

The Adventure of the Leaping Lord of Beasley Manor

Chapter One by Kent Ross

Summer's here had been oppressive, but it finally seemed to have passed.

September's rains had come, but even they had only tempered the heat.

Now finally as October began, there was a coolness in the morning that was invigorating.

So much so, that following our rising and matutinal ablutions, we had enjoyed an excellent morning repast of eggs and fresh rashers, with a strong Arabian coffee that seemed appropriate for this day.

It was bright outside our windows, with light wind stirring the leaves, many of which had already descended due to September's rains.

We rose from our chairs to take a walk through the park, though a bit unusual for Holmes, but the weather change had stirred us both to enjoy the morning.

We strolled casually, not minding our time, since neither of us had pressing business.

It was with a startled consternation that came from Holmes as we rounded the corner.

Right in front of our abode was a stately carriage, certainly of the upper echelons of the city.

He may not have snorted, but I heard him mumble, "We might have missed this," as he hurried to the door.

We were met by Mrs. Hudson who told us that we had a visitor, a "Lady Honorific Beasley, of Beasley Manor. I seated her in your rooms, but she has waited nearly fifteen minutes. I do not think she is accustomed to waiting on others."

"Of course not, Mrs. Hudson. Thank you. Did you provide her with some tea?"

"Yes, sir. She seemed some agitated as she waited."

As we entered our rooms, Holmes spoke to the woman seated near the window, "Lady Beasley, I am sorry we were delayed this morning and so we not present for your arrival."

"Yes," she responded. "I was a bit piqued, but since I had not sent you a note, I can hardly hold it against you. Incidents of recent days have left me a bit confused over proper decorum and I am sorry."

"Of course, Holmes replied. "I am Mr. Sherlock Holmes, and this is my friend, Dr. John Watson. How can we help you?"

Lady Beasley nodded and said, "Well, I hardly know how to tell you. It seems so, well, innocent, yet so strange, that I knew nowhere else to turn. I trust you perhaps can enlighten me about my son. I could hardly inquire of others"

"We will do our best, Lady Beasley, but pray tell us more of the nature of the situation."

"My son, the Earl of Beasley, came to his inheritance five years ago, with the death of my husband. He, my

husband that is, had been in poor health for nearly ten years before he expired. His death was not unexpected, and relieved him of much pain and suffering."

"Thank you, Lady Beasley, but it remains unclear as to your problem with your son. Perhaps you could start at the beginning of the story."

"Yes, precisely," She said. "It was five years ago with my husband's death, Arthur took his place. The estates are quite extensive, and with my husband's ill-health, Arthur had already been in charge of their care. He had done well, and has continued doing well, so that the properties have survived the change with hardly a notice."

"Then," I interjected, "Financial concerns are not part of their problem."

"Oh, my no," she expostulated.

"That is not it at all." Holmes said, "Go on, then, M'lady."

"Well, it was just on the first of May, May Day, just five months ago that the first incident occurred. Perhaps you remember, it had been a wonderful May Day and the village children had come to the Manor for a picnic on the grounds. We often invited them."

"Yes," I said.

"That evening though a storm came in with strong winds and rain fairly shattered the night. I had difficulty sleeping with the storm. I thought I would get up and descend to the library to look for something to read."

"I do remember that storm. It was quite out of the ordinary," I said.

"Yes, it was. As I descended the staircase, I did not need a light for I was, of course, entirely familiar with the house. I came down and turned the corner to go to the library and I was surprised to see light coming through the doorway. Somewhat fearful, I crept to the doorway and looked in... "And..." I asked, as Her Ladyship hesitated.

"It was Arthur." Holmes said, "But that cannot have been unusual?"

"No, of course not," she replied somewhat shortly, "But it was what Arthur was doing. He was not at the desk reading, but he was leaping around. Not with any intentionality, but leaping and laughing. I feared for his sanity, so I spoke soothingly to him, 'Arthur?' His leaping ceased and he turned to me and said, 'Mother, what are you doing up at this hour?'

"My reply was, 'What am I doing? Rather, what are you doing?'

'Oh,' he said, 'I was, eh... nothing.'

"And without further explanation, he brushed by me, with a soft touch to my cheek and went to his bed. Well, needless to say, I could not sleep that entire night."

"Perhaps it was the children had put him in a gay mind that evening and he was enjoying the memory of them."

"Is there anything else, or was this a single incident?" Holmes queried.

"No, Mr. Holmes, it was not a single incident."

"Then it has happened again?"

"Yes, at least four more times, of which I am aware, though it could have been more."

"Did you also observe any of these?" he said.

"Strangely, the four I have observed all happened on the evening of the first of each month. The first had been so odd of Arthur, that somehow on the first of June I was not asleep, perhaps remembering the incident on May Day, and at a similar time, it was 2:00 a.m., I again descended the stairs and saw that a light was coming from the library. Arthur was again leaping about, I might say cavorting. I didn't interrupt him this time and ascended back to my bedroom."

"Strange indeed, but what of the other incidents?" Holmes asked.

"Because of the first two incidents, I deliberately went down again on July first and August first and then again September first, and it was the same as that I had previously observed."

"And Sir Arthur has himself never spoken of them?" Holmes inquired.

"Oh, no" she replied, "He would never do that. And, I might add, his behavior and temperament have been exemplary in every respect. Well, at least, all that I have observed, except..." and she stopped haltingly.

"There is, then, something else?" Holmes followed.

"Yes," she went on, "I had been considering what I ought to do, if anything, but then it didn't happen."

"What didn't happen?" I said.

"The first of this month, the leaping didn't occur, but something rather more bizarre and mysterious. When I came down again, the light was emanating from the door, but Arthur was not leaping. Oh, this is quite embarrassing. He was sitting at the desk and he was weeping. I entered the room this time and spoke to him, 'Arthur, what is wrong?' He saw me and promptly screeched. Yes, that is the word. He screeched, an agonized voice, he cried out 'We are undone and all is ended. ' Whatever do you mean, Arthur? ' I cannot tell you. I cannot, but if I should die, you will be safe. ' And with that he rushed from the room and left the house, and I have not seen him these past two days. Can you explain this?"

"Up to this month's change in behavior, the situation did not seem unsettling, but this does call for inquiry, Lady Beasley. We will come to Beasley Manor in the morning and pursue one or two lines that are suggested," Holmes said.

"Oh, thank you. Any expenses you occur will be handled by our solicitor of the city," she added.

As she arose to leave, she added, "Thank you for receiving me and listening to this strange tale. The Beasley's have been there for hundreds of years, and have not had even the hint of scandal. Please use your discretion. Thank you again."

With that she left our rooms and descended to her carriage. I looked at Holmes and said, "Whatever do you make of that."

"Nothing without more data, but it has some most intriguing possibilities. Would you share a carriage with me to Beasley Manor in the morning?"

Chapter Two by Billy Fields

Holmes, who already had quite a store of information about the Beasley Family did, indeed, need more data.

"I nearly laughed aloud when she said it was not a financial problem," Holmes said as he eased into his chair upon her departure. "Beasley Manor is actually the less substantial of the family's holdings. In fact, the Beasley's whose ancestral homes are in Warwickshire, still main homes in London as well as the historic holdings in Warwickshire."

I must have surprised him since he answered my unasked question.

"Why have you not heard of them if their holdings are so vast and family legacy so great," he said with a puff of smoke. "I can sum it up in a single word... Clarendon."

"Of course, the Earl of Clarendon is Warwickshire and has been since Charles II gave him Kenilworth Castle," I said. "Even if the Beasley's held vast estates, it would be under the shadow of Clarendon."

"So the carriage ride to Beasley Manor will be a relatively short one in the morning. But the one by train then carriage to their home in Warwickshire, if we need to go there, will be a little more time-consuming," Holmes said.

He settled deeply into his chair as he drew up his long legs .

Holmes, with his encyclopedia memory, rushed forward recalling the history of the county. "You must know that Stratford-on-Avon is in the county," Holmes said as he cut his eyes to me for my response.

"Any school boy in England knows the birthplace of Shakespeare," I said.

"George Eliot taught me that 'Iteration, like friction, is likely to generate heat instead of progress'.

"While 'he' was a woman, Eliot had a first class mind who saw the world quite analytically and quite clearly" he said wryly.

"I am surprised. I thought you never read for pleasure," I exclaimed.

"Correct Watson. I don't, but writers, even writers of novels have ideas which must be consumed from time to time. And, George Eliot, rather the writer who used that name, was always interesting to me as a youth. I still have a few parts of my mind you haven't been able to access, old friend. Francis Holyoake, a lexographer, has provided me with data which I have used for years. He too is from Warwickshire. Shall I go on," he smiled.

"No, confound it, no. Your point is proven and I tire of your regurgitation of data on Warwickshire. I say we go and see what we must see. Then you will have the data you need," I said turning toward my rooms.

"Watson, old fellow, don't leave in a dither. I merely wanted to save you from research. I know how thorough to read and how little time we have. Please sit back and let's consider the data we have before us," he said.

I composed myself and returned to my place near the fire.

The fall, as I said, was rapidly coming to England so Mrs. Hudson had young Billy build a fire for us while we met with Lady Beasley.

The morning commotion had brought on my appetite as well so I asked for a mid-day meal from our kind landlady.

"I was not expecting to be serving a luncheon for you Dr. Watson, but I was able to put together some cheese and cold meats with some fresh bread. I even have spotted dick for you with your strong coffee," she said sternly with a slight grin. "Will that hold you 'til supper."

Holmes laughed aloud at the Scottish woman as she left me sitting in front of my meal.

"Bravo Watson. She was eating from your hand. Bravo."

At first irritated, I was soon amused as we laughed together.

"Join me Holmes. We have much to talk over," I said.

He nearly leapt from his chair as he gathered himself to the table.

He wasn't particularly hungry, but he wanted to probe my mind as he probed his mind as well.

He clearly was about to enter a place that I was unable to go with him... a place where he separated fact from fiction, where data were like water during a heavy gale.

His brow furrowed and unfurrowed as he sat across from me.

Often, it looked painful as his mind worked like the magnificent machine that it was...but soon it started slowing and he returned to my presence.

"It is still not clear to me how this strange leaping business can be more than a fantasy. What would compel a

normal man to go laughing and leaping about the rooms as if he was being lifting and swung by a puppeteer," Holmes said dryly. "It is not obvious and it is not answerable...yet."

Wiping a bit of coffee from my mustache, I grabbed his hand in an attempt to calm his nerve.

He recoiled as if touched by a hot poker.

I did not realize he had not been talking to me, but to himself...out loud.

I shouted at him, "Holmes, old man. Where are you?"

