

The Case of the Dartmoor Devil

Being the first published investigations of
Doctor Bratton Fleming and Professor James
Rhodes into matters most criminal

By Paul Wade-Williams

In memory of Peter Cook and Dudley Moore -
the finest Holmes and Watson to grace our screens.

Foreword

I never knew my great-grandfather, Doctor Bratton Augustus Gawain Fleming, but my grandfather and father both spoke well of him to me when I was a young child of immeasurable curiosity and had held him in the highest regard.

They fully admitted that he was a doctor of medicine, that he had left his native Cardiff and had lived in London around the time of the infamous Whitechapel Murders (1888), and that he had been something of an explorer in his youth. Indeed, he had served as a scout in the Sudan with Valentine Baker against the Dervishes (1883) and had participated in the Second Boer War as a civilian doctor (1899-1902).

His death, of which they seldom speak and the exact details of which elude me even to this day, has, until very recently, concealed a side to my great-grandfather of which I knew nothing. I knew only that he had apparently died in 1917 at the age of 69 in France.

Old age took my grandfather from me some twenty years ago, but before he died, peacefully in his sleep I am pleased to say, he handed me a large bundle of handwritten documents, newspaper clippings, and some poorly typed journal pages.

A brief glance revealed with surprising alacrity that these concerned my ancestor Dr. Bratton Fleming and a side of him hidden from me until comparatively recently.

Yes, Dr. Fleming of London did indeed do everything I have already mentioned. He also did much, much more. I am no author, no artist of words, no muse of the English language, so I have handed select notes over to a trusted young friend, whose work you now hold in your hands.

What follows in this manuscript is the truth about a dastardly deed committed in 1889, but not one that was ever reported at the time. The reasons for this will become abundantly clear as you reach into the world in which my esteemed forefather lived and worked; a world that you will find quite different to the one commonly found in history books.

A world I am happy to open to the public.

Doctor Ainley Watson-Fleming, MD

Bath, England

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Chapter One: A Lady in Distress

The gentle strains of Mozart's Magic Flute, played to perfection by hands well versed in the techniques required for such pieces, wafted gently from the open window of 221b Baker Street, London. In the fog-shrouded streets below passers-by, both gentry and commoner paused briefly beneath the open window to listen. For a few brief moments they were lost in a fantasy world; caught by the beauty and timelessness of the music, free from the shackles of their mundane lives. There were few who did not appreciate the violin playing of one of London's finest residents.

BANG! BANG! BANG!

The violin playing ceased, much to the relief of Professor James Rhodes, resident of 219b Baker Street. Contrary to what you may be thinking, Professor Rhodes was not a philistine when it came to music. Rather, like his more famous neighbour, he was a learned man and shared a love of the classics. Indeed he possessed a large collection of musical scores and attended concerts whenever he could spare the time. Now was not such a time, for Professor Rhodes was an acclaimed inventor, as well as practising the arts of the consulting detective, and was engaged in a rather delicate experiment. Frankly, he could do without the distraction.

Rhodes heard the banging on the door and, after placing his magnifying glass on his workbench, placed his ear against the wall, listening for some clue as to what the chain of events unfolding in the building next door might be. Raised voices, muffled by the wall, could be heard in the neighbouring room. One certainly sounded like his more famous neighbour; the other...a Welsh accent maybe?

CRASH!

Rhodes jumped back as the distinct sound of splintering wood carried through the wall. A small cry of pain followed, then the thudding of shoes on stairs, ending in the slamming of a front door below. It would seem, Rhodes mused thoughtfully, that someone who has now fled the scene of the crime has assaulted his neighbour in his own home. The audacity!

With his ear back against the wall he could now hear the distinct sound of his neighbour's colleague as he called out, "something for the pain Holmes?" Outside, a strong Welsh voice could be heard shouting back at the residents of 221b through their still open study window, "You quack! How did you get your license, eh?"

Moments later Rhodes heard the lower door to his own house open and slam closed, followed shortly by the sound of footsteps on the stairs leading to his apartment. Yes, a heavy figure, most likely a man by the weight, and angry, judging by the intensity with which he landed his feet upon the stair, Rhodes deduced; most likely the assailant himself!

The apartment door flew open, framing a ruddy-faced stout figure in the doorway, his mutton-chop sideburns and handlebar moustache almost completely covering his lower face.

Rhodes raised his right eyebrow at the gentleman, already knowing the answer to his forthcoming question. "And where have you been, Bratton?"

"I've been helping that ruddy idiot next door retune his violin, haven't I" replied the figure, his Welsh accent strong, bordering on brazen, before closing the apartment door and slumping into a chair. "Well", he added, straining his ears in the now-silent apartment, "that sounds better now, doesn't it Rhodes?"

* * *

19th May 1889

Two weeks passed in Baker Street without further incident between the households of 219b and 221b, much to the relief of the senior householders.

Indeed, it had been so quiet that Bratton Fleming, doctor of medicine and colleague of Professor James Rhodes, quite literally jumped from his chair by the fireplace when the sound of the apartment door being politely knocked reached his hair-covered ears.

"Ruddy hell!" he exclaimed as he gripped the arms of the armchair with a start, his sleep suddenly disturbed. "I'll get my revolver. I expect it's that opium fiend from next door!"

"I don't think that will be strictly necessary Bratton," Rhodes interrupted, laying aside his newspaper neatly and standing from the chair opposite Fleming's.

He made no move towards the door but instead straightened his already perfectly straight tie, pulled his jacket down to smooth out the non-existent creases, and then ran a quick hand through his immaculate hair. He glanced out of the window. A black cab was parked opposite, the driver's gaze turned to his study window. Rhodes shivered involuntarily and turned his back to the window.

"I think you will discover shortly," he said to Fleming, "that we have a client. A young lady of attractive appearance, of moderate height and slight build, and with a barely discernible West Country accent."

Fleming stared in amazement at his colleague. "How can you possibly tell all that from that infernal hammering at the door, Rhodes?"

"Firstly my learned friend, that 'infernal hammering' as you incorrectly described it is a polite knock from hands using the knuckle and not the whole fist, as you are so want to do with the neighbours. Secondly", he continued, ignoring Fleming's silently opening and closing mouth, "she sent word yesterday via telegram that she would be arriving at noon today and took the liberty of describing herself for the purposes of recognition."

He pulled a silver pocket watch from his waistcoat and opened the face cover, a slight crease appearing on his forehead. "A minute late. Forgivable I suppose. Mrs. Pye," he said as his landlady emerged from the small kitchen, "would you kindly show our guest in? As the hour of eleven is rapidly approaching, a pot of tea and some of your delicious lemon cake would not go amiss, either."

* * *

Rhodes, Fleming, and their attractive lady guest sat quietly in the cluttered study of 219b while Mrs. Pye served tea and cake. Only when she had retired to the kitchen did Rhodes speak.

"Thank you for your telegram, my dear lady. How can we be of assistance to you?"

"Thank you for agreeing to see me at such short notice, Professor Rhodes." She placed her cup and saucer on the side table and dabbed her mouth daintily with a silk handkerchief. "My name is Claire Cotterill, daughter of Lord Arthur Cotterill of Okehampton. I see from your expression that you recognise my father's name."

Rhodes raised his eyebrows. "Very astute Miss Cotterill. Yes, I do indeed know your father's name, though sadly I have never met him in person. Your father is one of our greatest inventors, the founder of the Cotterill Armaments Company, a Lord of the Realm, and, if I am not mistaken, owner of a dozen armaments' patents. All of which are currently in use by the armed forces of our beloved sovereign, I believe."

"Quite correct Professor. It is regarding my father that I am here today." A tear appeared in the corner of her left eye, but was quickly dabbed away. "He has been murdered by parties unknown!"

"Ruddy hell Rhodes!" exclaimed Fleming, almost raising his large frame to his feet. "Did you hear that? There's been a murder! I'd better get my gun."

