so you may be able to answer a question that has piqued my curiosity."

"I'll be glad to answer anything I can."

"When the oast house was in operation, how were the hops taken to the upper floors? Surely they were not toted a sack at a time up that ladder, or even the now-gone staircase. So the question remains: how were the hops taken up to the upper floors for drying? Not to mention the furniture that was used by the servants when it was used for quarters."

"You know, I never thought of that, since we've never used the place except for equipment storage since I have been here. But you do raise an interesting question. Perhaps there is some kind of lift, a hidden dumbwaiter. It's possible, but if so I've never seen one. It would make sense, however."

"I was thinking much the same. I believe it might be instructive if I were to look for it. It may be that our murderer already knows of its existence and has put it to use. I was hoping you might have some knowledge of it."

"I'm sorry, but I don't. I would think it would be connected to the operations room attached, though. That would make sense, but it's only a guess."

"And a good one."

"Is that all?"

"Only one other question, for now. Who found Joseph Lovat's body? Since the upper floors were never used, what was the finder doing up there."

"Another good question. I can see why Inspector LeStrade thinks so highly of you, Mr. Holmes. Unfortunately, there is no way to know what he was doing up there. Possibly looking for Joseph, since we had looked everywhere else. I don't know."

"Well, who found the body? We can ask him."

"Therein lies the problem. You see Joseph was found by Mansfield Parke..."

"...Who was later found dead under the same circumstances. It would have been useful to talk with him, but that is not to be. Thank you, Dear Lady, for your time. I shan't keep you any longer. I intend to return to the oast house this very afternoon and seek out this hidden lift and to re-examine the scene of Tilly Raines' death. She may yet have a secret to tell us."

"Take care, Mr. Holmes."

Would you like some assistance?"

"Thank you, Lady Dunbury, but I would rather do this by myself."

"Very well. But if you haven't returned by sunset I shall send someone after you."

"How very kind of you. Thank you."

Taking his leave, Holmes set off to return to the oast house, paying close attention to see if anyone was following.

Dr. Attenborough was a wizened little gnome of a man, and very spry for a man of four score plus years.

I idly wondered if he had had any Pictish ancestors.

His skin was tanned and wrinkled like that of a field hand, and his beard and receding hair were curly and white.

He smiled broadly and genuinely, shaking my hand with both of his.

"Since I retired some five years ago I don't get many visitors anymore. How may I help you, Dr. Watson? Surely you had some purpose for this unexpected visit..."

"I do. Your young colleague, Dr. Kennelworth sent me to see you."

"Gerald? How are he and Rebecca? They still come by to check on me every week or so. I think they've adopted me as a foster grandfather," the old man laughed.

"They're well. Surely you've heard of the strange deaths in the old oast house at Dunbury Hall?"

"Dreadful business, and quite perplexing. But how does that concern me?"

"My friend Sherlock Holmes and I are investigating the murders..."

"So it is murder? I thought as much. Sherlock Holmes you say? I never thought I'd see the day he would be investigating a case in these parts....Oh!...Silly me!...I should have recognized the name immediately:

Dr. Watson. Gerald and Rebecca can hardly wait for your stories to come out. They talk about you and Holmes incessantly. Of course I'll be glad to help in any way I can, but I doubt I have anything to offer. I haven't even been to Dunbury Hall in several years."

"But you were the local doctor when Beckley Dunbury died?"

"I was. But that was so long ago. What? Forty, forty-five years?"

"Forty-five. But the cause of death was quite similar, I understand."

"None, you mean. There was no reason for that man to be dead that I could discover."

"Then you do remember it."

"How could I forget it? John, may I call you John? I'm a Doctor, John, not a detective. It's puzzled me for years how a healthy young man could just fall over dead without a mark on him. It never made sense to me. Still doesn't."

"There was another matter Holmes wanted me to ask about. There was a girl, a servant named Nancy Ashcroft..."

"Aha! You want to know about the girl."