"Here, dear Watson. I am here. For a few minutes, I was thinking thoughts I cannot share just yet," he said.

"A few minutes," I said. "You have been in a near trance for almost an hour."

"Data...I need data. Without it I am lost," he said.

Words that I had heard so many times before.

"In the morning, we shall go to the Manor," I said. "Data is what you need and what you will find there."

Chapter Three by Kent Ross

I arose a bit late the next morning, but shaved and hurried to see which train we would take to Beasley Manor.

To my consternation, Holmes was not there in our sitting room.

Mrs. Hudson had laid my place at the table.

Evidently hearing my footsteps on the floor, she hurried my coffee along with a lovely meal.

I asked her, curiously, where Mr. Holmes might be.

Her rejoinder was that he had left quite a bit earlier saying he had some errands before we were to leave.

I couldn't imagine what they could have been, though in his mind, he must have generated something that he thought he might find answers to here in the city.

I asked, "Mrs. Hudson, did he say anything more?"

"Just that you would be catching the 11:14, and hoped you would be prepared to join him," she said.

I was just finishing my eggs, bacon and a delightful bun, as our door opened and Holmes stepped in, to my dismay, he was limping.

I arose and asked, concernedly, "Holmes, dear friend, what happened to you?"

He shook his head at me in a dismissive way suggesting I should not be concerned.

"Holmes," I said, "That looks like a nasty sprain, or you've possible twisted your knee. What happened?"

"I hesitate to tell you."

"Were you assaulted? Who were the dastards?" I insisted.

"No, no, Watson, good fellow. I almost wish I had a better explanation, but I fear it to be a bit foolish."

"Well, then, what did happen? That looks frightfully painful," I said.

"Really it is minor, though I confess, it is painful, and somewhat limiting."

"Of course," I went on, "We must postpone our trip to Beasley Manor to another day.

"No," said Holmes. "It is in fact Beasley Manor that is the cause, indirectly, for this folly."

"How, then, do you relate your injury to Beasley Manor," I queried.

"As you said yesterday, at times I drift into a trance-like state when my mind reaches for possibilities... and without sufficient data. I fear I was mulling on what we had heard from Lady Beasley. I was thinking of the Earl dancing or leaping, or whatever he was doing, and strangely I found myself leaping around. Most foolish I must admit. Has Lestrade or someone from the Scotland Yard seen me, they may well have had me committed."

"But why...," I began, but he cut me off and went on.

"I only emerged from my deep thought patterns when I inadvertently over-stepped myself, and falling on the curb, or off it more precisely, I preceded to bring myself to this injury. With perhaps some wrapping and a stick, we can carry on. Yes, we must go on. This problem is intriguing me more and more."

And with that, I wrapped his knee.

We grabbed our grips and found ourselves on the 11:14 toward Beasley Manor.

Holmes scarcely had time to collect his usual cache of morning papers,

without which it would have been difficult for him to endure the inactivity of our train trip.

He was perusing them casually but suddenly brightened and sat erect.

"What" I asked, "did you find."

"Beasley Manor, Yes, by Jove, Beasley Manor."

"Has something happened there since yesterday? Is there now a crime? Just what have you discovered?"

"No, no," he quickly responded. "No crime, but perhaps the key."

"Key," I asked. "What key?"

"The divorce."

"What divorce?" His reply had left me at sea regarding how it applied to Beasley Manor, "The Earl is unmarried!"

"Just so. But this item is not immediately with him. It is about the divorce of Lord and Lady Forecastle."

"Well," I responded, "What about it or them?"

Holmes replied, "At this point it is only conjecture, yet suggestive."

"How so? You've lost me completely."

"As I said, it is merely conjecture," Holmes explained.

Lord Forecastle and the Earl of Beasley have been very close chums since Cambridge.

They have a passion for betting on the races and attending the gaming tables in the city."

"But Lady Beasley indicated that her family had no financial concerns, unless there have been substantial losses of which we've not heard."

"No" said Holmes, "I've not heard anything of the like and my ears usually bring me such news. No, it is something far deeper, I fear, if this is all connected."

"Well, then" I urged, "What do you think is involved?"

"We shan't know unless more data come our way. Ah, here we are at our station. Watson, get us a dogcart as I hobble along to join you. I've stiffened up a bit."

"But...," I sputtered.

"No more until we arrive at Beasley Manor. I would direct your thoughts to the beautiful Lady Forecastle."

Our dog cart arrived.

Chapter Four by Kent Ross

Securing a dog-cart, we clambered on with our valises, and directed our driver to take us to the village, near which lay Beasley Manor.

From our innkeeper, Holmes secured a map of the area surrounding the village and manor.

I asked him why, as I thought there was little here except what we might find at Beasley Manor.

He responded, "Watson, consider that while Beasley Manor is the Earl's primary residence and the center of the village's concerns, there are also other substantial houses near."

"Well, I suppose..." I said, without any clear sense of what he was meaning.

He carried on further pointing to the map he had unfolded on the table in our room. "See here," he said. "The Forecastle's live just a few miles beyond, lying near the market town of Pawkney." He pointed his finger at the village of Pawkney, noting it was just across the valley.

It remained unclear to me, yet seemed to be the focus of his thinking.

He spoke and said, "Let us sup as the evening draws nigh and I now intend to visit both Beasley Manor and the Forecastle's tomorrow."

"But how, does the fact of proximity of the Forecastle's affect our concern with the leaping Lord," I queried. "The papers only mentioned their divorce, but nothing regarding Beasley Manor."

"Their proximity, Watson, their very proximity," he said. "Nothing more tonight," he added, and with that we went to the inn's dining room.

I could gain no more from him and was mulling over what little I knew, and yet could make nothing of it. The meal itself was excellent for a village repast.

We congratulated our host and commended his cook for the meal.

He offered the cook was his wife, and said he would pass along our best.

Holmes continued the conversation, "You've lived here for some years?"

"Indeed," he responded, "When I was born my parents lived at the Manor when the late Earl was alive."

"How then did you come to the inn?" I asked.

"The Earl has always been very concerned for us, well for all of us in the village. I bless his memory for helping me purchase the inn and to get started here."

Holmes then continued, "You know the young Earl, then."

The Innkeeper turned expansive then and said, "Indeed, yes, sir. Of course we was always closer with the old Earl, bless his memory, but the lad, the new Earl was also very friendly to the likes of us."

"You would see him now and again?" I asked.

"Oh, yes," he went on, "like the old Earl, the young one would on occasion stop in, even here, and take a pint of an afternoon. Well, he did, not always, of course, but on occasion, but something must have happened, though I couldn't say what was. No, I couldn't"

"How do you know then that something happened?" I asked.
"Well, it was in just the past few days, I suppose. Course I'm not at all sure what it might have been, I'm not."

"But you must have noticed something to have come to such a conclusion," Holmes prodded.

"I might oughten' to be talking, really knowing no more than I do, but there was such a change, and nearly over the night, it seems."

"How so?" I volunteered, wanting to encourage his garrulity.

"Well, as I said, like the old Earl, the young one would drop in and take a pint with us here. Right friendly, he was. He always seemed to be riding through, though I'm not sure just

where. Now I think more about it, it was about the middle of the afternoon. He'd take a pint, spend some time with us, me and the other men. And then he'd give a friendly wave and be on his way."

"But that changed, did it?" Holmes continued.

"Well, yes. But strange it was. Before, he would stop by always in a good mood, like he was anticipating a good bit of fortune. But, it was just a day or two ago, he came by in a very different mood, I'd say."

"How was that," Holmes continued his query.

"Well, his mood was very different, it was. As before he would be brighter, happy, I suppose. Like I said, looking forward to something, though he never said what that might have been. But 'lo the other day his mood was far different. Really like something bad had occurred. But then again he didn't say, and..." Just then his wife stepped into the room and said, "John, you've bothered these gentlemen long enough. You be speaking out of turn. And they talk about us women being the ones doin' all the talking." He started to leave and follow her, but added one last remark. "It was like he'd lost a good friend, or something. Then again, he didn't come by today at all. Perhaps the bit of trouble the Forecastle's are havin' might be also botherin' him. They'd always been very close. Well, good night, good sirs."

With that, as the innkeeper departed to speak with his wife, Holmes said, "This is probably a good time for us to go to our rooms, Watson. What he had to say though was suggestive, don't you think?"

"Well, no, not really. I suppose we can see some connection now between Beasley Manor and the Forecastle's, what with their being friends, but beyond that, it remains unclear to me," I demurred.

"Be that as it may, Watson, it was suggestive. Not definitive, but suggestive. Tomorrow our visits may clarify further both the leaping and the weeping, but that must await the morrow," and with that he stepped into his room, and I went on to mine.

Chapter Five by Deidre Chattler

We arose early the next morning and went down to breakfast together before beginning our investigations.

"I say, Holmes, I slept marvelously," I stated as we met in the hall.

"It must have been the country air."

However, I could see Holmes had not had as good a night as I, his eyes were sunken and his face looked drawn.

"Holmes." I queried, "were you up all night with this puzzle?"

"Very nearly" he replied.

"It is, at least, a two-pipe problem."

"And what conclusions have you drawn?" I questioned.

"Nothing definite" he responded.

"But I have my suspicions."

"Any you are willing to share?" I asked.

"Not yet. Our visits today may shed more light on what we know so far. But come," he said, "a good breakfast will do wonders. If the innkeeper's

wife does as good a breakfast as she does a dinner than we are, indeed, in for a treat.”

So, down we went to the inn’s dining room where a magnificent spread awaited us: poached eggs, rashers of bacon and ham, kippers, fried tomatoes, buttered scones and muffins and pots of hot Lapsang Souchong to wash it all down.

Fortified by the hearty meal we were ready to embark on our rounds of questioning.

We secured a dogcart and were off to Beasley Manor to speak again with Lady Beasley.

Upon our arrival our knock on the door summoned the butler.

“I am Sherlock Holmes and this is Dr Watson, my associate. Please announce us to Lady Beasley” Holmes stated.

“Of course, sir. If you will follow me you can wait in the library. My name is Sellers and I am the butler.” As he opened the library door he pointed to the corner of the room and said, “Should you require anything simply use the bell-pull.”

“Excellent!” Holmes hissed to me as Sellers left the room.

“The very room where the Lord leapt about. We can make a quick survey before Lady Beasley arrives.”

As Sellers left he, closed the door behind him.

This was Holmes’s cue and he sprang into action scurrying around the room like a terrier sniffing out a rabbit.

He knew his time was short and he put it to wonderful advantage.

Searching the desk and bookshelves his sharp eyes hunted for anything would give us a clue to the Earl’s behavior and sudden disappearance.

“Aha,” he cried.