"I am not deaf old boy and please retake your seat. I doubt the murderer is about to burst in and attack Miss Cotterill while she is here." He waved Bratton back into his seat and returned his attention to his guest. "What are the circumstances of your father's untimely demise Miss Cotterill?"

"My father was murdered at his home, the family manor outside of Okehampton. I have recently been away in India with my fiancée, Captain Douglas Hamilton-Carpe of the 57th Foot, but returned two days ago. My father has been working very hard lately and was exhausted. I had returned to make sure he took care of himself."

Rhodes and Fleming waited while she took a small bite of cake, chewed twenty times, and then swallowed.

"He had just finished plans for a new weapon and was expecting to hear from the Ministry of Armaments any day now with regards to a contract."

Rhodes sat patiently while Miss Cotterill took another sip of tea. Fleming, a far more excitable fellow, was on the edge of his seat, mentally urging her to continue at a pace more in keeping with his own.

"Two days ago he had a visit from his partner, Mister Edington Burtle ", she continued. "He and father met in the study and had a frightful row. Their voices could be heard throughout the entire house. Mister Burtle left in a hurry and without his usual farewells. When Jacobs, our butler, brought father his evening coffee later that day, he discovered the body. He had been brutally stabbed to death. The safe had also been opened and its entire contents stolen."

"Hmm, most interesting", said Rhodes, leaning back in his chair and taking a long drink from his teacup. "Are the local police investigating the crime?"

"I have little faith in our local constabulary, Professor Rhodes. Sergeant Barnes is a good man and knew my father well. His heart is in the right place, but I do not believe he has the experience to handle such a case."

"How did you hear of Rhodes, though?" asked Fleming, almost overbalancing as he readjusted his position on the chair to make use of the greater part of the seat instead of just the front quarter. "We don't advertise in Cornwall."

"Devonshire," corrected Rhodes.

"Whilst travelling back from India, I came across an old copy of The Times. Having been out of touch for so long I began to read it and there was a report of your last case. I suppose that your name stuck in my mind, and when father was found murdered, I had Jacobs take a telegram to the village at first light yesterday."

"Ah yes", said Rhodes, "the Case of the Vanishing Nannies. A most simple case to solve once I had deduced that there was only one nanny involved. How did you know I would agree to see you?"

"Alas I did not, but what did I have to lose? The worst you could say would be 'no,' and I believe that another consulting detective lives in the neighbourhood."

"Ruddy charlatan that one," said Fleming. "Quite right you came here first miss. If Rhodes can't help you then no one can."

"Thank you Bratton, I believe I can.... What on earth are you doing man?"

In the few seconds of intervening time Bratton had risen swiftly from his chair (faster than his bulk would seemingly allow) and approached the wall that separated the apartment of Rhodes

from that of 221b Baker Street. He had begun banging on it loudly with his fist, as if he were hammering in a nail.

"You have to be careful Rhodes. That nosey devil Watson is most likely listening to our conversation. I expect he'll try to steal our case from under our very noses the moment Miss Cotterill leaves. I use this to deafen him temporarily, don't I?"

"Both Mister Holmes and Doctor Watson have already gone out," Rhodes sighed. "I saw them leave earlier this morning whilst you were napping in the chair."

"I wouldn't call it napping exactly," Fleming answered. "More like checking the old eyelids for light leaks. Anyway, I've had trouble sleeping at night until recently, haven't I?" He resumed his seat and tried to appear attentive. Unfortunately Bratton didn't really have the face for it and merely looked eager, like a boy listening to a good yarn.

"Indeed you have, my friend. Now, where was I? Ah yes, of course. Miss Cotterill, we would be delighted to help. I have some tasks to complete in London but will endeavour to catch the late train. I should be in Okehampton by ten o'clock this evening." He glanced at Bratton, who sat frowning and mumbling to himself. "Assuming that you still seek our services, of course?"

"Oh yes. Thank you Professor Rhodes. I shall return to Okehampton immediately and tell the staff to prepare for your arrival. Jacobs will meet you at the station and bring you to the manor."

"One more thing Miss Cotterill," said Rhodes. Characteristically, he paused for a moment before continuing. "Has the study been cleaned since your father's recent death?"

"No Professor. I informed the staff to touch nothing. The local doctor took father's body away of course, but nothing else has been moved," she replied, finishing the last of her tea and placing the cup back on the saucer beside her.

"Excellent. More tea before you leave, Miss Cotterill?"

* * *

"Well Bratton, it looks like we have another case," said Rhodes after Miss Cotterill had departed into the fog-shrouded streets of early afternoon London. He looked out of the window as Miss Cotterill climbed into a cab. A second cab, the same one that had been parked across the street earlier, moved off behind it. The driver's attention was now fixed on the road.

"Yes indeed Rhodes," said Bratton smiling. "I've always fancied seeing Exmoor since I got back from exploring Africa you know."

"Exmoor is indeed a wonderful place, but we shall be visiting Dartmoor on this trip."

"Oh well, I expect it's very similar; lots of grass and hills and all that. So, what tasks have you got to do in London then before we catch the train?"

"Matters relating to this case Bratton. I need to contact a few old friends. Why don't you be a good chap and book some tickets for us on the evening train to Okehampton? I'll meet you back here at three o'clock so we can pack accordingly."

"Suits me fine," said Bratton, as he checked the time on the mantelpiece clock. "Gives me a few hours to get some sleep, I suppose."

Rhodes' eyebrows raised in resignation as he went to fetch his coat and hat from the coat stand. "I'll see you later."

Chapter Two: Arrival in Dartmoor

At four o'clock, Professor James Rhodes and Doctor Bratton Fleming were sat in the first class carriage on the evening train to Exeter. They would change at Exeter for Okehampton on the North Devon branch line.

Rhodes sat reading the morning edition of *The Times*, turning the page every few minutes as he perused the columns for anything of import. Fleming, seeing himself a more practical man, was cleaning his service revolver in between taking puffs from his pipe. The pipe was a long, bulky piece of red wood carved especially for him, so he claimed, by a witch doctor in Africa whose life he had saved. The native, having been bitten by a diseased monkey, required expert medical assistance. To Rhodes, a non-smoker, it smelt much like Fleming was actually smoking the deceased monkey.

"Well, would you like to hear what I have learned through my investigations?" asked Rhodes, folding away his paper and placing it carefully by his side as the train got under way and slowly crept away from London.

"Of course I would," said Fleming, not stopping either his cleaning or his pipe smoking. "Just let me finish giving Betty a good polish first though. I heard that Watson next door saying that there are great, big vicious dogs on Dartmoor this time of year. You never know when she'll be needed."

Patience was a virtue Rhodes had instilled into himself at an early age, but by Basingstoke station it was wearing frightfully thin. Fleming had polished every square millimetre of his revolver, even going so far as to shine individual bullets. Rhodes had enquired as to the purpose of this particular act but had lost interest when the answer "it makes the bullets fly faster, doesn't it?" has issued from Fleming's lips. For all his skill as a medical man, Fleming was lost when it came to any other branch of science.

The sky had clouded over, and a light rain had begun to patter gently against the window, as they left Salisbury heading west. Fleming finally holstered his gleaming revolver and carefully placed the cleaning kit back in its tin.

"Right then Rhodes, what was that you were saying just now about finding something out?" asked Fleming, taking a long draw on his pipe.

"That was well over two hours ago, Fleming. We've just passed Salisbury," said Rhodes, exasperated but happy to be able to finally reveal what he had discovered. "Right, well..."

"Probably explains why I'm feeling hungry then, doesn't it? Would you like a sandwich?" Fleming asked, reaching into his bag and finally producing a squashed bag of cheese sandwiches.

"Mrs Pye was good enough to pack some food for us in case we got peckish on the journey. We have cake as well if you'd prefer that."