"I do. I don't know how, but Holmes believes that she may be connected somehow with both the original death and the ones now."

"And what do you think, John?"

"It's possible. It has been my experience that Holmes is seldom wrong."

"So what do you want to know?"

"I take it you remember her as well?"

"Course I do. Believe it or not, I remember most all of my patients."

"Remarkable."

"Not really. This isn't that big a village, even counting the Hall."

"I see."

"Nancy Ashcroft was a pretty thing. Hair red like fire and eyes green as emeralds. Every young buck in the village fancied her, but she had higher aspirations. She set her cap for Beckley Dunbury. She wanted to be real lady, she did. She wanted servants instead of being one. Understand?"

I nodded.

It wasn't uncommon for a young woman to aspire to marry above one's station.

"For his part, Beckley was a handsome devil with a silver tongue. Tall. Six feet plus three or four inches tall, as I recall. Maybe a touch more. He could've had his pick of women. Looked a lot like Lord Byron, they say, so it was a bit surprising when he married the daughter of the Duke and Duchess of Spindlethwait. Nice enough girl. Sweet, really. But kind of homely. Still, she was an only child, pampered, and lots of money. The Duke owned an armory works selling war materials: guns, cannons, ammunition. What with India and Africa and so on, England is always fighting somewhere, so the money fountain never runs dry. Young Beckley just swept her off her feet."

"It happens. Many people marry for money," I sighed.

"Too many if you ask me. Two, perhaps three, weeks after the big wedding Nancy came to see me, worried because she hadn't had a period in seven weeks."

"I see. And Beckley Dunsbury was now married..."

"Exactly. You know how it is, as a fellow doctor: we do double duty as confessors..." I nodded in agreement.

"She told me she'd never been with any man except Beckley, and now he'd abandoned her."

"So she was certain the child was Dunbury's?"

"That's what she claimed."

"What happened to her? Any idea?"

"The last time I talked with her was a day or two before Beckley died. She and the baby seemed to be doing fine. She said she was going to confront Beckley, and at the very least see that he paid for her upkeep and the baby's or she would tell his family."

"Did he pay her off?"

"No idea. Just a day or two later, he was dead."

"So she was still around after he died?"

"For a brief time."

"Then Beckley didn't do her in."

"Beckley may have been a cad, but I don't think he had it in him to kill

anyone."

"Did she kill herself, do you think?"

"Not her! Too spirited. But there was nothing for her here with Beckley dead. Beyond her hopes of high position, I got the impression she really loved him. I think she just left."

"Any idea where?"

"None. She never told me she was going."

"Did she have family somewhere?"

"I am not aware of any, but it is possible. Her parents lived here. Mary, her mother, died some twenty-odd years ago. Poor Fred, he grieved himself to death within a year. If Nancy had been alive, she didn't come to her parents' funerals. That's all I know. I wish I could help you more."

"You've been a great deal of help. Thank you very much."

We chatted briefly about things like how medicine was changing and I made my departure.

I told Jefferson to take me to the telegraph office.

Perhaps Lestrade would be able to find a trace of Nancy Ashcroft.

With some effort Holmes managed to fight his way through the tangle of weeds, cursing when he felt the nick of a brier scratching his hand.

Sweating despite the cool breeze, he doggedly continued to clear the doorway of the abandoned operations building.

At last he found himself inside.

Sections of collapsed roof covered whole sections of the room.

Rusty tools lay scattered about, orange and brown from water, weather, and time.

The dirt floor was muddy and in some spots rain water still pooled from the recent downpours.

Holmes gingerly picked his way around, checking the footing with his cane before taking each step.

Not to his surprise there were footprints near the dilapidated door into the oast house proper.

He took a ruler from an inside pocket and made careful measurement, mentally noting both the size and depth.

His brow knit in thought.

After looking around for perhaps another twenty minutes he was satisfied for the moment that he had seen all this room had to offer.