“Watson, look at this-an article clipped from the local newspaper.” He had discovered the shred of newsprint under the writing pad on top of the desk.

The article was dated April 15th and related that Lord Forecastle had embarked on a significant new business venture in India.

This would require extensive travel on the part of Lord Forecastle but he felt it was a sacrifice well-worth making as rewards would be great.

Holmes placed the paper back under the writing pad just as the door swung open and Lady Beasley entered the room.

Chapter 6 By Roger Riccard

Though only an inch or two over five feet, here, in the presence of her own manor house, the Lady Beasley commanded the room like a queen.

Being in her early fifties, her hair had begun to show some streaks of grey among the chestnut brown piled upon her head like a crown and she made no attempt to disguise it through artificial colors.

I saw now that the brass handled oak walking stick she had borne to Baker Street was not just for fashion.

It was apparent that it was an aid to an arthritic knee, though she still moved with the grace of her station.

Holmes and I remained standing until she sat on a red velvet loveseat near the fireplace and bid us to do likewise.

Settling opposite her into a pair of mauve upholstered wingback chairs with walnut frames and brass buttons, we began our inquiries.

“I take it, Lady Beasley, that your son has still not returned.

Has he communicated with you in any way?” asked Holmes.

“Not so much as a note, Mr. Holmes,” she replied. “How do you propose to begin your investigation?”

“I already have to some extent,” he replied. “However, I do need some assistance on your part.”

“Whatever it takes, Mr. Holmes, so long as you find my Arthur.”

Leaning forward, his long arms resting on his knees, Holmes began his list of requests. “First of all, you say the Earl stated that, even if he should die you would be safe. I would like to ask your solicitor if Arthur has made any recent changes to safeguard the holdings, or you in particular. I will need your permission so that I, or Dr. Watson, may be given access to that information.”

“Of course, I will write out a letter before you leave.”

“Secondly, is anyone else in the household aware of Sir Arthur’s unusual behavior?”

"I've not told a soul other than yourself and Dr. Watson."

"Ah, then I must ask your permission to interview your staff, Lady Beasley."

At that the aura of dignity surrounding her ladyship dimmed and she haltingly replied, "Is that really necessary, Mr. Holmes? The staff knows nothing other than the fact that the Earl is gone. To reveal his embarrassing actions...."

Calmly Holmes interrupted, "I shall be discreet, madam. I'll not mention the dancing in the library. But, if someone else has seen or heard something they may be holding back, not wishing to embarrass you."

"My staff is very loyal," she admitted.

"No doubt, but they may have witnessed something that could be significant without their realizing it."

"Very well," she relented. "I'll have Sellers instruct the others to cooperate with you."

"Thank you," Holmes responded. "Dr. Watson and I will also need to search your son's room and his office."

"Yes, that much I expected. Arthur did all his work from this room, mostly at that desk." She added, pointing to the very desk Holmes had perused before. "His room is upstairs at the end of the hall as you turn right. If it is locked Sellers can let you in."

"Excellent! Finally we shall need a list of your properties and any sort of itinerary your son had for visiting them."

"There's a ledger in the top left drawer of the desk, there." She said,

waving toward the aforementioned workspace. "That should answer all your needs. Anything else, Mr. Holmes?"

"You are being most gracious Lady Beasley. With your permission we'll get started here."

"Very well, I'll write out permission for you with our solicitor, Mr. T. James Salmon (see footnote), of Anderson, Erstad and Salmon in London."

I replied, "I am well acquainted with Mr. Salmon, Lady Beasley. I worked with him on a previous case of ours and he was most cooperative."

She looked at me and nodded, "Very good doctor. I shall return with it in a short while. If you need anything just ring for Sellers."

At that point we all stood.

As Lady Beasley made her way out, Holmes immediately returned to the large oak desk and sat down.

Pulling the ledger from the drawer he studied it methodically, jotting down several notes.

In the meantime he handed me a map he had also pulled from the drawer, which marked all the locations of the Beasley family holdings.

I spread the map on a large work table near the bookshelves.

The sun, streaming through the broken cloud cover, was just beginning to brighten the room beyond the need for artificial lighting.

"Holmes," I asked, "are you planning to visit all of these properties?"

"I hope that won't be necessary, Watson," he answered. "However, if you could determine the most convenient route to those near the area of Pawkney it could be most advantageous."

Taking a piece of paper and pencil from the desk I traced out a route from the map that would provide the shortest distance to the market village while going through all the Beasley holdings in the valley.

It was then I noticed, that just off the corner of my tracing lay the town of Syndenham.

The name triggered my memory of the famous physician, Thomas Syndenham, considered by many to be the Father of English Medicine.

"I wonder...." I thought out loud to myself.

"What's that Watson?" queried Holmes, glancing up from his study of the Earl's ledger.

"Eh? Oh nothing Holmes," I replied.

Then I grinned, "Just a possible clue, but I'd rather not discuss it until I research it and gather more data."

Holmes gave me a look of indignation, "Doctor, I believe you enjoyed making that statement far too much."

* * *

Finishing up in the library we summoned Sellers to escort us to the young man's bedroom.

As we ascended the stairs the butler queried, "Lady Beasley said you wished to speak to the staff. Would

you like to do that all together or individually, gentlemen?"

Holmes replied, "Individually please, Sellers. How many staff members are there?"

As he unlocked the Earl's door he answered, "In addition to myself there are two maids, the cook and a groomsman. On occasion we hire extra help for large social functions but there have been none of late."

"Very well," answered my friend. "We should be ready to start in a few minutes. May we use the library in private?"

"Very good, sir. I suggest you start with the cook as she will likely wish to begin lunch preparations within the hour."

"Yes," murmured Holmes distractedly as he entered the bedroom and began surveying with his hawk-like eyes. "That will be quite satisfactory, thank you."

As Sellers left us I closed the door, knowing that Holmes worked best in such situations in privacy.

The room itself was quite large with a sitting and dressing area in addition to the sleeping portion.

Unlike many older manor houses, this room had been fitted with expansive windows making it well lit.

Heavy green drapes with gold ties framed the view out onto the meadows surrounding the estate.

The plastered walls held few decorations.

Most prominent were two paintings by Gerrit Dou, a Dutch Painter of the

so-called Golden Age and a fascinating artist who somehow made his paintings shine from their light source.

Here on the Earl's walls were, what I assumed to be copies of, The Astronomer and The Physician.

Having a copy of The Physician myself, an anniversary present from my sweet departed Mary, I recognized the work immediately.

I then had moved on to peruse his bookshelves when Holmes, going through dresser drawers and the closet cried out.

"Watson, look here. There are several clothes missing and the middle-sized suitcase is gone."

"What does that tell you, Holmes?" I responded.

"Lady Beasley said the Earl brushed by her and left the house. Yet this evidence would suggest that he either had planned to leave and had already packed and removed his suitcase, likely to the stable, or that he came back later that night and threw things together on the spur of the moment in an attempt to either correct the problem that assailed him or run from it."

"Thank God for that." I replied, "At least it's not likely that he dashed off to commit suicide, in spite of his 'death' remark."

"Yes, while I believe the young man to be desperate, I think it is in the manner of taking action to repair the situation if he can."

"I quite agree, Holmes," I replied. "From his taste in art and literature, I would characterize the young man as

a scholar, but one who is seeking the deeper truths of life, more along the lines of philosophy and exploring the human body and how it relates to the world around him and the universe as a whole."

"Oh, I quite agree Watson. Unfortunately that could mean anything from a religious fanatic to an exploratory drug user."

He then bade me follow him back downstairs to interview the staff members.

The cook and maids were of no help, not having observed anything out of the ordinary.

The groomsman however, did manage to satisfy at least of bit of Holmes craving for data.

"He lit out of here like a lightning bolt, Mr. Holmes," said Carter, the groomsman.

A short stout fellow and, as it turned out, a former jockey in his younger days. "By the time I woke up and came down from my rooms above the stable he was mounted up and headed out the door on Blackjack, that's his prize stallion you see, fastest horse in the county."

"Which way was he headed?" asked Holmes.

"When he hit the main road he turned right. That'd be northwest, back toward town."

Holmes seemed satisfied with that, but then I decided to pursue my own line of questioning.

"Tell me, Mr. Carter," I interjected, "Have you noticed anything unusual about the Earl's hands recently? Have

they shook or has he favored them in any way?"

"Now that you mention it, doctor, he has been shaking his right hand and rubbing it like it was asleep or something lately. He's been doing a lot more with his left hand because of that."

"And how long has this been going on?"

"Oh, seems like off and on, maybe six months or so."

"Thank you, Mr. Carter. You've been most illuminating."

After the man left us, Holmes turned to me, "What do you have in mind, Watson?"

"I'm building a case, Holmes, at least a medical one, that might explain his 'dancing'."

"Really?" replied the great detective, "And what might that be, good doctor?"

Slowly I pulled out a cigar, walked over toward the windows to enjoy the view, and lit it.

"It's still only a working hypothesis, Holmes. A 'theory', if you will."

"And you're not willing to share, Watson?"

I turned back to him, slowly blew out a puff of smoke and smiled, "I'll tell you mine, if you'll tell me yours."

Timothy James Salmon appeared as the Solicitor in charge of the affairs of Lillian Fields in Sherlock Holmes and The Case of the Poisoned Lilly by Roger Riccard - Publisher: The

Irregular Special Press a Division of Baker Street Studios, Ltd.

Chapter 7 By Roger Riccard

The pause was almost palpable and I could easily imagine some of the thoughts racing through the great detective's mind.

Of course with Holmes no one could know everything that spun through that magnificent brain of his.

At last he spoke. "Watson, there are too many conflicting paths at this juncture to postulate which way to turn. I have at least five possible theories that are still viable after our current state of examinations and interviews. If you can shed some light from your medicinal province it may help me to narrow the field further." It was tempting because, after all, the case must come first, but I was not about to give in so easily.

"Do any of your theories allow for a drug-induced cause to his dancing?" I prompted.

He brightened, "Yes, doctor, that would fit at least two of them."

Finally I acquiesced and announced my suspicions. "Are you familiar with Sydenham's Chorea, more commonly known as St. Vitus Dance?"

"Indeed, Watson. However I considered it only briefly since it is primarily confined to children and adolescents."

"Yes, Holmes, but there are other forms of Chorea that can be contracted by a man of the Earl's age and some of them can be induced by drug use."

"Fascinating, doctor," he replied. "If that is indeed the cause of his behavior it could simplify things considerably."

"Your turn, old man," I demanded. "Tell me at least one of your theories that fits with my hypothesis."

"Very well," he stated flatly. "Let us talk as we walk. I wish to check around the house for signs that his Lordship did, in fact, return for his luggage."