"I'm fine for now thank you, Bratton. You just tuck in. You look half starved," said Rhodes, watching Fleming's waistcoat button straining to remain done up against the nearly insurmountable pressure of his large stomach trying to break free. Fleming was anything but half-starved.

"As I was saying," he continued, "I went to do some checking on our victim, Lord Cotterill. I have a few friends at the Ministry, you know." Rhodes could see that Fleming was nodding, his mouth full of sandwich. "Yes, best you don't talk right now. I have a clean shirt on."

Rhodes stole a quick glance out of the window. Dusk was starting to creep in to the evening sky. "They told me that Lord Cotterill had indeed brought new plans for them to inspect. They couldn't tell me what the plans were for, obviously. National secret and all that, you understand." He waved away Fleming's offer of a slice of fruitcake.

"It seems that they had rejected the plans just over a week ago, long before he was murdered. Apparently the item in question would be too expensive to produce, and seeing as how we weren't really fighting any one of note, the Ministry decided not to offer a contract."

"Nothing suspicious there though, is there?" said Fleming, finishing a mouthful of cake and wiping the crumbs from the moustache. The sweeping motion only served to transport the crumbs from his moustache to the lower part of his bushy sideburns.

"Not really, no. But apparently the last three patents that Cotterill submitted were also turned down for various reasons. Cotterill hadn't had a new patent accepted in nearly two years. No new patents means no extra money. Word at the Ministry is that Cotterill was nearly bankrupt."

"I nearly bankrupted myself once, you know? Playing polo in India, I was. Fell off my horse and nearly bankrupted myself good and proper, didn't I?"

"I think the term is 'ruptured', *Doctor* Fleming," said Rhodes with a small note of exasperation in his voice. Only five hours to go and they'd be in Okehampton.

Five long hours.

Five long hours in a small compartment.

Five long hours in a small compartment, with only Fleming for company.

* * *

The train pulled into Okehampton Station at five minutes to ten, a pleasant change for it to arrive early, especially given the long distance it had travelled. Rhodes and Fleming waited on the station while a porter unloaded their trunks. Aside from themselves and the elderly porter, the station was completely deserted.

"Jacobs, the butler, should be waiting for us just outside the station gate," said Rhodes, wrapping his woollen scarf around his neck to ward off the damp night air. "He will take us to the manor, where we shall begin our investigation first thing in the morning."

"Not tonight then?" enquired Fleming, apparently taken by surprise. "You normally like to get an early start on this sort of thing."

"Given that Lord Cotterill is already dead and my clever deduction that his killer is still in the area, I am happy to rest tonight in order to make sure I am in top form when I begin my investigations."

"Oh? And what makes you think that his killer is still here then, Rhodes?" Fleming was fighting against the wind to light his pipe. Rhodes secretly wished the wind good luck before continuing.

"Just a hunch old friend, just a hunch," answered Rhodes, looking at the night sky around them. Apart from the station lights, the surrounding area was black. No gas lamps to conceal the night sky, just mile upon mile of desolate moor, dotted with the occasional farmhouse or hamlet. "Yes," mused Rhodes to himself, "I'd forgotten what it was like out here. It's been a while since I saw much of the country. Not since..."

His voice trailed away. No point dwelling on the past now, he thought. Somewhere in the back of his mind he heard a Welsh voice; Fleming was talking to him.

"...and *we* all thought it was funny of course, him having no trousers on and the baboon armed with his riding crop. Anyway, I think it best that I deal with the natives. I've had more experience of that sort of thing in Africa, haven't I?"

"I don't think the 'natives' will cause us much trouble. Anyway, your Welsh accent is so thick they may not be able to understand you," said Rhodes.

"What accent? Fleming looked a little disgruntled. "I don't have an accent, do I?"

Fleming's ponderings on whether his thick Welsh voice counted as being accented were cut short by the porter appearing from the back of the train with a squeaky trolley laden down with their trunks. He nodded politely to the only two other figures on the platform.

"An' where would 'e be likin' this taken?" he said, nodding sharply at the trolley.

"Just to the station gate if you please," said Rhodes. "We're expecting a lift from a man called Jacobs. A local fellow."

"That's right," interjected Fleming. "We've come from London. LON-DON, I say. It's a big city far to the east." He was now talking slowly and loudly, as if the man were both deaf and stupid.

"Ar, I've 'eard o' London. Ain't never been there, mind. Too much crime I've 'eard. An' deadly fog an' all. Much cleaner air down yer," said the porter, slowly pushing the squeaking trolley past

the sleuths towards the station exit. "Daft furriner," he added under his breath as he reached the white gate that separated station from road.

* * *

A carriage was waiting outside the station. The single lantern hanging from the front illuminated the figure of a tall, thin man. On hearing the distinctive squeak of the porter's trolley approaching, he walked over to the porter. He told the old man to put the bags on the back and slipped a shilling into his hand.

"Good evening, sirs," he said to the two figures following behind, bowing slightly as he did so. "I am Jacobs, the late Lord Cotterill's butler. I trust your journey from London was pleasant, sir?"

"Yes, thank you Jacobs," said Rhodes. "I am Professor Rhodes and this is my colleague, Doctor Fleming." He indicated Fleming with a flick of his wrist. Jacobs bowed again.

"How far is this manor then?" said Fleming. "I'm ruddy starving, you know? Haven't eaten a thing since we left Exeter."

"Quite some way I am afraid, sir," replied Jacobs assuming the unreadable expression of a professional butler. "We should be there in an hour and a half. Once your trunks are aboard we shall leave. Miss Cotterill is expecting you for a late supper."

The road to the manor was deserted. No lights could be seen in the gloom, and the landscape looked bleak and foreboding. For the most part Dartmoor looked to be a featureless expanse of grassland, broken only by the tors, tall outcroppings of rock thrusting out of the mists. Although sparse on trees, Dartmoor concealed many bogs more than capable of swallowing unwary travellers, and keeping to the path was deemed advisable. Rhodes was glad that he was travelling by carriage driven by a man who knew the road well. Yes, walking on Dartmoor at night was a foolish course of action and one he never planned on taking.

An hour into the journey, the carriage slowed to a halt and Fleming stuck his head out of the window. "Can't see any lights," he said. "Maybe they're all asleep?"

"We have yet to reach the manor," said Rhodes, his deerstalker half over his eyes as he dozed, his long legs resting on the opposite seat. "My guess is that we have met with some form of obstruction on the road. Jacobs will undoubtedly take care of it for us. If he can't, he will call us for assistance."

From the front of the carriage a voice could be heard calling out. "That you ther', Jacobs?" The voice was deep and carried a thick local accent. The owner, a thick set man of ruddy complexion and with a strangely pointed head held a lantern in his left hand and a shotgun, closed at the breech and ready for use, in his right.

"Yes, Sergeant Barnes," replied Jacobs, not dismounting from the carriage. "I have been to the station to collect two guests of Miss Cotterill's. Detectives from London, here to investigate her father's murder."

"The cheek of it," said Barnes. "Moy investigation were thorough enough. 'Twas obviously the work of that...they be awake in ther'?"

"Yes, sergeant, we're awake," said Rhodes loudly, opening the carriage door and stepping out. The road was damp from the night air, but thankfully he had avoided any puddles. Nothing worse than having wet feet – 'chilled the brain', or so Fleming claimed. He pulled his scarf tighter about his neck and walked to the front of the carriage.

"While we do not doubt that your investigation was thorough," he said drawing level with the lead horse's head and getting his first view of the sergeant, "Miss Cotterill would like a second opinion. Just to be sure that the murderer is found quickly. Pray tell, what are you doing out at this time of night? I would deduce that you are hunting something...or perhaps someone?"

"I don't rightly know wot yeh're deducin'," said Barnes sharply, "but we don't be needin' no city-folks comin' do'n yer interferrin' in police mat'ers. I reckons I knows 'oo did it an' I'll 'ave 'im in custody any time now."