He tried the door.

At first it wouldn't budge, but after careful inspection he discovered a hidden catch.

Once the catch was released the door swung open easily.

The wood, he noted, looked much older than it was.

This, too was no surprise, for Holmes knew of several successful antique forgers who could do this kind of distressing in their sleep.

The door, he observed, swung easily.

On closer inspection he saw that the hinges looked rusted, but were well oiled to operate smoothly.

From his coat pocket he retrieved a candle and lit it with a match.

As he suspected, he was facing a second door, one that opened out into the oast house proper.

In this narrow space between the doors were even more footprints.

Again he made careful measurements until he was satisfied he knew how many people had been there.

As he had suspected, this section of the tower had a double wall.

He had guessed so when he had observed that the interior was a few feet narrower than it should be, given the size of the exterior.

Holmes smiled slightly when he found not one but two dumbwaiters, one on either side of the door.

He carefully examined both and found that both were sound, that the hardware was rust free and well oiled, and the pulley ropes were practically new.

The dumbwaiters had been built to hold large sacks of hops, so it was no problem fitting himself inside the one on his left.

He blew out his candle and began hauling himself up a foot at a time, stopping to peer out between slats whenever he reached the hatch to each floor until, arms aching, finally he reached the top floor, that dread place where he and I had only hours before nearly met our doom and where poor Tilly Raines lay still

awaiting transport by the mortician.

Holmes pushed open the hidden door and stepped out into the shadowy room.

He stretched to relax his cramped muscles before walking toward the dead girl.

Behind him he heard the unmistakable click of a firearm being cocked.

"Too bad, Mr. Holmes," said the voice behind him.

"You got out of here alive once. You should've taken the hint and shoved off. Believe it or not, I was hoping it wouldn't come to this. I'm sorry, really I am..."

The roar of the gun was deafening!

## **Chapter 7** by David Hayes

The ride to the telegraph office went over even roads and was uneventful.

That was fortunate, since Watson couldn't possibly handle one more thing.

Taking advantage of the smooth trip, he set everything down in his notebook, as is his practice.

Holmes always accused him of writing the first draft of his next magazine story, but the truth was it is just his nature.

Times, dates, places, and people easily blur together into one big mess.

It was a problem in school and in his medical practice.

He knew he couldn't take the chance - not on this case - and he would need the facts to be accurate and concise if he expected Inspector Lestrade's help.

As he wrote, he remembered the original request from Lestrade, to come to Harrow Weald and help him investigate four strange deaths.

Now, it appears there was a fifth one, much earlier, the last Lord of the Manor.

They are pretty sure that all five died by asphyxiation, that he and Holmes had barely escaped the same fate.

He wrote down a question, "What did the people who were murdered have in common?"

What bothered him most were the people.

To Watson, it was always the people.

The Lord and Lady of Dunbury didn't measure up.

Neither of them acted like they were raised by parents and staff of good quality but it was Lady Dunbury that bothered him most.

It isn't that unusual for a man to lack social graces, but he usually married someone well-schooled in them, either by his own choice or that of his parents.

She ran the house and issued orders and threats to her husband both by word and by body language.

Her explanation of the relationship between Peggy Ashcroft and Lord Beckley Dunbury showed contempt for the working class, also echoed in



the way she managed those who farmed the estate.

Her presence dominated the estate in the same way her portrait dominated the manor house.

They arrived at the train station that served as the telegraph office.

The station was the center of a cluster of buildings that included a pub.

Leaving Jefferson with the carriage, Watson went inside.

He wrote out the telegram carefully, bringing Lestrade up to date and asking him whether there was any record of Peggy Ashcroft in London.

Hoping to receive a message soon and being very hungry, he walked over to the pub for a supper.

He told Jefferson to tie up the horse and join him.

He hoped to learn something more from the time together.

The pub wasn't in much better shape than everything else in the area but it was comfortable and the food smelled good.