Holmes theory was fascinating as it took into account the possibility of drug use, a relationship of some form with the Lady Forecastle and how the divorce of the Forecastles may be related, as well as the Earl's statement about being "undone" but Lady Beasley being safe. "So, that is why you stated that you wished to go the Forecastle's today as well?"

"I am certain there is a connection there, Watson. Ah ha!" he cried as he stooped to examine the ground near the rear entrance to the manor house. "See here, doctor. Several prints from horse hooves and from the type of shoe I'll wager they belong to the famous Blackjack. Come, Watson, it's time we sojourned on to visit the other players in this game."

We strode off to the stable and, after confirming the shoeprint with Carter, Holmes had the groomsman ready a horse and trap for our own journey while I returned to the house, retrieved the map I had drawn and induced the cook to pack us a lunch.

It was roughly 5 miles to Warwick proper but we came to a crossroad after only about a mile at Radford Semele.

Holmes pulled our steed to a stop and bounded to the ground to examine the road.

The overcast and dew of the previous days still held many tracks but finally the detective found that which he sought.

Clambering back aboard he pulled the horse's reins sharply to the right and we set off northward toward Offchurch.

"Is this the way to the Forecastle's?" I inquired of my friend.

"Yes, and it is the way that Sir Arthur rode his stallion on that fateful night."
Soon we found ourselves at the entrance to the grounds of Forecastle Heights.

Stopping short of the gates, Holmes again left my side and examined the pathway.

Upon his return I asked what he had found.

"The Earl was here, Watson. However, he has left again and seems to be headed northeast."

Being somewhat turned around I asked, "Where would that take him, Holmes?"

"If he turns left at the Welsh Road he could make for Kenilworth Castle to see Lord Clarendon."

"For what purpose?"

"One step at a time, my friend. First let us see what we can learn from the Forecastles."

Arriving at the manor we pulled our trap under a covered portico.

This was one of the newer buildings in the district, the Forecastles having demolished the old house, much to the chagrin of historians and archeologists.

Replacing the termite-infested wood and crumbling stones was a fine three-storey red brick structure with white trim, balconies and the portico where we disembarked.

We met the butler at the door, a medium height gentleman with broad shoulders filling out his coat and a broader stomach that overflowed it, stretching the buttons of his waistcoat to the limit.

He requested to know the nature of our business.

"I am Sherlock Holmes," announced the detective, "and this is my colleague, Dr. John Watson. We wish to speak to Lord and Lady Forecastle on a private matter regarding the Earl of Beasley."

The butler stiffened at the name of Sir Arthur and curtly replied, "That person is no longer welcome in this household. If you are friends of his I must ask you to depart."

Holmes held up his hand, "Wait, my good man, we are neither friend nor foe to Lord Beasley. We are merely seeking his whereabouts on behalf of the Lady Beasley, and the doctor here has some medical information that may be of use to your mistress."

The paunchy servant hesitated and then bade us wait in the foyer while he inquired of his mistress as to her availability.

"Holmes," I elbowed my friend, "what medical information did you expect me to impart?"

"If the Earl is suffering from a drug-induced form of Chorea, m'lady may wish to know it as his friend. She may also possibly be his partner in these drug experiments."

Before I could question as to how he came to that supposition the butler returned and had us follow him to greet Lady Forecastle in her library.

The modernization of the home did not exclude the old manor feel as we were escorted into a room that included ancient tapestries, sculptures and paintings of the Forecastle ancestry.

The Lady Forecastle was seated in an overstuffed, hunter green chair near the windows that allowed sunshine to come over her shoulder should she wish to read by daylight.

It was not conducive to reading her face, however, being in shadow with the afternoon light shining in our eyes.

The butler introduced us and left.

We were not invited to sit down.

Instead she gazed at us coolly without saying a word.

She was a comely woman in her late twenties with auburn hair that fit well with her name as I recalled it being 'Colleen', and her aristocratic Irish background.

Holmes opened the conversation.

"Thank you for seeing us, Lady Forecastle. Will his Lordship be joining us?"

She stiffened slightly and answered in her most formal tone, "Lord Forecastle is not in England at present. Whatever you have to say, I will decide what is worthy to pass along to him."

Holmes nodded, "I've read of your troubles m'lady and I do not wish to exacerbate them. However it is imperative that we find Lord Beasley. His health could be at risk."

At the mention of the missing Earl's health her right hand went to her throat. "What is wrong with Arthur... that is, Lord Beasley's health?"

At this question I gave a slight bow and replied, "It is unknown for certain, however I notice that your left hand is exhibiting some of the same symptoms."

She quickly reached down and squeezed her trembling extremity.

Lifting her head in defiance she answered, "My condition has nothing to do with Lord Beasley."

"But something you share may very well be affecting him." Answered Holmes, "I know he came here on the night he disappeared. I suspect that it was in an effort to save your honor from what your husband has falsely accused you of."

"How could you possibly know what my husband has accused me of, or that his suspicions are completely false? None of that information was reported in the papers and I have not told a soul." answered our host.

Holmes softened his tone and responded, "There are very few causes for divorce that a man of his Lordship's standing could possibly

hope to succeed in and retain public opinion on his side. The most obvious would be an implication of infidelity on your part. Forgive me m'lady, I do not wish to be indelicate. However I also do not believe that charge to be true. Sir Arthur and your husband have been great friends for many years and I do not believe it is in the character of the man whose rooms I've examined to cuckold his best friend."

"Thank you, Mr. Holmes." She answered, "I've tried explaining that to my husband but he has listened to the gossip-mongers and when he found us together when he was not expected to be home he assumed our surprise to be caused by guilt."

"But your guilt was not the result of an illicit relationship," declared Holmes. "You share a different type of secret with Sir Arthur."

The emotions were too much for the lady to bear any longer and she buried her face in her hands in tears.

"Yes, it's true," she cried. "Arthur and I share a curse."

"An addiction?" I ventured.

"Yes, doctor," she paused and with a lifting of her head in great resolve continued, "I see I must confess all if there is to be any hope to salvage all our lives."

Chapter 8 By Roger Riccard

The mistress of the house at last asked us to sit down and we took our places opposite to her.

She shifted uncomfortably in her chair, no longer bothering to try and hide the rubbing of her hand to

relieve the symptoms of her physical suffering.

"Gentlemen, since you know so much allow me to explain the entire situation in which I find myself."

Holmes interrupted and asked, "Please Lady Forecastle, start at the beginning and do leave out even the slightest detail."

Finally interlacing her fingers and holding her hands together in her lap she began the tale that brought her to this verge of demise.

"You are aware that Arthur's father, the ninth Earl of Beasley, suffered ill health for many years before his death?"

"Lady Beasley has informed us so," I answered.

She nodded, "Then you will understand how the suffering of his father affected Arthur deeply. He often remained in the room during the doctor's visits, learning all he could as to how he might assist in the relief of his father's pain. It was during the final year of the elder Lord's life that the doctor began using more substantial pain killers to ease his patient's burden. Now, you must understand that there are not many medical men close at hand here in our valley and the doctor, though sympathetic, could not be at the beck and call of just the Beasley clan. Therefore, he taught Arthur when and how to administer the injections of the drugs the doctor had prescribed for his patient.

Because he had given this responsibility to Arthur, only to be used during extreme agitation when the doctor was not available, he had left a supply of the drugs at Beasley

Manor. Arthur, kind and sensitive soul that he is, could not bear his father's sufferings and desired to administer the drugs, probably more often than the doctor would have recommended. In order to hide this overuse Arthur used the information on the drug containers to track down the supplier and somehow, I hesitate to say whether by forgery or bribery, he established a supply line of his own."

As a medical man I started to object to this obviously unethical behavior but Holmes laid his hand on my arm to stifle my interruption.

"A risky undertaking, no doubt," he stated, somewhat placating my own feelings, "Please continue your narrative, madam."

"I know not the risk from a legal standpoint, Mr. Holmes," she went on, "but the ensuing turn of events has created an unbearable situation that threatens all our happiness."

Finally I could listen no longer without expressing my opinion.

"Lady Forecastle, there is more at stake than your happiness. It is obvious that both you and the Earl have engaged in using this drug yourselves. Your very lives are in danger!"

She broke down and began sobbing at my revelation.

Holmes dug his hand into my shoulder in admonition as he pushed off the sofa to go to her side.

Kneeling before her he took her hands into his own and wrapped his long fingers around them.

"Lady Forecastle you must be brave. It is not too late to save all of you, if

you will put yourselves in our hands. Please, tell us how this addiction came about."

She gained control of her sobs and nodded.

Pulling a handkerchief from her sleeve she wiped her eyes and continued her story as Holmes returned to his seat giving me a hard look of warning not to interrupt her again.

"Thank you, Mr. Holmes. You are correct Doctor. Naturally after the Earl's death the drugs were put away. But back in January of this year, Arthur took a fall down some steps and severely sprained his ankle. Normally I'm sure he would have allowed natural healing to take its course, but he was scheduled to race Blackjack in the county sweepstakes that same week. Remembering the pain relievers still in storage he injected himself the day before the race and was able to compete and win.

"I was not aware of his action, of course. Not even my husband, his closest friend, had an inkling of what Arthur had done. But as time passed, circumstances brought about his revelation of the truth to me. Just a month after his incident, I myself took a fall from my own horse while riding one day and severely contorted my knee. My husband was away working on his latest business venture but somehow Arthur became aware of my injury. He came by for a visit and told me of the relieving powers of the drugs he had and offered to administer some for my pain.

"What he failed to tell me, was that in spite of his injury being a month old, he was still taking the drugs himself. Using his leg without feeling pain had

continued to worsen the injury and led to a vicious cycle of drug use. Later he told me that he did not think my situation would have the same results in that my less strenuous lifestyle would not exacerbate my injury to the extent of continual need for pain relief.

"How wrong he was, Mr. Holmes! It came to be a weekly need for me. We always arranged for his visits to be at times when my husband was out of town or away from the house as I did not wish to reveal this weakness to him. But then one day, my husband unexpectedly burst into the room while my dress was pulled above my knee, having just received an injection from Arthur who was on his knees in front of me.

"The scene was horrid, Mr. Holmes. My husband, Ronald, was livid and roared out at poor Arthur, screaming obscenities. Arthur had managed to hide the syringe from his view, so he assumed the worst. He actually rushed to the wall, grabbed his grandfather's sword and started after him. Both Arthur and I attempted to explain but he was hearing nothing save the rage of his own voice. Arthur had to beat a hasty retreat. In his defense for leaving me behind, let me say that it was obvious from Ronald's accusations that he held Arthur completely responsible. I was viewed as a victim and not in any danger from my husband."