"Good show," said Rhodes chirpily. "Then I shall expect you at Cotterill Manor at nine o'clock sharp tomorrow morning to enlighten me as to the identity of the killer." With that, he turned and began to walk back to the carriage door.

"Drive on Jacobs, we don't want to be late," he said as he drew level with the driver, who responded with a touch to his cap.

As Rhodes took his seat the carriage lurched forward. Passing by Sergeant Barnes the occupants of the carriage could see that he appeared most perturbed.

* * *

The carriage pulled up to the front of the house at a quarter to twelve, and Jacobs opened the door to allow Rhodes and Fleming to climb down. "I shall leave your belongings by the front door, sir, whilst I park the carriage. I shall return for them shortly and take them to your chambers. If you would care to go up to the house, you are expected."

"Thank you Jacobs," said Rhodes. "After you, Fleming," he added, gesturing to the front door, highlighted by the glow of two oil lanterns.

Cotterill Manor was a Georgian house and had been the Cotterill family home for the past ninety years, since the then Lord Cotterill won it in a game of cards with an army colonel. Constructed in the standard box shape of the era, there was a porch over the front door, held aloft by four plain pillars and reached by means of three wide steps.

"Why? Do you think the killer could be in there right now?" said Fleming, eyeing the house with suspicion and trying to draw his revolver.

"Sigh! No, I do not think that the killer is in the house. I was just being polite," said Rhodes, slowly shaking his head. "Would it make you feel better if I were to go first?"

"An excellent idea! I can cover you then, can't I?" said Fleming, a wide smiling breaking through his hairy face.

Before they had reached the top of the steps that lead to the solid oak front door, it had opened; Miss Cotterill stood framed in the doorway. "Welcome Professor, Doctor," she said, stepping back to allow them entry. "I hope you had a good journey?"

"Most interesting," said Rhodes. "We encountered Sergeant Barnes on the way from the station. He was out hunting someone. I have asked him to come to the house tomorrow morning to enlighten me as to his findings. I trust I was not presumptuous in doing so?"

Both Rhodes and Fleming took off their coats, hats, and scarves, laying them on a small oak table for Jacobs to hang later. Rhodes could not help but notice a small calling card that lay on the table, partially concealed by a pair of leather gloves.

"Not at all, Professor," replied Miss Cotterill, ushering them down the hall towards the dining room. "The good sergeant was here earlier this evening. Apparently he is of the opinion that the killer will be caught very soon. Please," she opened a door into the dining room, where two places were set, "I've had the cook prepare a light supper for you."

"Excellent," said Fleming as he brushed past Rhodes and lowered his ample frame into a chair with surprising rapidity. "I could waste away if I don't eat soon. Ah, roast chicken! My favourite!"

"Please excuse Fleming," said Rhodes, "but he has a...healthy appetite. Will you be joining us, Miss Cotterill?"

"No, I have had an exhausting day, what with travelling so far, and will retire now. I shall see you for breakfast though. I trust that seven is not too early for you?"

"Not at all. Sleep well and do not fear; we shall soon have the killer behind bars."

Fleming mumbled 'goodnight' through a mouthful of chicken, dropping only a few pieces onto his plate, before turning his attention to the freshly baked bread rolls. "Ruddy starving I am, Rhodes," he muttered, before ramming half a buttered roll into his mouth.

An hour later, both Rhodes and Fleming were in the east guest room, which had been made up with two beds. Rhodes leant over and blew out the small oil lamp that stood on a chest of drawers positioned between the beds. "Goodnight, Bratton."

"Night, Rhodes. Sleep well," replied Bratton.

Barely five minutes had passed when Rhodes awoke with a start at the sound of a loud thump from within the bedchamber. Someone, no doubt Fleming by the clumsiness of the actions, Rhodes deduced, was fumbling in the dark with one of the trunks that held their travelling gear.

"What are you doing Bratton? Do you want the light on?" enquired Rhodes sleepily. Fleming had been troubled by insomnia for the past month, and Rhodes was used to his nocturnal wanderings, though normally he paced the spare room at the apartment, leaving Rhodes to sleep peacefully.

"No, no," Bratton replied quickly. "Just getting something to help me sleep, aren't I? Ah, here it is! Night then, Rhodes. Sleep well." Bratton quietly chuckled to himself. "I know I will."

The faint scent of violets wafted over Rhodes. Within seconds the sound of Bratton's heavy snoring pervaded the room. Rhodes pulled his pillow over his head and quickly fell asleep himself. It had been a tiring day, indeed.

Chapter Three: Murder Most Foul

20th May 1889

"I trust you slept well Professor, Doctor?" asked Miss Cotterill cheerfully, as her guests entered the dining room for breakfast. The cook had prepared a selection of breakfast dishes and had placed them on the sideboard for the guests to serve themselves. Lord Cotterill, for the most part dining alone, had rarely stood on tradition, much to the relief of the servants.

"Very well, thank you," said Rhodes. "Naturally, I have been pondering the case. I look forward to starting shortly." Rhodes helped himself to a small plate of kedgeree and a cup of coffee before taking his seat further down the table from Miss Cotterill.

"Oh, yes indeed," said Fleming over-enthusiastically. "Slept marvellously, didn't I? I used to have trouble sleeping, but now I've found...ah, sausages, my favourite!" With several sausages, a mountain of scrambled eggs, a piglet's worth crispy bacon rashers, and a pile of steaming mushrooms on his plate, Fleming felt contented enough to sit down next to Rhodes and begin eating.

"So," he said, fighting to force a whole sausage into his mouth, "what's the plan of action then, Rhodes?"

"Firstly," replied Rhodes, putting down his fork and dabbing his mouth with his napkin, "I feel we shall look at the clues left by the killer in Lord Cotterill's study. I strongly suspect that they will reveal a plethora of vital information.

"Secondly," a brief pause for a sip of coffee, "we shall talk to every member of the household who was present at the time of the murder. And thirdly," he said quickly, cutting Fleming off from asking another question, "we shall take a walk around the grounds to discern if there is any further evidence to collate."

"Jus' wah I wuz finking," replied Bratton through his mouthful of sausage meat.

"Naturally," said Rhodes, turning his attention to Miss Cotterill further along the table. "I would very much like you to be present during the investigations this morning, Miss Cotterill. I hope that would not inconvenience or distress you?"

"Not at all Professor," said Miss Cotterill. "I saw my father's body as it lay on the study floor." Her eyes lowered slightly and then flicked back up to stare directly at Rhodes. "I may be a woman, Professor Rhodes, but I am very strong. Mother died when I was young, you see. Father was too busy with work to raise us by himself, so we looked after ourselves. The Cotterills are very independent. You must think me quite beastly to behave in this manner, not crying and all, I mean?"

"We each grieve in our own way, Miss Cotterill," said Rhodes absentmindedly. "Would you be so gracious as to explain whom the 'we' you refer to may be?"

"Pardon? Oh yes, how silly of me. My brother, Jonathan, and myself. He lives in New York. He married a local woman by the name of Susan Ashford. Old money, I believe. He and father never saw eye to eye over the family business. Jon hates violence, you understand. I telegraphed him the day after the murder, the same time as I contacted your good self. He should be here in a week or so; he's coming straight over by liner. Will you need to talk to him?"

"By then the case will be closed and your father's killer where he belongs."

"On the end of a ruddy great piece of rope," Fleming interjected, wiping his mouth with a napkin and eyeing up the possibility of a second helping. "What?" he exclaimed innocently, seeing the look on Rhodes' face.

* * *

With breakfast complete, Professor Rhodes, Doctor Fleming, Miss Cotterill, and Jacobs the butler stood in the wood-panelled corridor that led to Lord Cotterill's study, the scene of his death. The atmosphere was quiet, an underlying tenseness threatening to simmer through at any moment. After what seemed an eternity, Rhodes nodded to Jacobs, who walked the few steps to the study door, produced a bunch of keys from his trouser pocket, and unlocked the study door. Pushing it ajar, he stepped back to allow Rhodes and Fleming entry.