They settled in to a carvery of meat with potatoes and a mug of ale.

After they had eaten well and ordered their beer mugs refilled, Watson asked, "Jefferson, how long have you been at Harrow Weald?"

"About ten years. I come right after the present Lord and Lady arrived."

"Were Barrows and the maid, Eleanor, already there?"

"No, Dr. Watson, they came at about the same time."

"Let me get this straight. All of the staff were hired after the current Lord arrived? Do you know what happened to the former staff?", asked Watson.

"No sir, and very few of the residents knew the staff or his Lordship. The only people who spent any time there were March, Lovat, Smyth, and Tilly Raines, and they're all dead. I don't know what to do, sir. I'm afraid."

Watson tried to assure him that he and Holmes would do everything possible to help him.

They finished their beer and went back to the telegraph office.

The reply was there.

"Lucky that Lestrade had been on the force for so long, and doubly lucky that he always seemed to be at the Yard", thought Watson.

He put the telegram in his pocket, gathered Jefferson, and set out in the carriage for the manor.

His second trip to the manor didn't seem to take as long as the first.

He was in a hurry to speak with Holmes, to find out what new things he had found, and to give him the information from Lestrade.

They arrived at the manor house and Jefferson went in to tell Holmes they had arrived.

Watson lingered at the doorway under the gaslight.

He pulled out the telegram from Lestrade and as he read it, a feeling of surprise mixed with fear gripped him.

Jefferson reappeared alone.

"Mister Holmes went to the oast house several hours ago and hasn't returned", exclaimed Jefferson.

"Come, Jefferson, let's get to the oast house right away."

They rode there in the carriage.

Watson bounded from the carriage and rushed right in.

"Holmes", he called but received no answer.

He saw the ladder there on the floor and using it, climbed to the upper floor.

What he saw horrified him.

His friend was stretched out across the body of Tilly Raines, his hand clutching his side.

There was enough moonlight that through the cracks in the roof, he could see a small amount of blood on the floor.

He knew it was his friend's.

He rushed to him, his voice shaking from the emotion of the moment.

"Holmes", he said almost in a whisper.

"Holmes".

His friend groaned and moved slightly.

Watson checked Holmes' heart rate.

It was very faint but he knew from his military experience that he could survive if he could be treated for what appeared to be a bullet wound in his side very soon.

He saw the dumb waiter, something he hadn't seen the first time he was there.

He placed Holmes in it.

The groans his friend made as he was being moved pierced his every being.

Watson made his way back to the lower floor and, enlisting Jefferson's aid, lowered Holmes down to the lower floor and helped him in the carriage.

They made him as comfortable as possible and set off for Dr.

Kennelworth's office via the back road so as not to be seen from the manor house.

While Jefferson drove as cautiously as he could, Watson sat with his arm around Holmes, trying to make him as comfortable as possible.

Holmes was fighting to stay awake but was starting to lose consciousness.

Before he passed out, Holmes opened his eyes and stared at Watson, saying two words, "Green eyes."

## **Chapter 8** by Carolyn and Joel Senter

"Painful, and more exsanguination than was comfortable. I am told that no vital organs were damaged, but, as I'm sure you are certainly aware, hospital incarceration does not suit my constitution in the least. I need to be freed from this pest hole!"

The resurfacing of Sherlock Holmes's constitutional irascibility and impatience was a comforting sign of his returning to normal.

"In due time, my friend, in due time. The doctor will release you when your condition permits. Even if your wound wasn't life-threatening, you do need to rest and recuperate. Needless to say, I have been worried to distraction for these last three days, but your doctor is confident that you will recover." I reassured him.

"The time hasn't been a total loss. Since I recovered consciousness I have had visits from Lord and Lady Dunbury, headsman Brown, Jefferson, and a few other assorted local folk whom I have no recollection of having ever met. I have also had the opportunity to review your report concerning your visit with the Doctors Kennelworth and Attenborough and your conversation with Jefferson. All of these have provided ample grist for my mental mill, and, heaven knows, I have had an abundance of time to grind away at it in this accursed hospital bed."