"But something must have changed his mind to lead him to contemplate divorce," responded the detective.

"Ronald refused to listen to me. He interrogated the servants and found out how often Arthur had been coming by. Shortly afterward, he packed up and left for India to see to his investment prospects there. I was

not aware of his seeking a divorce until I read that awful newspaper article. I immediately contacted our solicitor and found that the newspapers had exaggerated some tidbit they had gotten hold of and that Ronald has only inquired about his options regarding our marriage and has not started formal divorce proceedings."

"Have you attempted to contact Lord Forecastle and tell him the truth?" I asked.

She looked at me in despair. "I have taken pen in hand a dozen times to do so and yet I hesitate. If I admit to my drug dependency, will he not divorce me immediately? Whereas time may heal the wounds he now labors under and he may yet forgive me when he returns home."

Her logic escaped me, but before I could respond, Holmes jumped in. "Lady Forecastle, we do not know what time may bring, but our immediate focus must be in finding the Earl of Beasley. His drug dependency could lead him to any number of actions which could endanger his life. Do you know where he is?"

Frightened at the thought of her friend's danger she cried, "I do not know, Mr. Holmes! Since the encounter with Ronald he has left my drug supply at an apothecary in town where I have arranged for it to be picked up by one of our servants and administered it myself. As you say, he stopped by here the other morning, attracted my attention through the window and I met him in the garden, out of sight of the house servants. He said he was going to see Clarendon but he wouldn't tell me why, only that he hoped his actions would fix

our situation and that he may be gone a long time."

Holmes closed his eyes and contemplated this statement as we all sat in silence for a minute.

Finally he leaned forward and stated softly, "Madam, I do not pretend to be able to save your marriage, that will be left to your husband's temperament. However, I will do what I can to assist the Earl. What I need to know from you is, are you willing to take the necessary steps to eliminate your addiction?"

"Is such a thing possible, Mr. Holmes?" she cried.

"I daresay that it is. I myself have overcome the need for a more powerful drug than you are in the power of."

"Then by all means, please help me," she pleaded.

Holmes asked her to bring a vial of the drug she was using for me to examine.

It was indeed a powerful pain killer.

Something I would only administer to a dying individual because of its addictive effects.

"How often are you taking this, madam?" I asked her.

"Once a week, Doctor," she replied.

"Then we have an excellent chance to beat it. Are you willing to move into a sanatorium and stay there for as long as it takes, even if it turns into months?"

"Yes, anything to remove this vile curse from me!"

"Then I will arrange it," I stated. "When are you susceptible to your next dose?"

"Not for a few days."

"Then I will contact you as soon as I have made arrangements. It shouldn't take more than a day or two."

"Thank you, Doctor. What of Arthur, Mr. Holmes?" she asked.

Standing, Holmes replied, "We shall leave immediately to see Lord Clarendon and learn what we may. In the meantime I can only suggest that you write to your husband and tell him the absolute truth. I believe that is your only chance for any possible forgiveness on his part."

She stood as well, "Thank you, Mr. Holmes, and Godspeed on your journey to save poor Arthur."

Chapter 9 By Roger Riccard

We boarded our trap and immediately set out for Kenilworth Castle to see Lord Clarendon.

By now it was nearly noon and so I retrieved our lunch basket and offered a sandwich to Holmes.

"Feed yourself if you must, Doctor," he replied as he prodded the horse into a cantor. "I've no need for sustenance now and must concentrate on the problem at hand to contemplate our actions once we meet Clarendon."

The six mile journey to the castle of the district's largest and most influential landowner took a bit over an hour.

We then found ourselves greeted by a stable boy as Holmes pulled the rig through the open castle gate.

Upon introducing ourselves, the young lad pointed us toward the main entrance and offered to water and rub down our horse, which we gratefully accepted after putting her through a trying pace to reach our destination.

The imposing door to the castle was opened by a proper butler who enquired as to our business, to which Holmes requested an audience with Lord Clarendon on behalf of Lady Beasley.

We were escorted to an anteroom which was lined with tapestries, coats of arms and ancestral paintings.

In addition, there were several suits of armor and ancient weapons on display.

I was examining a timeworn rendering of the first Earl of Clarendon, who rode to the Crusades with Richard the Lionheart and was rewarded with his lands and title, that have passed through the generations to the man for whom we waited.

He held a Bible in his left hand, near to his heart, with a cross emblazoned in gold on its cover, actually reflecting off of his gleaming breastplate.

His right hand was stretched skyward, wielding his two edged sword as if in triumph as it pointed to the heavens.

His hair was dark and shoulder length and his beard and moustache were pointed and neatly trimmed.

The age of the paint made it hard to see if his eyes were black or brown, but they reflected a determination

that gave his countenance a strength worthy of his title.

Holmes was pacing, without seeming to appreciate the antiquities surrounding us and so I attempted to engage him in conversation.

"I say, Holmes, isn't this painting in remarkable condition for being over 700 years old?"

He stopped his pacing and looked at me.

"It is in remarkable condition, Watson, for a painting that can be no more than 350 years old, and likely younger than that."

"Are you saying that this is not the First Earl of Clarendon?"

Nodding toward the painting he replied, "It could well be his likeness, but if so it was copied from a much older work."

"What makes you say that, old man?"

Suddenly a voice came from the doorway, "Because there were no printed Bibles of that type during the time of the Crusades, Doctor."

Turning, our eyes fell upon the surprising presence of the current Earl of Clarendon.

While he retained the hair, and possibly eye coloring of his famous ancestor, the resemblance stopped there.

The man approaching us was about 50 years of age, short, stout and held out a pudgy hand in greeting.

Holmes smiled at this admission as he shook the proffered hand, "I would venture to say it rather dates from the late 1600's, your Grace?"

"Quite so, Mr. Holmes, commissioned by one of my ancestors in a frenzy of religious zeal. Dr. Watson," he said, offering his hand to me, "welcome to Kenilworth."

I shook his hand and found it soft and swollen with age, possibly arthritic. "Thank you, your Lordship," I responded. "This is quite a collection."

He looked around the room, "Oh, it is that and most of it is authentic, although there are a couple of pieces, like this painting, that were added as embellishments by my ancestors. They are rather hard to keep up however. I'd as soon donate it all to a museum."

"Why don't you?" I asked.

"Ah, well there are two pressing reasons for that, Doctor. First, there is the weight of my ancestors upon my shoulders. Who am I to break the traditions of several hundred years? Then there are societal expectations, this is a castle, after all, the public expects a room like this and would be sorely disappointed were its existence to cease."

"Forgive me, Lord Clarendon," interjected Holmes, "we are on a rather urgent mission and timing could be of the essence."

"Of course, Mr. Holmes, let us retire to my study where we can discuss matters in more comfort."

The Earl's study proved to be a much more intimate space.

Bookshelves lined the walls without interruption except for the doorway and a window which looked out upon the grounds toward the stables.

We were offered modern, comfortable leather chairs while Clarendon sat behind a simple oak desk with the view out the window being to his right.

He offered us cigars which Holmes declined on our behalf.

“Lord Clarendon,” stated the detective, “we’ve come on behalf of the Lady Beasley in regards to her son, Arthur.”

“I see,” replied the diminutive Lord of the castle. “Is she your only client in this matter?” he asked, somewhat suspiciously.

Holmes responded in his most diplomatic tone, “We were engaged by Lady Beasley, your Grace, the interests of any other parties are secondary to our concern. We believe the young Earl is in poor health and requires medical attention. Our primary goal is to find and assist him as we may.”

The older man steeped his fingers as he leaned back in his chair and peered over them at Holmes.

Holmes gaze remained steady under that scrutiny and the time clicked by interminably as this approached the manner of a staring contest.

Finally I could stand it no more.

“Confound it, Sir Arthur’s life is in danger, we don’t have time for this!”

The Earl raised his hand as if he could silence me, and calmly stated, “Young Arthur is being taken care of, even as we speak, Doctor. I have arranged for his care at the Ledbetter Sanatorium.”

In response to this statement, Holmes spoke again, “And he has arranged for you to care for the Beasley lands and accounts, as well as Lady Beasley herself.”

Clarendon tilted his head and scrutinized Holmes further before answering, “Yes, Mr. Holmes, you are quite correct. Although, I am at a loss as to how you came to such a conclusion.”

Holmes waved the query aside, “He told his mother all would be taken care of should anything happen to him. As the member of Parliament for this district you are the natural caretaker of your flock.”

“Arthur’s father was a good friend to me and I feel duty bound to see after his family in these troubling circumstances,” answered Clarendon. “The lad has given me power of attorney should he become incapacitated and I will ensure that any debts are paid and any charges laid against him, from any person or purview, are challenged and defended against.”

Do you expect such charges?” questioned Holmes.

“Are you aware of the Forecastle situation, sir?” he replied.

“I have Lady Forecastle’s version, which I am ready to accept as fact.”

“Then perhaps you can be of usefulness in this unfortunate chain of events,” responded the Earl.

“If doing so is in the service of my client’s interest.”

“It shall be in the interest of all who seek justice and wrongs righted, Mr. Holmes.”

“Then I will do what I can.”

“The obstacle in all this is, of course, Ronald Forecastle. He is a truly stubborn man,” offered Clarendon. “There are times when I almost wish the rumors were true, for surely Colleen and Arthur seem much more suited to each other. Yet they are both fiercely loyal to Ronald and would never engage in what they are accused of.”

“Do you not have any influence with Lord Forecastle?” I questioned.

“Alas, as close as I am with the Beasley clan, is as far as I am removed from Forecastle. The rivalry between our families over this district has been long and bitter. I would not hold out any hope that my words would have any effect on him.”

Holmes then countered, “I believe that if I am to be of any assistance in reconciling these parties, I must speak with Sir Arthur. As I recall, the Ledbetter Sanatorium is in Coventry?”

“Yes, Mr. Holmes,” replied our host. “Arthur is under the care of Dr. William Blaise, a much respected expert in the treatment of addiction.”

“Yes,” I remarked, “I’ve read of Dr. Blaise’s progress with new treatment methods. In fact, I was going to recommend that Lady Forecastle put herself under his care.”

“Then we should be off for Coventry,” barked Holmes, in that decisive command tone of his.

“Wait, Holmes,” I responded, “I should return to Lady Forecastle and conduct her to Ledbetter’s as well.”

"I see your point, Doctor," my friend conceded.

Turning to our host he asked, "Is there any means of transportation I may borrow, Lord Clarendon, so that Watson can return to the Forecastle's in our trap?"

