

SHERLOCK HOLMES
AND THE CASE OF
THE MISSING
AMERICAN CULTURE

A Novel

Kenneth Frawley

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CHAPTER I

The Visitor

The day had started out like every other of the last eighty years, or thereabouts. I had risen at my usual hour of 8am, dressed and had gone down to the dining room to devour the breakfast that was always waiting for me by half past. And, as usual, it, and the morning paper, were meticulously laid out on the Victorian mahogany dining table I have had since the days of my first marriage. Mrs. Gale, my housekeeper for the last thirty years was not only the most efficient domestic I had ever employed, she was the most cordial and considerate. It seemed an impossible task to replace her. Yet that was exactly what had been occupying my mind for the preceding fortnight. She had elected to retire from professional life and settle in the Welsh seaside resort village of Tenby. Both she and her husband Bryn had long thought of returning to Wales, the land of their births, before they were too old to savor it and their retirement. One could not argue against that. After all, I had been enjoying my retirement immensely for the last eighty-five years. Nevertheless, it was with great sorrow and reluctance that I had accepted Mrs. Gale's resignation.

As I consumed the usual breakfast of grapefruit, nine-grain toast, tofu scramble, a pot of Russian Caravan tea and my pile of vitamin, mineral and herbal supplements, I searched through the classified ads in the Times. I knew the effort was an exercise in futility, but the act seemed to help me cope with the impending loss of my very good friend and housekeeper. Simultaneously, I found myself recalling an adventure from my very early days at

Holmes' side that I had yet to chronicle. Since Holmes and I had been out of the game for some ninety years now, he no longer minded if I penned detailed accounts of the cases he had believed were too delicate to speak of in any form, at the time. After all, the principal parties involved in them were long gone now.

BOOM, BOOM, BOOM, BOOM! Suddenly, my thoughts, and my morning read, were uncharacteristically interrupted by a strong, anxious pounding at the front door.

"Who could that be at this early hour? exclaimed Mrs. Gale as she sprang into the room. "How unbelievably inconsiderate. You haven't finished your breakfast, or done your yoga and stretching exercises yet," she added.

"I'm afraid it's my fault, Mrs. Gale," I answered. "Though I did not expect anyone at this early hour, I did agree to let the employment agency send someone round today."

"I'll send them off and tell them to return at a more civilized hour," she offered.

"No, no. You'd better show them in. Let's offer them a cup of tea while I finish this most outstanding breakfast of yours."

"Very well, Dr. Watson. Very well."

And with that she nodded her fine featured, gray head, took a deep sigh to help hold back the tongue-lashing she felt certain our early arriving visitor deserved and darted for the door.

While Mrs. Gale fetched our visitor, I put down my paper and concentrated on the food before me. However, I could only manage a single bite before Mrs. Gale returned with our unexpected guest.

"Excuse me, Dr. Watson. A Mr. Moore to see you, sir," she announced.

I looked up to see a tall, very well tailored, man of about forty-five-years of age standing before me. He was slender and appeared very fit. His dark, finely manicured hair revealed scarcely a gray hair and his clean-shaven face exposed a strong square jaw. Yet immediately I could see an anxiousness about him that clearly contrasted the image of the strong, confident man his physicality presented.

"Good morning, Mr. Moore. What can I do for you, sir? I

cooperatively asked. "I assume you have some people for me to consider?"

"Excuse me?" he responded with confusion and a refined, yet unmistakable, southern American accent. "I don't quite know what you mean, sir."

"Ah", I shot back. "Clearly you are not from the employment agency. Are you?"

"No, sir. I'm not. I'm from the U.S., sir."

"Yes. Well then, what brings you all this way, Mr. Moore?"

"I'm awfully sorry to interrupt your breakfast, Dr. Watson. Please, forgive me," he stated with a slight tremble and a genuine regret.

"Come, come, young man. It's quite all right. My ritualistic mornings can do with some variation now and then. What is it that inspires you to visit me this morning?"

"Well sir, to put it simply, I desperately need your help." he answered.