Stepping in to the study, the two detectives surveyed what lay before them. To the left of the door, in the corner, stood a coat rack, currently bare. Following the room round to the left, their eyes settled on the large bay windows, partially concealed by heavy velvet drapes. Past the window were bookshelves, working their way along the opposite way to roughly the midpoint, where there stood a large, highly polished oak desk. Behind it stood a comfortable armchair, no doubt the master of the house's chair; in front of it two less-comfortable looking chairs, one of which has been tipped over. A red patch on the carpet, just to the right of the fallen chair, indicated the last place Lord Cotterill had laid.

Protruding from the right hand wall could be seen the open safe door, apparently undamaged. A large painting in a gilded frame, facing away from the room, leant against the wall beneath it. In the middle of the same wall stood a large fireplace, the ashes light grey and powdery. To the right of the fireplace was situated a small writing desk, currently topped by a silver tray with a coffee pot on.

"Let the game begin," muttered Rhodes, as he stepped to the middle of the study.

* * *

Rhodes moved slowly around the room, talking quietly to himself. He seemed lost in his own world, paying no attention at all to the others who were waiting patiently near the door. After five minutes Fleming broke the silence that had pervaded the study. "This is how he works," he said quietly. "Has a good look round first and then picks up on a clue. Works every time, it does."

As if on cue Rhodes strode to the blood pool and knelt down beside it, his eyes glanced over to the safe and back to the blood several times before he stood up.

"Although this is obviously where Lord Cotterill died," he said, more to himself than to anyone else, "it is *not* where he was first attacked."

"And how do you deduce that then, Rhodes?" asked Fleming, still amazed at his colleague's observational powers. Not that Fleming was visually impaired, just that he tended to think slower, miss the obvious, and often leapt to fanciful conclusions. He was a very good doctor though.

"Simple really. Look here," he said, turning to face towards the window and pointing to a patch of carpet in the middle of the room. "A small spot of blood shows where the attacker's weapon made impact. Lord Cotterill, propelled backwards by the weight of a charging assailant put out his hand to steady himself, caught the back of the chair, and, as he moved backwards, the chair fell forward. Newton's Third Law of Motion at work."

"Ah, yes, I see," Fleming lied, totally oblivious to what these particular laws referred to and wondering whether he had ever inadvertently broken them.

"The blood pool itself is large, consistent with extreme blood loss, but shows little in the way of splattering in the vicinity. My guess would be that Lord Cotterill had by now fallen on to his back, no doubt bravely putting his arms between his attacker and his body. I shall need to see the body to be sure, of course."

Jacobs coughed politely, attracting Rhodes' attention. "Excuse me, sir," he said, "but his Lordship did have wounds to his forearms when we found him. He was also laid on his back, sir."

"Excellent!" exclaimed Rhodes. "Then the logical point of entry would be..." his voice trailed off as he walked towards the heavy curtains, swished them aside, and disappeared behind them.

At that moment a rather red-faced and panting Sergeant Barnes entered the room. "Sorry oi'm late," he wheezed, "moy bike got a puncture an' I 'ad to run up yer. The cook let me in." He surveyed the room. "At least oi'm yer 'fore that 'igh an' moighty London detective."

"Sadly, your deduction is incorrect, as I suspect is your idea of who the criminal may be," said Rhodes, emerging from behind the curtains with an even greater swish. It was a theatrical

entrance, purely for the benefit of Sergeant Barnes. "Yes, most definitely the point of entry." He looked the wheezing sergeant up and down disdainfully before continuing. "The killer entered through the window, but waited for some time before killing Lord Cotterill."

"Rubbish," scoffed Sergeant Barnes, already in a poor mood from having to run the last mile to the manor just to please some over-paid detective. "'Ow can 'e possibly say that? 'E wasn't yer. 'Tis obvious the killer jumped in through the window, look at the mess." Barnes was speaking to those around him rather than to Rhodes, whom he would rather ignore existed.

"Quiet simple really," said Rhodes, pulling the curtains open and revealing the scene behind for all to see. "If you would care to examine the evidence, it really is self-explanatory." He waited until the others had joined him near the window before revealing the clues he had spotted.

"Firstly," he indicated the window frame, "there are mysterious scratch marks, as if someone with very long nails had pulled themselves in from outside. The broken window," he indicated a window frame now blocked by a wooden board that had been hidden from view by the curtains when the party entered the study, "was his escape route. There is very little broken glass on this side of the window, but I suspect that there is a great deal more outside."

Sergeant Barnes' mouth opened to say something, but Rhodes, anticipating his question, cut him short. "Tell me Jacobs, did you clean up anything in here?"

"No, sir," he said, puffing out his chest importantly. "Miss Cotterill gave strict instructions not to touch anything. Whatever glass is present was there on the day his Lordship was murdered, sir."

"And what lies outside of this particular window?" Rhodes continued, gesturing to the broken window.

"A flower bed, sir. Red roses I believe. His Lordship was very partial to roses, sir. Her Ladyship's favourite when she was still with us."

"Have you checked outside, sergeant?" Rhodes turned to face Sergeant Barnes, who was now slightly red-faced from something other than the run

"No need, sir," he snapped. "As oi said, the killer came in through that window," he jabbed a podgy finger at the broken window, "murdered 'is Lordship, robbed the safe, and then escaped back the way 'e came in."

"A very interesting story, but one that is nearly totally incorrect," said Rhodes, now ignoring the sergeant altogether. "Here is what actually happened, as determined by the evidence that lies before us."

He walked back to the intact window where he had discovered the faint scratches. "This was the point of entry, but I suspect the window was not forced, rather that it was already open. Further proof can be seen on the floor."

He stepped back to allow the others to see what appeared to be a patch of carpet rather similar to the remainder of the surrounding carpet. "Here," he continued without noticing the bemused look on the faces behind him, "are two faint impressions in the shape of bare feet, formed by a large weight standing. Would you care to guess the height and weight Bratton?"

"Yes, of course, Rhodes," said Fleming, stepping forward and crouching down. He pulled his magnifying glass from his pocket and proceeded to study the area. Sure enough, under scrutiny the carpet showed clear indentations where someone with very large feet had been standing. "Hmm...big feet and a deep impression, even after two days. This carpet does hold impressions well but the footprints seem deeper in the middle than at the edges. I'd have to say that he was a tall bugger, probably six feet four inches or more and weighing about 20 stone."

"For all his faults elsewhere," said Rhodes, "Bratton is remarkably skilled at tracking. A trick you learned in the Sudan I believe, old friend?"

"Oh yes indeed, Rhodes. Of course it takes years to learn these skills." He glanced at the sergeant as if to apologise for having found a clue. "I remember a time a few years back when I was out there. I tracked what I thought was a wounded man for three days before I realised it was a wounded lion. Ruddy nearly got killed by it, I did. Vicious beast, all teeth and claws and..."

"I think they have the idea now Bratton," said Rhodes, gently patting his friend on the back. "Back to the case."

Sergeant Barnes was not letting the matter rest peacefully. "They could'a been made by anyone in the 'house. What makes yer think it was the killer, eh?"

"Firstly," he said in a matter-of-fact-like voice, "I strongly doubt that anyone in this house would stand behind the curtain of his lordship's study for a lengthy period of time. Secondly," he continued, "the killer has been identified at being over six feet in height and weighing considerably more than anyone else currently present in the house." Rhodes wanted to add "save for yourself, sergeant" but stopped himself. *No point in further alienating the locals*, he thought.

Rhodes returned to the centre of the room, everyone's attention fixed firmly on him. "Now that we have established where the attacker entered, we shall continue. Our assailant then closed the window, for it is now locked and I have heard from Jacobs that no one touched a thing. He then stood behind the curtain for some time, possibly listening to a conversation, before making his move. I do not yet know why, but I have barely started my investigations here," he added for the benefit of Sergeant Barnes, who had momentarily cheered up at hearing the great detective

admit he didn't know something. "My guess is that he launched his assault when Lord Cotterill went to close the curtain, like thus. Bratton, if you'd play Lord Cotterill and walk towards the curtain?"