"As a matter of fact, I took Arthur to Ledbetter's myself so his horse is here and well rested for the journey. I warn you though, Mr. Holmes, Blackjack is quite a spirited animal."

"All the better for a speedy trip," my friend replied. "If you will please order him ready I shall depart as soon as possible, so as to make Coventry before nightfall."

Lord Clarendon rang for his butler and issued the necessary orders.

We finalized our plans so that Holmes would proceed on to Coventry and I would return to the Forecastle's where I would spend the night and convey Lady Forecastle on to Ledbetter's the next day.

A messenger would be dispatched to Lady Beasley to let her know her son was found safe and that further details would follow.

Little did we know how far those plans would deviate.

Chapter 10 By Roger Riccard

We started off as planned and Holmes mounted the famous Blackjack whilst I took up the reins of the trap so that I could return to the Lady Forecastle.

I arrived at Forecastle Heights shortly before sunset and was greeted by a groom who took the trap in hand as I returned to the manor house.

My knock summoned the butler who promptly escorted me to her ladyship.

"Dr. Watson, have you found Arthur?" she enquired, as soon as the butler had shuffled his bulk out of the room.

"We know where he is, m'lady, and Holmes is on his way to him now. He is at the Ledbetter Sanatorium, under the care of a well-known specialist in these matters. It is, in fact, the very institution where I would like to take you for your own treatment."

"That is in Coventry, is it not?" she asked.

"Yes, we are fortunate that it is so close. If you can be ready, I should like to escort you there tomorrow."

"I'm not sure that is possible," she replied.

"Lady Forecastle," I responded, rather sternly, "I realize that your symptoms are far less severe than your friend, but you cannot put off their treatment. You have an opportunity to avoid the misery he is undergoing. I grant you it will not be easy, but it will be harder the longer you wait."

She looked at me with imploring eyes, "I am aware of your concerns, Doctor and I too wish to relieve myself of this cursed addiction. But I have received a telegram from my husband. He is in Paris and will be returning here within the week. Should he find me gone, and in fact find that I am with Arthur, even though it be in hospital, he may never forgive me."

I realized that it now fell upon Holmes and myself to act as mediators with Lord Forecastle, for I could not allow

my patient to risk her life over the unfounded jealousy of her husband.

"Lady Forecastle, if your husband has any love for you at all, he would surely want you to take whatever measures necessary to regain your health. My advice to you is to let me take you to Ledbetter's to begin your treatment. Holmes and I will do all we can on your behalf to make your husband understand how he has falsely accused you."

"You are so kind, to show me such gallantry. I shall have to think the matter through. Would you stay for supper and spend the night, Doctor? After a good sleep I should think I could make a decision in the morning."

This was a tempting offer, for it was now dark outside and the road back to Beasley Manor was unfamiliar, as Holmes had done all the driving.

However, with Lord Forecastle out of town and gossip already rearing its ugly head, it would not be prudent for me to accept her invitation.

"I can see what you are thinking, Doctor," she added. "What if you stayed with the hostlers above the stables? It's not likely to be as comfortable, but it would save you the extra trip to Beasley's tonight and back again tomorrow."

"Lady Forecastle, I appreciate your thoughtfulness, but I suggest we not give the gossip mongers any further fuel for their fire. You know how these stories can spread. All they'll hear is that I spent the night. They won't take into account that I was sleeping in a separate building. More likely, even if they hear that, they'll assume the worst and that some rendezvous still took place. Besides I

should take word to Lady Beasley that we found her son.”

“Yes of course,” she replied. “Then at least allow me to supply someone to drive you, for the road can be treacherous in the dark.”

“I would appreciate that, madam,” I replied, somewhat relieved.

“Then please, while your horse rests, at least stay and eat something before you journey on.”

I agreed and we sat down to a delicious, if subdued, meal.

I questioned her more about her symptoms and strongly suggested that she heed my advice to accompany me to Coventry. As I wrapped myself in my coat to depart, she promised to give it careful thought and would have an answer when I returned in the morning.

Her groom, a middle-aged man named Fallon, pulled up at the front door in the Beasley trap, with a horse for his return trip tied behind. We proceeded to Beasley Manor at a brisk pace, for he knew the road well.

Lady Beasley was quite anxious upon our return and graciously arranged for Fallon to spend the night so that he would not have to ride back alone and could return me to Forecastle Heights in the morning.

She immediately bade me to come sit with her and give my report.

I explained all that had occurred and how Holmes was, even now, en route to her son.

At my tale of the unfortunate drug arrangement between her son and

Colleen Forecastle she grew saddened.

“Ronald Forecastle is a fool!” she cried. “Though I cannot fathom it, Colleen is devoted to the man, as is my son. They would never betray him. Although, Doctor, I sometimes wish that my son had found her first, for they are of a kindred spirit and she would have made him a good wife.”

“You are not the first person to say so, Lady Beasley,” I concurred.

“Whenever the three of them are together at any social event it would seem obvious to a knowledgeable observer.”

“I wonder if Lord Forecastle is aware of that?” I pondered. “He is so self-absorbed and single-minded I doubt he would notice any such thing,” she replied. “But enough of him, what are your plans, Doctor?”

I explained how I hoped to transport Lady Forecastle to Ledbetters where she could also be treated and, once there, observe for myself the progress that her son was making.

I told her I would send her a telegram advising her of his condition.

“Can I not go to him with you, Dr. Watson?”

“I would advise against that for now, m’lady. From Clarendon’s description, he is not well and his treatment would not be a pleasant thing for you to witness. Nor, I am sure, would he want you to see him in such a condition.”

“I am his mother, Doctor, I need to be there for him. I lived with his father through a long and painfully

debilitating illness, so I am no stranger to such unpleasantness. I will accompany you tomorrow.”

“Very well, Lady Beasley, but it will take us several hours to get there so may I prescribe an early bedtime and a hearty breakfast?”

“Agreed, Doctor, I shall expect you for breakfast at seven so we can get an early start.”

We informed Fallon of our plans and the next morning we proceeded back to Forecastle’s, this time in Lady Beasley’s enclosed carriage, for the weather was threatening.

Upon arriving at Forecastle Heights we were admitted by the butler, who stiffened when he saw that Lady Beasley was in my company. I was relieved, however, to see a carpetbag and umbrella at the ready by the front door.

Before he could announce us, Lady Forecastle appeared from the direction of the dining room.

She stopped suddenly when she saw Lady Beasley.

“Lady Beasley! I...I...,” she stammered.

The elder woman went to her and took her trembling hands in her own.

“Colleen, it’s all right,” she spoke softly, like a mother to a child. “Dr. Watson has explained everything. I am only sorry that my poor Arthur introduced you to those demon drugs.”

“I know he never suspected any harm, I don’t blame him,” the young mistress replied. “It’s my own fault for being weak.”

"Hush, no more of that," Lady Beasley admonished, taking her into a hug.

When the two separated, Colleen insisted that we have some tea before departing.

We exited to the parlor and enjoyed a first rate blend.

"This is quite excellent," I said. "What brand is this?"

"To my knowledge we have the only supply in England. It's a unique tea that my husband discovered in India. His latest trip was spent negotiating for rights to become a primary importer of this flavor."

"Well, I hope he is successful, my dear," added Lady Beasley. "It is a delightful tea and I for one, would certainly keep it in my kitchen."

"Thank you both," she replied.

Noting the time she added, "Shall we prepare to go?"

We made ready and soon were on the road again.

Fortunately the threatening clouds held their peace and Fallon made excellent time.

We stopped in Cubbington to refresh the horses and soon after we resumed he turned north, prior to Kenilworth and took the Coventry Road straight on to that fair town.

The trip required most of the day and it was nearly five o'clock when we alighted at Ledbetters.

It was a former manor house that had been turned into a hospital with

additional wings added for patient rooms.

Its stately brick exterior faded with the years of exposure to the elements.

As we arrived at the front desk I introduced the members of our party, explaining that I wished to admit Lady Forecastle and that Lady Beasley was there to visit her son.

The staff was quite efficient and an orderly escorted Lady Beasley while I went with Colleen to consult with Dr. Blaise.

Blaise was a stocky fellow, slightly shorter than I, with a receding hairline and a thin black moustache.

His manner was friendly but professional.

Our consultation regarding her prognosis went well and he agreed that by starting treatment at this stage, she had an excellent chance of complete recovery and independence from her addiction.

His news in regards to Arthur Beasley however, was not so encouraging.

"Lord Beasley is quite far advanced in his addiction, Dr. Watson," he stated. "The dosage he was using over so many months will be difficult to overcome. There are only so many treatment options available. I may have to resort to some experimental methods that have not yet been tested."

"But first," he continued, responding to Colleen Forecastle's reaction to this news, "let us get Lady Forecastle settled in and then we can speak some more."

He made arrangements for a nurse to see to Lady Forecastle's needs and I promised her that I would look in on her before I left.

Upon her retreat I turned to Blaise again.

"By the way, can you tell me where I can find Sherlock Holmes? He should have arrived yesterday to look in on Lord Beasley."

Dr. Blaise looked at me in surprise, "Did they not tell you at the front desk?"

"Tell me what, sir? I did not enquire about Holmes at the desk."

He folded his hands on top of his desk and said, "We admitted Mr. Holmes as a patient last night."

Chapter 11 By Roger Riccard

"A patient? My God, what happened?" I cried.

"He'll be all right," said Blaise. "But he took a nasty fall from his horse. He was knocked unconscious and dislocated his shoulder, which we've set aright again. More seriously, he appears to have torn ligaments in his left knee."

"He had injured his knee a few days ago," I recalled to my colleague.

"Well, this time he won't be getting up and about so fast. It will be a few days at least before he can even try walking with crutches. I'll take you to him. Perhaps he'll listen to you, because he keeps insisting that he must be in London tomorrow."

We made our way to the ward where Holmes was housed with the less severe patients.

I must admit that seeing him prone and in a hospital gown was a little unnerving.

I had treated him for injuries before, from tussles with thugs, but those were mere contusions and abrasions.

This was the first time I had seen him incapacitated.

Apparently he was, likewise, unfamiliar with this condition, for as soon as he saw me he cried out, "Watson, you must override this overcautious colleague of yours! With this infernal wrapping of his I'll barely be able to get my trousers on. I must catch the morning train for London."

I folded my arms and looked down at him. "Just how do you propose to walk, old man?"

"I will simply use my cane," the detective replied, sourly.

Blaise and I looked at each other, knowingly.

Then I turned back to my friend, "Holmes, in case you hadn't noticed, you have a sling on your right arm."

"Confound it, man! Of course I noticed. It's my left knee that's injured, so naturally I'd be using my cane with my uninjured left hand to take the weight."