"What sort of assistance can I be to you, Mr. Moore?" I asked with a slight pitch in my voice that gave away my intense curiosity. "I have not practiced medicine in almost a century."

"No, sir. I have not come to seek your medical counsel. Although I am sure you are still quite—"

"You are very kind," I eagerly jumped in. "But I still would very much like to know the nature of your business."

"Yes, sir. Well—," he continued, trying to quickly swallow the nervous lump in his throat.

"Please, Mr. Moore, do have a seat. Mrs. Gale, would you mind pouring our guest of cup of this marvelous tea of yours?"

"Certainly, Doctor." she dutifully replied.

"Thank you, Dr. Watson," said Moore humbly.

"Now sir, again, how can I be of service to you?" I asked.

"Well, Dr. Watson, I am an American."

"Yes, I have observed that."

"And, well, sir, I have been sent here on a matter of the utmost importance and urgency."

"Really?" I said with a slightly feigned impression.

“Yes, sir. It’s very, very serious, I’m afraid.”

“That may be, but what use can I, an elderly retired physician, be to you in your time of need?”

“Sir, I am an employee of the United States government.”

“Really?”

His face quickly lit up and he sat erect in his chair.

“Yes, really.”

“What, may I ask, could the United States government want of me?” I asked.

“Sir, I am an attorney, specially appointed by the president himself to act in his behalf on the matter.”

“I see. Well then, what is this urgent matter?”

“I cannot tell you, sir,” he said coldly.

“Well then,” I quickly countered, “how can I possibly assist you if I do not know what you require assistance with? I’m afraid you must enlighten me a bit more, young man.”

Moore quickly retrieved a wallet and passport from the inside breast pocket of his jacket and tossed them onto the table before me.

“Excuse me, sir,” he said with much humility in his tone. “I regret that I cannot.”

He followed this with another item from his jacket pocket. It was a small identification card, complete with photograph, issued by the United States government.

“These, sir, should confirm I am who I say I am, sir.”

“Very well, Mr. Moore. Let’s assume you are who you say you are. I have no reason to doubt you. I only ask that you simply tell me what it is you wish of me.”

“Yes, sir.” he happily replied.

“Excuse me, but did you not, just a minute ago, say you were unable to explain to me the nature of the prob—”

“That is true, sir,” he said quickly. “I cannot discuss the nature of the problem with you, Dr. Watson. However, I can share with you what it is we desire of you, sir.”

“You perplex me, Mr. Moore. But, indeed, I am all ears.”

“Thank you, sir.”

His manner became slightly schoolboy-ishly giddy.

“Please, sir, let me start out by saying what a genuine pleasure it is to meet you. In fact, while on the plane over, I reread several of your accounts of the adventures you had experienced with Mr. Sherlock Holmes. Outstanding! Simply outstanding!”

I was growing fairly tired of this drawn out plea for help that I am certain I was less than polite when I lowered my brow and firmly stated, “I appreciate that, Mr. Moore. But I do have other business to tend to and—”

“Oh, yes, certainly. Do forgive me,” he groveled.

“Now please, may we get on with the nature of your business with me?”

“Yes, Dr. Watson, of course.”

He took another swallow.

“We, my government that is, has tried numerous times to consult with your good friend, the great master himself, Mr. Sherlock Holmes. But I am afraid we could not manage to get the time of day from him, sir.”

“I should say not. Mr. Holmes has retired and is no longer interested in pursuing criminals or coming to the aid of governments, as he had done many a time during his great career. Surely you are aware of this by now?”

“Of course, sir, we are very much aware of that fact. But this is a matter of life and death.”

His voice broke with such emotion I expected the man to begin sobbing.

“We, sir,” he continued, “we, the United States of America, are a country very nearly on the brink of ruin. We sir, the world’s sole remaining superpower, have reached the end of our rope. We, sir, have exhausted every measure available to us, and then some, and yet we can proclaim no success. Thus, the only recourse left to us, we very much hope, is to throw our fate into the hands of your good and wondrous friend, Mr. Sherlock Holmes.”