"Righty ho, Rhodes. Always pleased to help. Here do?"

"Perfect, now walk towards the curtain as if you were coming to close the window. Excellent. When Lord Cotterill reached this point," he said as Fleming began reaching his hand out to pull aside the curtain, "our killer sprang out, pushing Lord Cotterill backwards and stabbing him at the point I indicated earlier; the first point of contact." Rhodes had placed his left hand around Fleming's neck and pushed the other into his stomach.

"Steady on, Rhodes!" said Fleming as he moved backwards under Rhodes' guidance. "I've only just eaten, you know?"

"Thank you, Bratton," said Rhodes, releasing Fleming and giving him a quick dust down. Bratton rejoined the others by the door, happier now he had been of use.

"Ow did 'e know when to attack 'is lordship?" asked Sergeant Barnes.

"I can only guess that Lord Cotterill went to close the window before he rang for his coffee, thus forcing the intruder to make his move whether he was ready or not."

"Ah, but 'is lordship may 'ave 'eard 'im an' gone to investigate."

"Potentially, but I suspect that if he suspected an intruder his lordship would have either rung the bell for Jacobs or grabbed something to use as a weapon."

Sergeant Barnes conceded defeat and stared at his boots as if he expected them to lend support to his argument.

"If I may continue? Thank you. Once he was convinced that Lord Cotterill was dead, the killer escaped, *not* through the open window, but by leaping through a closed one. Why you ask? Alas, I do not yet know. Tell me Jacobs, did anyone hear breaking glass?"

Jacobs cleared his throat. "No, sir. At the time in question, I was most likely in the kitchen with cook. The gardener is a local man and would have returned home before dark, sir. Miss Cotterill was upstairs in her chambers, I believe, sir. There was no one else present. Lord Cotterill would ring if he needed attention." Miss Cotterill nodded her agreement to the statement.

"So, either our killer knew that he would not be heard, or he did not care. Either way, a dangerous man escaped undetected after committing an appalling murder."

"You forgot the bit about him robbing the safe, Rhodes," said Bratton.

"I certainly did not," Rhodes sounded hurt by the accusation that he may have made a mistake.

"No, I think you did. You see, you said that he killed Lord Cotterill and then escaped. Well, I may not have your powers of observation, but that safe door is open, isn't it?"

"Ar, 'at's roight mister detective," added Sergeant Barnes, preparing to crush Rhodes' theory now that he had new supporters and fresh evidence. "When did 'e pinch the money then?"

"The killer did not 'pinch' anything, sergeant. He simply killed Lord Cotterill and left, as I have already explained." He walked a few paces, letting the others protest his error of judgement, before calmly continuing. "A second person robbed the safe."

Gasps issued from the mouths of the assembled listeners, and Miss Cotterill looked liked she was about to swoon. Fleming, ever the on-call doctor and a gentleman to boot, rushed to her side and helped her into a chair, ordering Jacobs to fetch a glass of water from the kitchen.

"I am sorry for the shock, Miss Cotterill," Rhodes continued when Jacobs had returned with the water, "but the evidence is overwhelming. Tell me Jacobs, where did Lord Cotterill keep the keys to the safe?"

Jacobs glanced at Miss Cotterill, who nodded once and then said, "Tell him Jacobs. He's here to help."

"In the top drawer of the desk behind you, sir. Only his Lordship and I have keys to that drawer and the only set of safe keys are kept in there, sir," said Jacobs.

Rhodes moved around to the other side of the desk and pulled at the drawer. "Locked!" he exclaimed, promptly lowering to his haunches and producing his magnifying glass from his jacket pocket. "And no sign of the lock having being picked, either."

He stood up again and walked back round to the safe door. After scrutinising the safe lock under his magnifying glass for a few minutes he wheeled to face the others. "The safe keys were never used! The outside of this lock shows small scratches, the telltale signs of a lockpick at work. Our safe cracker was no cold-blooded killer but a skilled criminal. However, neither was this a random crime of simple robbery."

More gasps from the onlookers.

"Ridiculous!" mumbled Barnes.

"No, sergeant, not ridiculous," said Rhodes indicating the space between the pool of blood and the safe. "Look at these footprints. Boots. The killer wore nothing on his feet, as we have already proven. Our safecracker broke in through one of the two open windows, walked across the carpet, caught his boot on the edge of the blood pool whilst trying to step over it, and then proceeded to rob the safe. Do you know what his Lordship kept in the safe, Jacobs?"

"Money, I believe, sir. There were some private papers, such as his will, work documents, and letters from his children. I am not entirely sure, of course, sir," said Jacobs.

"You never opened the safe?"

"I must protest if you are implying that I would ever peek inside his Lordship's...", Jacobs voice had risen in volume, though his expression remained as impassive as usual.

"Not in the slightest," intervened Rhodes. "I am merely asking that if at any time in your service you ever opened the safe? As part of your duties."

"Never, sir. I hold a second set of desk keys in the unlikely instance that his Lordship should have ever have lost his or did not have them to hand. Only his Lordship would open the safe and then always when alone."

"Aha!" cried Sergeant Barnes. "'Oi've got yer now, Rhodes. What if 'is Lordship opened the safe and then went to close the window, eh? An' then when 'e wuz attacked 'e tried to close the safe. Bet yer never though o' that?"

Fleming took a step towards the sergeant but Rhodes waved him back. The last thing he needed was Fleming further alienating the local constabulary by thumping the sergeant in front of witnesses.

"Tut tut sergeant. Firstly, it is very unlikely that Lord Cotterill left the safe open while going to close the window. If he kept large sums of money in there, he would have been very foolish to perform such an act.

"Secondly, he did not stagger through his own blood in any attempt to close the safe. The footprints we see here are two regular, like those of someone walking. Were a struggle involved then we would expect to see two sets of footprints and more scuffing around the area. Also, closing a safe does not lock it, and no man is going to try and lock a safe door while fighting for his very life, is he sergeant?" The last three words came out punctuated by short spaces, a challenge to the sergeant to produce a more rational explanation than the one he had just heard.

"How do you think he escaped then, Rhodes?" asked Fleming, breaking the energy-charged silence that had fallen over the room.

"A good question, Fleming. What is your opinion?"

"What? Oh!" it was not often that Rhodes asked Fleming's advice at this stage of an investigation. "Well, let me see now. The window that the killer used was locked, so he can't have escaped that way now, can he? Logically he must have escaped through the smashed window."

"An excellent deduction my friend. Yes, our robber escaped through the same window as the murderer; unheard and unseen by any of the staff. When I move my investigation outside I believe you shall be proven right Fleming."

"Oh, thanks very much, Rhodes." Fleming's chest puffed with pride. "Glad to be of service."

"However," Rhodes added, "he did not enter through the smashed window but instead used the now-locked window. He closed and locked it after himself to lead us away from the fact there were two intruders."

"How do you know that, Rhodes?" asked Fleming.

"Because the window through which our killer entered is now locked. No intruder, having just committed a murder, is likely to lock an open window and then escape by jumping through another one."

I suppose you're right, aren't you?" said Fleming.

"Miss Cotterill, what we have here is not the work of a lone killer and an opportunist thief but, I believe, a vicious team who knew exactly what they were after," Rhodes said, a fiery look in his grey eyes. "This was a cold-blooded, refined, and quite deliberate murder."

He waited for the energy of his last statement to clear before continuing in a less energetic tone. "Now, I would like Jacobs to ask the cook to prepare some tea and sandwiches and to leave them in the dining room. I would then like to question Jacobs, the cook, and the gardener there. Come Fleming, there is more work to be done!"