Blaise chose to explain, "First of all, Mr. Holmes, you'll need to use crutches for several days and that requires both arms. Secondly, once you can get by with a cane or a single crutch, you'll need your right arm to use it. When humans walk, we stride with our feet and swing our hands at

the same time. But when we stride with our left foot, we swing with our right hand; when we stride with our right foot, we swing with our left hand. Handling a cane in the hand opposite our injury replicates this natural arm movement, giving your hand an opportunity to absorb some of your weight while you walk. If you try to use your cane with your left hand, you could put undue stress on other muscles and hurt yourself worse."

"Bosh and falderal!" exclaimed my friend.

"Wait a moment," I said. "Let me see your eyes."

I leaned over Holmes prostrate figure and took his face in my hands.

One at a time I used my thumbs to hold his eyes open as I checked their dilation.

"You're also showing signs of a concussion, Holmes," I declared. "How long was he unconscious, Doctor?"

"Roughly fifteen minutes."

"Certainly no more than that," said his patient. "The town clock tower struck five just as I arrived on the main road."

It certainly took me no more than ten minutes to come within sight of the hospital, but it was then that Blackjack took matters into his own hands to find his master.

He took off at a gallop and with my knee in its weakened condition, I did not have the strength to hold him back."

Dr. Blaise picked up the story, "The horse actually burst through our front door. That's when Mr. Holmes struck his head on the frame and fell off to his right, dislocating the shoulder, as he was unconscious and unable to break his fall."

"I was leaning my weight on my good leg, Watson. That threw my balance to that side. He is quite the spirited animal."

As you were warned," I admonished the detective. "Where is Blackjack now?" I enquired of Blaise.

"We've corralled him in our own stables, with our other horses and ambulances," he replied. "I am hoping that Lord Beasley is up to a trip out to see him tomorrow and perhaps, calm him down."

"At any rate," interrupted Holmes, "I was quite awake enough to hear the clock in the lobby strike the half past five, so it was not a prolonged state." "Time is not always the measure of severity, Holmes," I warned. "Let me look in on Lord Beasley, and I shall be back in a few minutes so we can make alternate plans."

The young earl was talking with his mother when I arrived.

"Here's Dr. Watson, now," said Lady Beasley, by way of introduction.

"Good afternoon, Lord Beasley," I greeted. "You've given us a bit of go. How are you feeling?"

"Call me Arthur, please, Doctor Watson," he replied, offering me a handshake. "I am sorry I've put everyone to so much trouble."

I accepted his hand, but chided him, "You've taken some foolish risks, Arthur, but I understand your motivation. Unfortunately, drugs are a trap that lures you in until you've become so dependent it's difficult to break their grip."

"Don't I know it!" he replied. "Dr. Blaise' treatments are only giving me temporary relief."

"He's the best there is in all England," I assured him and his mother. "And there are new treatment methods being tested.

You're in good hands."

"How is Lady Forecastle?" he asked, timidly.

"We'll be setting up her treatment regimen as soon as she's settled."

"Settled? What do you mean? Is she here?"

"I hadn't told him yet, Doctor," said Lady Beasley.

"Oh," I responded to her, then, turned to face him, "Yes, we've brought her here so that she can undergo treatment before her own addiction gets any worse."

"Oh my God!" he cried out and became increasingly agitated.

He began to thrash about and I leaned over to hold him down while I called for a nurse.

One arrived quickly and he was given a sedative that soon rendered him unconscious.

Lady Beasley and I left him to sleep.

Once out in the hall she questioned me, in that no-nonsense way of hers.

"Tell me, Doctor, what is his prognosis?"

"Dr. Blaise tells me he is in a very serious condition," I informed her.

"He may have to resort to some experimental treatments."

"Is he going to die?" she asked, bluntly, but with fear underlying her tone.

"He's young and strong," I replied. "There's every reason to believe that his body will recover if the drugs can be gleaned from his system."

"You wouldn't be attempting to placate a worried mother, would you, Doctor?"

I looked into her keen brown eyes and replied, "I would never attempt to put anything past you, Lady Beasley. The human body is often unpredictable, but it is also quite resilient. We must give your son time and see how he responds.

"In the meantime," I continued, changing the subject, "We should see about hotel accommodations. Let's find Fallon and have him scout about for lodgings."

We did so and soon found rooms at the Ashleigh House, which was actually more along the lines of a bed and breakfast inn.

I was surprised that Lady Beasley would not desire more luxurious accommodations, but she insisted on remaining as close to the hospital as possible.

Indeed, on a fair weather day it would be just a couple hundred yards' walk to Ledbetters.

We arranged rooms, Fallon and I sharing one down the hall from Lady Beasley.

Once settled in, we set about finding a restaurant.

Fallon went his own way to leave us more privacy in our discussions.

I had to press the earl's mother to eat, for the sake of her own health, for in her worrisome state, she had no appetite.

The meal passed quickly.

I saw Lady Beasley back to her room and decided to walk over to the hospital to confer with Holmes.

I found him sitting up in bed, his sling hanging loosely about his neck with his arm removed, furiously writing out telegraph forms, occasionally wincing if he moved his arm too vigorously.

"Watson, I need you to take these to the telegraph office tonight and check for replies first thing tomorrow morning," he ordered, not even bothering to look up from his scrawling.

"What are your plans, Holmes?" I asked him.

He emphatically punctuated his last period and looked up at me, "If I cannot go to Lord Forecastle I must get him to come to me. I am contacting people who can tell me when arrives in London."

"Lady Forecastle received a telegram this morning," I informed him. "He is in Paris and due back in London later this week."

I swear that the man that sat in bed before me positively growled.

He tore up two of the telegrams he had written and hastily scratched out another.

“Watson, I need data! If you and your co-conspirator, Blaise, insist on keeping me wrapped up like a Christmas present I, in turn, must insist that you be my eyes, ears and legs.”

“Haven’t I always acted in your best interest, old friend?” I stated, calmly taking the forms from his outstretched left hand.

He sighed and softened his tone, “Yes, old man. Your heart has always been in the right place, occasionally to the frustration of my mind. You are a rock of predictability which I depend upon and I wouldn’t have you any other way.”

“Thank you, Holmes,” I replied, holding up his enquiries. “I’ll take these right now. Is there anything else you need tonight?”

“Yes, Doctor,” he implored, as he slid his arm back into its sling, “before you go, could you appropriate a wheelchair and take me outside for a smoke?”

I felt the least I could do was offer him this creature comfort.

I found a chair and retrieved his pipe and tobacco pouch from his belongings.

It was getting close to a full moon and it shone brightly on a patio that led out to the gardens behind the hospital.

It was distinctly chilly and I had made sure Holmes was well-bundled in blankets.

My own overcoat was sufficient but I could feel the chill starting to numb my ears.

I lit his pipe for him, then a cigarette for myself, while he enjoyed his first influx of tobacco since the previous afternoon.

After a minute or so, in smoke ensconced contemplation, he asked a question. “Watson, can your patients spare you for a day or so to take a trip to London?”

I nodded as I tapped my ashes off onto the dew-laden grass, “Certainly, Holmes. Now that they are here, under twenty-four hour care, there is no need for my constant presence. What do you need me to do?”

“Nothing yet my friend, but depending upon the answers to those telegrams I may well need you to retrieve someone from the city and bring them here.”

“Of course,” I answered, “Who do you need me to bring?”

“His Lordship, Ronald Forecastle.”

Chapter 12 By Roger Riccard

The answers to Holmes telegrams, which I retrieved the next morning, confirmed that Lord Forecastle would be arriving in London in two days.

Further confirmation came when I checked in on Lady Forecastle that morning, before going to see Holmes.

She was clutching a telegram in her hand when I stopped by her room.

She looked up at me with such forlorn that I thought she had received news of someone’s demise.

“No, Doctor,” she replied, “except perhaps my own. This was forwarded to me from the staff at the Heights. Ronald is coming home the day after tomorrow.”

“Yes,” I replied, holding up one of Holmes’ answers, “Holmes has received the same information.”

“Whatever shall I do, Doctor?” she asked in distress.

I put on my most stern and authoritative air and insisted, “You shall do exactly as Dr. Blaise instructs you to do and get better. Your own health must be paramount to all else.”

“Yes, Doctor,” she replied, reaching out and taking my hand as she smiled wanly. “I only hope I have a reason to live.”

“You stop such nonsense this instant!” I declared. “If your husband will not listen to reason and hear the truth, he is not worthy of you.”

She nodded and folded her hands back on her lap.

I encouraged her to try and get outside for some fresh air, if the day proved sunny enough, then went on to report to Holmes.

Holmes looked over the telegrams I handed him, in that harried fashion of his.

Only, with his arm in a sling, he could not throw the unimportant papers very far and they scattered about his blankets.

Finally he held one aloft with his good arm and declared to me, "Forecastle sails from Calais the day after tomorrow. If I cannot be released from this infernal confinement, you must meet his ship and bring him back here."

"I've already determined that I shall be on hand when the Candlewick docks," I replied, "for you shall not be, and it imperative that we act on Lady Forecastle's behalf."

He looked at me strangely, "How did you know what ship he was arriving on?"

"Holmes," I responded, "this only goes to prove why you cannot go. Your medication is affecting your thought process. Did you not realise that I would read these telegrams and thus be aware of the circumstances of his Lordship's arrival?"

He sank back on his pillows. "Watson, friend, Doctor, you must eliminate any such medication from my regimen. I need my mind clear if I am to be of any assistance to the young Earl of Beasley or the Lady Forecastle."

I looked at him.

I had made sure his current prescription was not a derivative of either cocaine or morphine, which he had used during our early association.

However, his frustration at inactivity was a fragile thing.

I took up his chart and noted to cease pain medications immediately.

The only drug he would receive henceforth would be sleeping draughts.

He expressed his gratitude and we began to lay our plans for bringing Forecastle to Coventry.

* * *

Thus it was that I found myself at the London docks, waiting at the bottom of the gangplank where passengers were streaming off the small steamer Candlewick.

Lord Forecastle was easily recognizable from the photographs I had seen at Forecastle Heights.

He was a large man, over six and one half feet and weighing close to 18 stone.

His hair was longer than the photos I had seen, where it had been close cropped in military fashion.

The brown locks now covered his ears and curled over his collar.

His moustache was a bit ragged and his walk down the ramp indicated an uncharacteristic lack of steadiness

I approached him and introduced myself.

His reaction was quite unexpected.

"Doctor? Thank goodness, I need your help," he rasped.

He put his hand on my shoulder and steadied himself.

I led him to a nearby crate where he could sit down.

"What's wrong, Lord Forecastle?" I enquired. "Are you seasick?" For he was very pale and holding his stomach.