I sat breathless, struck by the audacity of this man, and the government behind him. He looked squarely into my face as he sat waiting for my response to such an appeal. But I thought long and

hard. He began to speak again, but I waved him off before he could utter a single syllable. I took a sip of my Russian Caravan, which, thanks to this very long-winded visitor, was now cold. That was the topper! My mind was made up. Holmes was my dearest friend. It is to him that I owe so much of what I am. It is he I place before all others, superpowers included.

“So if I hear you correctly,” I began, “what you ask is for me to arrange an audience with Mr. Holmes?”

“Yes, sir,” the nervy intruder answered with great enthusiasm. “Yes, that is exactly what we wish, Doctor.”

Thinking for another second, I reached for my teacup. Feeling the coolness of it in my hand, I thought to myself, “He shall swing for this!”

And just as I was about to speak, Mrs. Gale, who had astutely observed the tea fiasco, quickly came to my aid with a fresh pot and another cup, the perfect antidote. Nothing like a hot cup of Russian Caravan coming to the rescue, his of course.

With myself now somewhat collected, I turned to the government servant beside me and calmly began to state my position on the matter.

“I am afraid that even I will not be able to persuade Mr. Holmes to meet with you. For as I have stated, Mr. Holmes has retired. Today he is a simple beekeeper, keeping quietly to his own. And he is vehemently opposed to any unwanted intrusion.”

“But, sir, the matter is most grave!”

“I am truly sorry. However, my friendship with Mr. Holmes is far too valuable to risk on a matter I am certain he will have not the slightest interest in. Furthermore, I simply cannot allow you to invade his privacy in this manner.”

Mr. Moore’s face began to sag like a child’s face that fails to persuade its parent to purchase for it that impulse candy at the supermarket checkout. It was rather pathetic for a man of his position and physicality.

“Dr. Watson,” he said with an extreme seriousness, such as a man walking the plank might, “I implore you—No, I beg you sir, to reconsider. This is our only option.”

He took another swallow.

“Mr. Holmes is our only hope.”

“Surely you greatly dramatize the need for his assistance,” I replied.

“Not by any measure, sir. Not by any measure. Why, if we cannot enlist Mr. Holmes’ assistance, then, I’m afraid, we are done for and we must place the very existence of our great country entirely in the hands of God and pray for a miracle.”

He spoke those words with such passion, such despair, I thought to myself, only the great *Olivier* himself could have given a more convincing, more moving delivery. And this man was no thespian. Clearly he must speak the truth. But was the United States really on the brink of disaster? Could such a thing really be? I read the newspapers. I found nothing alluding to any threat to the U.S. But, still his plea began to affect me. So much so, I was almost convinced.

“Mr. Moore,” I started, “tell me something.”

“Anything,” he replied.

“How is it that you have concluded that Mr. Holmes, and only Mr. Holmes, can rescue your very powerful nation? It has every possible weapon, every conceivable arsenal at its disposal, manpower, technology, even forensics. What can a man of his age, a man long out of the game, do what such a powerful entity cannot?”

“That Dr. Watson, is a mystery to me,” he replied. “I only know that he is the only human on the planet that is capable of seeing into, and right through, the very heart of evil. All one need do is read your accounts of his accomplishments to be certain of that. Surely, there is no other, only he.”

“How can I assist you?” the words rocketing out of my mouth before I knew it. “Shall I ring him?”

“Heavens no, Doctor. He is certain to refuse us.”

“Then what do you prefer I do?”

“I have a car outside. We could drop in on him together perhaps?”

I stepped away from the table, ignored the disapproving look

on Mrs. Gale's face and started for the Georgian hat rack in the foyer to grab my hat and coat.

"He will be extremely angry with me when he discovers my treason."

"He will understand, I'm sure," offered Mr. Moore.

"I suggest we take my Range Rover. He'll recognize it immediately. Thus, effecting your audience with Holmes more easily," I said with great trepidation as I steered my very excited and relieved American visitor to the door.

"After you, Doctor."