"So, have you had the inclination and energy to give further consideration to the matter of the oast house murders?"

"I have indeed," answered Holmes, "fortunately, Dr. Hollins, the doctor which the hospital assigned to my case, is a smoker and permitted me my pipe.

It was probably worth being shot to be allowed access to my pipe after the long deprivation at Dunbury Hall.

After two pipes and a bit of head-clearing rest, the many errors in

judgement, of which I have been inexcusably guilty during our involvement at Harrow Weald, have come clear to me."

"Errors?," I asked incredulously.

"My dear Watson, you should have been screaming "Norbury" at the top of your voice since the instant we set foot at Harrow Weald"

"I'm sorry, Holmes, but I wasn't aware of any errors you might have made, in fact I was not aware of your making any suggestions about the resolution of the case at all, not even erroneous ones."

"Well," Holmes chuckled, "sometimes I make the additional error of assuming that you are following my line of reasoning and, hence, have entry into my own train of thought.

I believe that, with respect to the current case, I have been a victim of my own past successes."

"How so?" I queried.

"I have spent my entire life in learning to avail myself of obscure clues which have allowed me to piece together seemingly unrelated fragments of evidence into cohesive, sequential wholes. In doing this, I have been lulled into the fallacy of expecting that there will always be a sequence of cause and effect events which will make themselves apparent with sufficient concentration and study."

"Is this not true? It seems self-evident and, indeed, to have been the core of your success as a detective."

"Ah, my dear Watson, sometimes things are not what they seem. On rare occasions, this having been one of them, it is necessary for the

investigator to disassemble what appears to be an orderly series of events into something of a more useful disorder."

"Why, Holmes, whatever do you mean?"

"In the beginning, my dear Watson, it was completely obvious to me, and, I presume, to you, that all the victims had been killed in the same way, for the same reason in the same place, hence, logically, by the same perpetrator."

"It never occurred to me to think otherwise."

"Nor to me. We both forgot one of my basic tenets, 'there is nothing more deceptive than an obvious fact.' While lying here in the hospital, I did two things which, I believe, have led to the proper conclusions. First, I asked myself a question, a simple question, but one which should be asked during any criminal investigation. Simply, Watson, *cui bono* and in this case we should add, I think, *cui malo* - To whose benefit and to whose detriment? First, let us consider to whose benefit would be the deaths of all those farm workers? Can you think of a single individual who would have benefited from all their deaths? We must, I think, discount the existence of some moonstruck maniac who strikes down whatever victim might be available at the proper phase of the moon. Now, give a thought to what possible gain might accrue to either Lord or Lady Dunbury by the deaths of those whom we were told by Lady Dunbury were the most productive workers on the estate. Considering the fact that the estate was on the brink of financial collapse, the loss of the most productive workers could only work to the detriment of the estate, hence,

also to her Ladyship. His Lordship, I think can be dismissed as a suspect from the lack of any benefit which would accrue to him, but also by virtue of the fact that he had neither the spunk nor the nerve to do anything without the express approval of her Ladyship. She would certainly not permit her husband to do anything which would work to her detriment since she would not even allow the inconvenience of his smoking in his ancestral estate."

"Yes, I think that most reasonable." I further affirmed.

"Of course, anyone who ever reads any future account of this case which you might pen can scarcely miss the connection between the current Lady Dunbury and Nancy Ashcroft; the former being, I think without question, the illegitimate daughter of the latter. Lady Dunbury had achieved the desire of her mother by acquiring the title 'Lady' and joining the nobility. She did so by marrying her own cousin, of course. This would be a union ill advised by modern standards, but such is not unheard-of, especially among the upper classes, and is certainly no crime. But it would be important to her, in her mother's memory, not only to achieve the desired lofty social status, but, also to be successful in that role. Hence, the loss of her best farm workers would have been a serious, if not disastrous, detriment to Her Ladyship."