Rhodes strode from the room with Fleming following behind, leaving Sergeant Barnes silent and looking somewhat abashed.

Chapter Four: A Question of Honour

Fifteen minutes later, Professor James Rhodes, consulting detective and inventor, and his colleague, Doctor Bratton Fleming, medical practitioner, were back in the dining room of Cotterill Manor, a large plate of sandwiches and a pot of hot tea in front of them.

Rhodes sat back in his chair, his eyes fixed on a spot on the ceiling in his usual detached manner whilst Fleming, being infinitely more practical (in his own eyes) and needing "energy, you know, for the rest of day" tucked heartily into a ham sandwich.

"You really ought to eat something, Rhodes," he said in between mouthfuls. "Keep your strength up. Something bothering you?" A few crumbs tried to hide themselves in his bushy moustache, but Fleming's tongue dragged them back to his mouth.

Rhodes rotated his head slowly to look at Fleming. "No, not really. Just piecing things together. There's a few things I have yet to understand, but I am sure they will become abundantly clear in due course."

"Ruddy good how you put that sergeant in his place. I was going to thump him at one stage, you know?"

"Yes. I had noticed. I am sure the sergeant is doing the best he can. He hasn't had the fine schooling I have and is very unlikely to have come across anything as sinister as this crime before. No, I am afraid he is out of his league here. We are not dealing with ordinary criminals."

"Do you think they've got one of them big dogs that Watson was talking about?"

"When, exactly, was Watson telling you about these dogs on Dartmoor? You never speak to him face to face."

"Of course I don't. He's a ruddy quack that one. No, I...er...accidentally overheard him telling Holmes about them a few days back whilst I was minding my own business. He must have been shouting or something, mustn't he?"

"Yes, or something," said Rhodes, picking up his teacup and taking a long sip.

There was a knock on the dining room door.

"Enter," said Rhodes, glancing at the grandfather clock. Eleven o'clock on the dot.

Jacobs entered the room, bowed politely to both Rhodes and Fleming, and then said, "I have the cook and gardener outside, sir. Which would you like to question first?"

"Sit down please, Jacobs," said Rhodes, indicating the chair opposite him. "Close the door first." Rhodes noticed Jacobs' nervous look but did not pass comment. It was never easy being questioned about a death, especially when it was one's master who had died in such a brutal fashion.

"Yes," said Fleming, "sit down and have a sandwich. Tiring work being a detective, you know?"

The door closed, and Jacobs sat down as ordered, his back straight, his hands resting in his lap. "How may I be of assistance to you, sir?"

"Why did you lie to me earlier when I asked you if anything had been moved?" asked Rhodes casually.

"Steady on now Rhodes! That's a pretty serious accusation," said Fleming, putting down his next sandwich and spraying crumbs onto his plate.

"Answer the question Jacobs," snapped Rhodes, ignoring his partner's protest.

"I...I don't know what you mean sir," stammered Jacobs, shaken by the question.

"The broken window. I doubt whether the killer or the robber managed to board it up."

Jacobs looked relieved. "I fixed it sir. I did not think it proper to leave it in that state. I assumed that you'd realised that."

"Don't be so flippant, Jacobs. Your master has been murdered and I expect total honesty when I ask a question. No matter how small the detail may seem to you it may be a vital clue. What else have you moved?"

"And assumption is the mother of all fu...", started Fleming.

"Nothing sir. Honestly," replied Jacobs, cutting Fleming off in mid flow.

"Nothing? What about the coffee pot on the writing desk? It had a single cup on it, a cup that had not been used for coffee. I strongly suspect that if we were to examine the pot it will still be full. Explain yourself man?"

"I...I...well...", stuttered Jacobs.

"You placed it there, didn't you?" Rhodes carried on. "You brought Lord Cotterill a pot of coffee before he retired for the night. Yet, when you opened the door you must have seen his body lying on the floor. Or was he still alive at this point? Answer me, man!" Rhodes slammed his fist onto the table, causing Jacobs and Fleming to jump.

"No, sir. I mean he was already dead sir. I always bring his Lordship coffee at eleven o'clock. He doesn't have to ring for it, sir. When I opened the door I saw...I saw."

"In your own time, Jacobs," soothed Rhodes, his demeanour now calmer and friendlier. "Have some tea." He pushed the teapot and a clean cup towards Jacobs.

"No thank you, sir. I'd rather just get on with it." Jacobs had gone quite white, a fact not missed by Rhodes or Fleming.

"Are you unwell, man?" enquired Fleming. "I've got some lovely pills upstairs that will pep you up good and proper. Brought them back from India, didn't I?"

"I don't think that Jacobs is ill Fleming," said Rhodes.

"No, sir, I am not unwell," said Jacobs, raising his face to look at Rhodes. "When I entered the study I saw Lord Cotterill lying on the floor in a pool of blood. He looked quite dead even to my untrained eye, sir. I was going to call for help when I noticed the safe was open. I..." he blinked once, "I placed the coffee pot on the writing desk and went over to the safe. It still had money in, sir. A lot of money."

"Are you in the habit of robbing your master? Or leaving him dead on the floor?" asked Rhodes.

"No sir, but he was dead and, well, my sister is very ill, sir. She needs a lot of medical help and it isn't cheap, sir. I...I thought that no one would miss it, sir. They'd think that the murderer stole it. I didn't mean no harm by it, sir. It was just lying there."

"I understand Jacobs, but you have committed a crime. Do you still have the money?"

"Yes, sir," said Jacobs straightening himself. "I have it tucked under my mattress."

"Later, when the household is asleep you will fetch the money and give it to me. I will make sure that it is recovered and returned to Miss Cotterill. If I have your solemn vow that you will not consider such an act ever again, we will say no more of this matter. I certainly do not condone your actions, but right now we have bigger fish to fry, and Miss Cotterill needs your support in running the house in this traumatic time."

Jacobs stared at Rhodes for a few seconds before speaking again. "Yes, sir. I mean, I swear upon my grandmother's eternal soul that I will never do anything so stupid again, sir."

"Good man. Now, pour yourself some tea and have a drink. When you are ready we will continue."

Jacobs poured himself a cup of tea, added sugar, and took a long sip. Nobody spoke for what seemed like eternity until Jacobs had finished his drink and pushed the cup away from him. "I'm ready now, sir," he said.

Rhodes pushed his chair away from the table and stood up. Straightening his immaculately pressed jacket he slowly turned and walked to the window, his back to the room. "Good, good. Now, what visitors did his Lordship have in the last...oh, the last week before his Lordship was murdered?" he asked.

"Well, sir, there have only been two visitors in the last week. The first was six days before his Lordship died. That would be the 12th, sir. His Lordship had not informed me of any guests he was expecting, but the doorbell rang at ten o'clock in the morning. I answered the door to a foreign gentlemen."

"Foreign?" prompted Rhodes.

"Yes, sir. The gentleman was, I believe, of German origin. He wore a dark blue military uniform with two rows of medals on his chest and a large square cross around his neck, long, highly polished black boots, and under his left arm he held one of those helmets with a pointy top that they wear, sir."

"Yes, that's a Hun alright," spat Fleming. "I ran into a bunch of them in East Africa once. Ruddy rude lot if you ask me."

"I didn't Fleming, but thank you for your confirmation as to the visitor's nationality," said Rhodes, casually flicking a piece of invisible fluff from his jacket collar. "Jacobs?"

"Yes, sir. He bowed to me and introduced himself as Herr Oberst Ludwig von Steinhagen."

"A ruddy alias I expect," said Fleming, polishing an apple on his shirt. "They all have such silly names, you can never tell if they're real ones, you know? I knew this girl in Munich once who..."

"Sadly, you are incorrect Bratton," replied Rhodes. "Colonel von Steinhagen is the German military attaché to England. From what little I know of him from articles in The Times, he is a close personal friend of the Kaiser, enjoys watching cricket, and is fascinated by the Imperial might of our beloved country. If I remember correctly, he has a scar down his right cheek and a rather bushy moustache, not unlike yours Fleming." Rhodes smiled to himself.