"The crossing was calm enough, but still aggravating to my condition," he replied.

"What condition has befallen you?"

He looked at me with a hopeless expression, "That's just it Doctor, I do not know."

He went on to describe alternating fever and chills, disruptive bowels and a rash.

He also exhibited lesions to his left hand and a tendency to vomit nearly any food he consumed.

His Lordship's trunk was unloaded as we waited.

I ordered it taken to a cab I had standing by.

He agreed to accompany me to the Ledbetter Sanatorium, where I told him his wife was already a patient.

This trip would only take us two hours by train and he agreed.

However, he insisted on sending a telegram first.

As there was a telegraph office at the docks this task was quickly accomplished and we were soon wending our way through the London Streets to the Limehouse Station.

Prior to our boarding, Ronald Forecastle made an extensive detour to the station's men's facility and emerged even paler than before and sweating profusely.

I suggested perhaps we should seek closer and more immediate medical attention, but he insisted on traveling on.

We soon ensconced ourselves in a private compartment, whereupon he put his feet up and leaned against the outer wall.

Shortly thereafter the train pulled out, slowly at first, then gathering more speed as we left the city for the glens and valleys that lay to the north.

Questions regarding his wife's health were brief, once he was assured that she was in no danger.

His own illness dominated his actions and he soon asked my forgiveness as he stretched out in an attempt to nap.

I had given him what medicines my bag contained for his upset digestive tract and they seemed to be taking hold for he was able to sleep for a time.

Our arrival at Coventry occurred just before sunset and I immediately checked him in with the hospital staff.

Having a different ailment unrelated to drug use, he was assigned a room in a separate area of the hospital from where his wife and Beasley were being treated.

As he was led off and prepared for a diagnostic examination, I sought out Holmes to report the events of the day.

"I suspected as much," Holmes replied, when I informed him of Forecastle's condition.

"How on earth could you suspect anything of the kind?" I asked. "You haven't even met the man."

"In spite of what you tell your readers, dear friend, I do have

sources of information other than straightforward observation.

While you were gone, more telegrams arrived from my contacts in India and France.

Lord Forecastle's activities have not been confined to the tea trade and I intend to use that information to the advantage of his wife and his friend Beasley."

* * *

The next morning, I arrived at the hospital at 9:00 a.m., in the company of Lady Beasley who had come to visit her son.

Upon escorting her to his room, we found the young man looking much better.

Though weak, his color was returning and the spasms had subsided. I had informed neither of them of Lord Forecastle's arrival, not wishing to cause any undo concern.

Leaving them to their privacy, I ventured to Lady Forecastle's room, where I found her to be enjoying a healthy breakfast.

"How are you feeling today?" I asked.

"I am quite well, Doctor," she answered. "The withdrawal symptoms have not recurred and my cravings appear to have subsided. I hope to be well enough to return home soon."

"That sounds promising," I replied, "although I am sure Dr. Blaise has explained to you the necessity of prolonged rest and removal from temptation, before returning to your routine."

"Yes, he has made that quite clear," she answered quietly.

"I do have some news for you," I declared. "Your husband is here."

"Ronald?" she started, putting her hand to her throat as her eyes grew wide with apprehension.

"Yes, I don't wish to alarm you, but you must be told that he is here as a patient. I met his ship yesterday and found him quite ill. I checked him in last night for diagnosis."

"What is wrong with him, Doctor? Can I see him?"

"In good time, I'm sure, Lady Forecastle. I'll be checking with the staff this morning to ascertain his condition and I will let you know as soon as I know anything."

"Thank you, Doctor," she replied, setting her spoon down, obviously too upset to continue eating.

"I would caution you not to seek him out just yet, M'lady. Sherlock Holmes has a plan and I believe we should let him confront your husband before any reunion is attempted."

She looked at me oddly, but then nodded, "Very well, Doctor. I shall do as you ask, but please implore Mr. Holmes to act quickly. I must know where our marriage stands."

* * *

Having obtained Ronald Forecastle's condition and whereabouts from Dr. Blaise, I brought the information to Holmes.

"The man is quite ill, Holmes," I told him. "The doctors are still running tests to determine his exact malady."

“Did they question him about his recent travels and activities?”

“I’m sure they would have,” I replied. “That would be standard procedure.”

“Hmmm, then I’ll wager that his Lordship was not totally honest in his revelations,” responded the great detective.

He mulled that over and then flung the covers off his own bed.

“Watson, we must confront him now, while we have the advantage. Help me get dressed.”

“Holmes, there’s no need for all that trouble. His room is not that far away.”

“Yes, but I’d rather hold the upper hand and appear as my normal self, instead of in this weakened state as a fellow patient. If I don’t over exert myself, I can do without this sling.”

“What about your knee?” I enquired. “Can you stand?”

“In spite of your professional opinion that I should use a cane with my right hand, I believe that for a short walk my left will do.”

With my assistance Holmes was able to get dressed, including his overcoat and homburg, and appear completely hale and hearty.

His limp was quite pronounced though, as we made our way to Forecastle’s room.

Once there, however, he left his cane outside the door and strode in with nary a hint of pain to show for it.

He stood at the foot of the bed and gripped the brass rail with both hands, leaning forward to confront the prostrate patient.

His stance suggested a barrister leaning in to a witness, but I was aware that it also provided him support and balance for his own frail condition.

“Lord Forecastle, my name is Sherlock Holmes. I must inform you that I know all. As an agent of the Countess of Beasley, her son and your wife, I can ensure you that your suspicions and accusations are as false as your own hypocrisy is true.”

In spite of his ill state, Forecastle managed to hoist his large upper torso into a sitting position and glared at Holmes.

“How dare you, sir! Dr. Watson, who is this person?” Before I could answer Holmes launched into a diatribe, such as I had never witnessed from him in all the years of our association.

“‘Who am I?’ Do you not read, sir? I am the greatest consulting detective who has ever lived. My cases are a matter of public record in Lippincott’s and The Strand magazines as well as the London papers. Watson here has recorded my more famous cases for all posterity. As such I stand here before you to condemn your false accusations and deceitfulness.”

Trying to summon strength for rebuttal, Forecastle turned to me, attempting to dismiss Holmes presence as a mere irritant.

“I was under the impression that you were a physician, Dr. Watson, not a doctor of specious literature. I do not read fictional magazines, and my

perusal of the London papers is confined to business and political concerns. Kindly take this phony creation of yours and leave this room instantly.”

That speech, brief as it was, was telling on the man and he could not hide his infirmity at its conclusion.

Yet my colleague was relentless.

“It is you, sir, who is the phony,” declared Holmes, as he strode around and placed his left hand on the larger man’s shoulder, in effect pinning him to the pillow. “Allow me to demonstrate what I know. Your sunburned neck complies with the purpose of your business trip, for you have surely spent time among the tea plantations of India. As a patient of this hospital your luggage was subject to inspection and I took the liberty, on behalf of Lady Forecastle, to join in that examination. There were indeed vegetation and soil samplings among your clothes and boots to verify your field inspections, as well as tickets stubs for various means of transportation. However, your hypocrisy becomes evident when your dress clothes are scrutinized. Your shoes and stockings contained traces of Cedar sawdust. Your evening dress held the odor of perfume and minute stains of lip rouge. Most telling of all were the traces of hair dye on your coat, used by ladies wishing to give the impression of natural blonde tresses. Some of those hairs still clung to your clothing, and the fact they were on certain garments that are not generally exposed to public view is most informative. All these facts, plus the symptoms you now exhibit, which include those of both tropical and the French disease, indicate to me that you were a recent customer of Salon Cédre in Paris. That, for your benefit,

Watson, is a gentlemen's establishment famous for its scattering of cedar sawdust on the floor of the lounge. Who was your entertainment Forecastle, Jeannette? Bebe? Gabrielle?"

Holmes pushed off the man's shoulder and turned his back on him as he returned to the foot rail.

From my angle I could see the grimace of his own pain, but it vanished again when he turned back to face Forecastle.

"As surely as the facts I have just related to you are true, so I tell you that your belief in the infidelity of your wife and best friend is misplaced. If you refuse to hear them out I shall use these observations against you in any suit of divorce you attempt. My personal recommendation would be for her Ladyship to divorce you instead and command a settlement which will stretch your purse to its limits."

Whether it was his weakened state or his realization that he was a beaten man, Forecastle let his body slide back down into a prone position.

He gazed off to one side for a few moments and then returned his attention to us.

"You have me, sir. I cannot deny it. I assure you however, it is not a common practice of mine. I have been faithful to my wife since our wedding day. But all these weeks away, my imagination overtook my belief in Colleen's love. I indulged in this shameful behavior as punishment

in kind, so I thought, for her infidelity to me."

"You are a bounder, sir," I responded. "If you do not beg the forgiveness of your wife and your friend you are undeserving of your rank and my next publication shall expose you as such."

He held up a weary hand. "There is no need, Doctor. As soon as we are all able, I shall meet with Colleen and Arthur and sort the matter out."

"Then we shall leave you to your rest," announced Holmes.

He turned on his heel and marched out the door.

I gave Forecastle one last glare and followed my friend.

In the hall Holmes was leaning with his back to the wall and holding his shoulder, sucking in deep breaths.

"Holmes," I whispered, so as not to be overheard, "Are you all right?"

"I shall recover, Doctor," he replied, retrieving his cane. "I am, however, desperate for a smoke. Let us retreat to the patio and sit for a bit."

Once again, I commandeered a wheelchair for my friend.

On the patio we indulged ourselves in some fine cigars after I had returned Holmes arm to its sling.

Once settled I could not help questioning him.

"Old chap, I've never seen you in such a state, nor so braggadocios. What came over you?"

He smiled as he blew out a smoke ring. "My indignation at the man was quite real, Watson. While I may have stretched the truth about exactly what I discovered among his luggage, I did have enough to support the reports from my overseas agents. I had also learned he uses his size to intimidate his adversaries, business or social. That is why I insisted on getting dressed and being able to stand over him. If I came on as a braggart it would throw him off guard until I could pounce upon him with facts. Setting his mind in that mode of reversal of thinking was part of my purpose. If he could be forced to re-think his impression of me, then he would be more disposed to re-think the situation with his wife and friend."

"Well, I congratulate you, Holmes. You solved the case of two leaping Lords, young Arthur and his drugs and Forecastle with his leaping to conclusions."

Holmes allowed himself one of his brief flashes of a smile and replied, as he adjusted his sling, "Lord Forecastle may have been correct on one thing, Doctor. There are times when I believe your penchant for a literary phrase actually does rival your medical capability."

He then sat back and pulled his hat over his eyes and mumbled something about "...and then there're times like this."

The End