"So who would benefit?"

"Please remember, Watson, that all four of the farm workers killed were in competition for the posh, but at the time nonexistent, living quarters promised by Lady Dunbury. So, any one of the competitive workers would benefit by the death of any other. Since most of the individuals

directly involved in the murders are now dead, it will never be possible for me to confirm some of the conclusions I have drawn from my own reasoning, but as the elements of the case have worked themselves out, I can conceive of no other logical alternatives. I believe that James Smyth actually did murder Joseph Lovat by luring him up to the fourth floor of the oast house, possibly with the promise of some sort of mutually beneficial conspiracy to be gained from the Lady Dunbury's promise of reward to the most productive worker. Smyth abandoned Lovat on the top floor that dark and lonely oast house, lit the brazier, and killed him in the manner that almost became our own undoing." "Very well, are you saying that the contenders for the genteel lodgings murdered each other?"

"Clearly not, Watson, else there would be at least one of them left alive! Would you have it like the Gingham Dog and the Calico Cat who devoured each other until nothing at all was left remaining of either? No, I have, so far, merely drawn what I believe to be the conditions associated with the first murder."

"Then who killed James Smyth and the others?"

"Circumstances have now erased the data necessary for proof, but I believe that Smyth's death was a matter of happenstance."

"Happenstance?!"

"Yes, a casual comment Jefferson made in conversation led me to this conclusion. It seems that some of the farm hands were accustomed to disposing of their personal refuse by incinerating it in the old brazier in the oast house. You know the old saying

that a murderer always returns to the scene of their crime? Well, of course, they don't always do that, but a surprising number of them do. I think that Smyth returned to the upper floor of the oast house for whatever reason - perhaps to make sure he has left no evidence behind - and, coincidentally one of the farm workers happened to start a refuse fire in the brazier, thereby igniting some of the residual charcoal and releasing its lethal gases. I believe that this contraband incineration was also the source of our near lethal experience, too. When we climbed to the upper floors of the oast house, Lady Dunbury simply went back home assuming that we would summon her when we were finished with our investigation. Jefferson had followed us up the ladder to see to our safety and had then used the ladder to return to the ground floor, he too assuming that we would signal when we were finished. Whoever ignited the fire did so in perfect innocence unaware of our presence or even that the fire would emit lethal fumes."

"Well, your summary does appear a bit farfetched, but it seems to account for the events, so far. So you believe that no one was actually trying to kill us."

"That is what I believe. Who would have made the attempt? Only the Lord and Lady and old Jefferson were present in the oast house. We have dismissed both the Lord and Lady as possibly being the culprits and since your own report indicated that Jefferson was in mortal fear of his own life, he had no reason to want us dead. We offered, in fact, a possible source of comfort for him. If we could catch the murderer, then he would consider himself safe."

"Well, then, were the deaths of Park and Tilly Raines also accidents?"

"Such a conjecture would stretch farfetched beyond farfetched. No, those deaths were murders."

"But by whom?"

The key to the solution of that came to me when I read your report of your visit to the village of Harrow Weald."

"Oh, I saw nothing of significance in any of my interactions in the village. It all seemed most cordial and inconsequential."

"It would seem so to the casual observer. I am surprised, though, that you did not perceive something a bit out of the ordinary in your conversations with Dr. Kennelworth."

"No, our conversations seemed to me to be quite ordinary."

"Did Dr. Kennelworth's enthusiasm about your writings and our detective work not seem to you to be a little extreme to you?"

"Well, not really. Over the years I have encountered many avid followers of my accounts of our adventures together."

"I found Dr. Kennelworth's zeal to surpass the bounds of enthusiasm and extend into the realm of fervor, and, in spite of the old saying that 'money is the root of all evil,' I believe that you have often heard me say that fervor is the root of all evil. I don't recall ever having heard your say that, Holmes," I said, raising a questioning eyebrow.