"I don't have a German moustache, you know. This is a good Welsh moustache, this one. I expect they copied it from us," snorted Fleming, who had been halted in his attempt to take a bite from the polished apple by Rhodes' comments.

"Yes, sir," said Jacobs, "that is a good description of him. He said that he had come to see his Lordship and presented me with his calling card. I asked him to wait in the entrance hall while I took the card to Lord Cotterill. His Lordship looked at the card and then, reluctantly it seemed, asked me to show Herr von Steinhagen through.

"After showing him to the study and closing the door I returned to the dining room to prepare the table for supper. The next thing I knew of the matter was hearing the front door slam and his Lordship ringing for me. "His Lordship looked very angry when I entered the study and said that he would take his evening meal there and that he did not wish to be disturbed until morning."

"You never saw Herr von Steinhagen leave?" asked Rhodes.

"No sir. I just heard the door slamming closed."

"Like I said, Rhodes," said Fleming, "rude buggers those Bosch. My grandmother lived in Germany for a bit as a nanny when she was younger. She never liked them either. Always said that they were too formal, you know, in a creepy sort of way."

"Indeed," replied Rhodes. "Who was the second visitor, Jacobs?"

"That was Mister Burtle, sir, Lord Cotterill's business partner. He was here the day of the murder, sir," said Jacobs. "He arrived unannounced quite late in the evening, as he often does, and asked to see Lord Cotterill immediately. He did not look happy, sir."

"Did you show him through?" said Rhodes.

"Not exactly, sir. Mister Burtle asked where his Lordship was. I informed him that his Lordship was in his study and he stormed off towards it. By the time I had hung up his coat and arrived there, Mr Burtle had already entered and was shouting at his Lordship. I asked his Lordship if I should remove Mister Burtle and was told to leave them, but to be ready if his lordship rang for me. I returned to the kitchen to help the cook prepare dinner."

"I don't suppose you heard what they were shouting about?" asked Fleming.

"No, Doctor. All I heard as I entered the study was Mister Burtle calling his Lordship a 'closed-minded old fool'. No way to talk to a gentleman of his Lordship's standing, sir."

"Indeed not," said Rhodes. "How long was Mister Burtle present?"

"Only about ten minutes or so, sir. His Lordship rang and I proceeded towards the study. As I entered the corridor I saw Mister Burtle coming towards me. He looked very angry about something and said 'don't worry Jacobs, I'll see myself out'. I thought that was why his Lordship rang and, with Mister Burtle leaving of his own accord, I went back to the kitchen."

"So you never actually saw Lord Cotterill from the time you left the study until the evening?" Rhodes asked, his eyebrows, unseen by Jacobs, rising. "And he never rang for you again?"

"No, sir. It wasn't unusual for his Lordship to spend a whole day alone in his study sir. I never saw him again until I brought him his evening coffee and by then...well, you know, sir."

"I understand. Did Lord Cotterill make a habit of having the study window open?"

"No sir. His lordship disliked the damp air when he was working."

"Do you have any ideas how the window got opened?"

"No sir, none at all. I can assure you that I did not open it."

"Thank you Jacobs. That is all for now."

"Yes, sir. Thank you, sir," said Jacobs, rising from the chair. "I shall return to my duties."

Jacobs was almost to the door before Rhodes spoke. "Jacobs? Don't forget our earlier conversation. And please tell the others that we won't need to speak to them just yet."

"Very good, sir," replied Jacobs, closing the door as he exited.

* * *

"Well, what a state of affairs," said Fleming once Jacobs had closed the door. "A murdered lord, a light fingered butler, an unexpected Bosch visitor, and now this Mister Burtle making a

racket. All very suspicious if you ask me. Do you have any idea what is going on, Rhodes because I'm totally confused?"

"A picture is forming Bratton. It is like having a jigsaw without all the pieces."

"I had one of them once. A lovely jigsaw of Buckingham Palace it was, but about five pieces were missing. Took me an age to finish."

"Indeed, Bratton."

"What next then, Rhodes? Why don't you want to talk to the other staff?"

"I do not think they can tell me anything that I don't already know."

"I wouldn't bet on that, Rhodes. I expect the gardener could tell you how to grow geraniums properly. And the cook could..."

"I was referring to the case, not to their professions," sighed Rhodes. "No, the butler held most of the information I needed. As for what to do next..." His voice trailed off as he continued to stare out of the window. "I think a bit of fresh air is in order! Shall we take a walk around the grounds and then pop down to the village? It's still early and the day is far from finished."

"Lovely. That should help build up an appetite for later. I'll get our coats and see you in the hall in a moment"

* * *

Five minutes later Rhodes and Fleming stood before the window to Lord Cotterill's study looking at the rose bed in front of them. The flowerbed showed clear signs that someone, or something, had trampled through in two different places.

"Here," said Rhodes, gesturing towards the area beneath the locked window, "was where the killer entered. See the footprints in the mud? Definitely barefooted."

"Hold on! What about these booted ones, then? Both sets go in through that locked window... and out through the smashed window!! How'd they do that? Magic?"

"As I deduced earlier, old friend," smiled Rhodes, "there were two intruders. The first entered through the open window and left by smashing his way out. Sometime later, the safe cracker entered through the same open window but locked it after him to cover his tracks."

"Ruddy clever, weren't they? Threw me off the track."

"Yes," admitted Rhodes, "a lesser man than myself would have surely missed the clues."

"Who would run around Dartmoor barefoot though? Even this time of year the grass is damp. He'd catch a cold. Unless...I've got it Rhodes!" The suddenness of Fleming's exclamation made Rhodes jump slightly. "The safe cracker used a trained ape to kill Lord Cotterill. I've seen them do it in Africa, you know? Teach monkeys to climb trees to get fruit."

"A interesting idea, but an incorrect assumption I'm afraid. Look here, these are most definitely human footprints. An ape, or a monkey, would have a more protruding big toe and would tend to walk on the outside of their foot, in a sort of rolling gait."

"Like Mrs. Pye does when she comes back from a bridge evening at Mrs. Davis', you mean?"

"Exactly!"

"So our murderer was sober then," Fleming mused. Rhodes ignored him.

"And here is further proof of my theory. Boot prints leading towards the locked window."

"Marvellous how it all fits together when you have all the pieces, isn't it?"

"Quite. Over here," said Rhodes, shifting to face the broken window, "we have a lot of glass fragments in the soil, as I deduced we would have, and also boot prints, matching those of the ones in the blood inside and the mud over there. I believe this vindicates my theory."

"Well, I'm no expert of course," said Fleming, "but it does look pretty conclusive. The sober killer entered here (indicating the intact window) and left there (indicating the broken window). The safe cracker did the same. Question is of course, was he sober as well?"

Whenever Fleming got stuck on a specific line of thought such as this, Rhodes knew it was best to change the subject quickly. Several cases ago, Fleming had become convinced that a giant earthworm was living under London whilst they were investigating a theft from the Bank of England (The Case of the London Worm, as Fleming constantly referred to it). That turned out to be a mechanical tunnelling mole machine built by an insane scientist from the Lake District. It had taken Fleming a week to use the underground railway again. He had been too afraid that a giant worm would swallow the train whole.

"The bare footprints go off towards the moor. What are the chances of tracking them?" asked Rhodes.

"Well, if it doesn't rain, then pretty good I think. Given the size of our murderer I don't think it'll be too hard a job, assuming we have good light, of course."

"Don't worry about the light. I also need your professional opinion as a doctor now Bratton. We're going to pay a visit to the local village doctor. If we can get a look at Lord Cotterill's body, do you think you could determine the exact cause of death?"

"If I can't then no local quack can. I'll tell you that for nothing."

"Excellent. I'll get Jacobs to drive us down. It'll save time."