"Well, perhaps not, but I should have said it. It may be the ultimate truth. No matter how worthy the cause in

which the fervor is invested or how flattering it might be to an author, it is the root of all human evil. When a person is consumed with fervor, nothing else matters - there is no room for reason, for justice, or even for morals or humanity. One's fervor must be served. The devastation of whole societies has been begotten in the service of fervor. Now, Dr. Kennelworth had a fervent passion concerning our adventures. When he first heard of the murders at Dunbury Hall, he waited in hope that the matter would bring us close to his neighborhood. The local constabulary, however, effected the only response. When Smyth was killed - a matter everyone thought to be a murder - he still waited in anticipation. We were not called into the case. I am sure, though, that you have heard me say that 'when a doctor goes bad he is the worst of criminals.' In his passion to meet us and, perhaps, to involve himself in the case, he murdered Manfield Pike hoping that a third mysterious murder would cause us to be summoned."

"Just how did he do that?"

"Well, as a doctor yourself, you well know just how many undetectable poisons can be administered to a person in a variety of undetectable ways. He administered poison to Smyth under some medical pretense, transported the body to the upper floor of the oast house, by way of the dumb waiter, in order to create the illusion that the haunted oast house had taken another victim."

"Yes, many poisons could well go undetected particularly if the doctor performing the autopsy had no reason to suspect poison."

"Now, the murder of Smyth was, indeed, enough to bring Lestrade to our doorstep, but the doctor didn't know that. He waited a reasonable period of time, then did in Tilly Raines in the same manner. This murder turned out to have been unnecessary for his nefarious purpose, because we were already planning our trip to Harrow Weald when the news of poor Tilly's death reached us. He picked Pike and Tilly Raines because they were the most important workers on the estate remaining alive and he thought that their deaths would attract the most attention."

"Are you sure, Holmes, of all this?"

"I admit it was all only logical conjecture on my part until just before you came to visit me today. I had just received word from Lestrade that Dr. Kennelworth, when confronted with my description of his murderous escapades, confessed directly. The neophyte criminal tends to yield confessions quickly when confronted by officials who seem to know all. You will recall a similar incident with a fellow named Ryder..."

"Yes, of course, ... but who shot you?"

"That was Kennelworth. When you stopped for your supper, he returned to the scene of his crimes, for what reason I cannot say - perhaps it was that murderer returning to the scene of the crime tendency, or, perhaps he was trying to effect some plan which would insure his being summoned by us to participate in the investigation. Fortunately, his marksmanship was as bad as his criminal plotting. In some corner of his twisted mind he had become very angry with us, and, particularly with me, for our not inviting him into our investigation; he fired on me in a moment's anger born of frustration. He even offered an apology, of a sort, before shooting me ... he said something like, 'I was hoping it wouldn't come to this. I'm sorry, really I am...' and then fired. He must have realized, after the act, that shooting me was scarcely a proper remedy for his disappointment. Then he must have fled from the Oast House in panic."

"Since Lestrade has extracted a confession, it would appear that your deductions have been correct, so the only living perpetrator will come to justice. Smyth has already reaped his just desserts through an act of

Providence. We shall, also, certainly see to it that the workers at the Dunbury estate are warned about the dangers of using the oast house brazier for rubbish disposal. But what about the tobacco ashes you found?"

"Merely remnants of one of Lord Dunbury's secret smoking adventures. He claimed that he never went to the oast house, but since he couldn't smoke in his own house, well, what was he to do?"

"And the green eyes?"

"Green eyes? I don't know what you mean?"

"When I found you in the oast house, the last words you muttered before you became unconscious were 'green eyes.' What did you mean by that?"

"Hummm. I have no recollection of having said that at all nor any notion of what I might have meant. I suppose that the lesson to be learned from this, old friend, is that you should never put much stock in the mutterings of a semiconscious, nearly delirious gunshot victim."