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The strange death of a Sherlock Holmes fanatic.

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BODY:

Richard Lancelyn Green, the world's foremost expert on Sherlock Holmes, believed that he had finally solved the case of the missing papers. Over the past two decades, he had been looking for a trove of letters, diary entries, and manuscripts written by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, the creator of Holmes. The archive was estimated to be worth nearly four million dollars, and was said by some to carry a deadly curse, like the one in the most famous Holmes story, "The Hound of the Baskervilles."

The papers had disappeared after Conan Doyle died, in 1930, and without them no one had been able to write a definitive biography–a task that Green was determined to complete. Many scholars feared that the archive had been discarded or destroyed; as the London *Times* noted earlier this year, its whereabouts had become "a mystery as tantalizing as any to unfold at 221B Baker Street," the fictional den of Holmes and his fellow–sleuth, Dr. Watson.

Not long after Green launched his investigation, he discovered that one of Conan Doyle's five children, Adrian, had, with the other heirs' agreement, stashed the papers in a locked room of a chateau that he owned in Switzerland. Green then learned that Adrian had spirited some of the papers out of the chateau without his siblings' knowledge, hoping to sell them to collectors. In the midst of this scheme, he died of a heart attack–giving rise to the legend of the curse. After Adrian's death, the papers apparently vanished. And whenever Green tried to probe further he found himself caught in an impenetrable web of heirs–including a self–styled Russian princess–who seemed to have deceived and double–crossed each other in their efforts to control the archive.

For years, Green continued to sort through evidence and interview relatives, until one day the muddled trail led to London–and the doorstep of Jean Conan Doyle, the youngest of the author's children. Tall and elegant, with silver hair, she was an imposing woman in her late sixties. ("Something very strong and forceful seems to be at the back of that wee body," her father had written of Jean when she was five. "Her will is tremendous.") Whereas her brother Adrian had been kicked out of the British Navy for insubordination, and her elder brother Denis was a playboy who had sat out the Second World War in America, she had become an officer in the Royal Air Force, and was honored, in 1963, as a Dame Commander of the Order of the British Empire.

She invited Green into her flat, where a portrait of her father, with his walrus mustache, hung near the fireplace. Green had almost as great an interest in her father as she did, and she began sharing her memories, as well as family photographs. She asked him to return, and one day, Green later told friends, she showed him some boxes that had been stored in a London solicitor's office. Peering inside them, he said, he had glimpsed part of the archive. Dame Jean informed him that, because of an ongoing family dispute, she couldn't yet allow him to read the papers, but she said that she intended to bequeath nearly all of them to the British Library, so that scholars could finally examine them. After she died, in 1997, Green eagerly awaited their transfer–but nothing happened.

Then, last March, Green opened the London Sunday *Times* and was shocked to read that the lost archive had "turned up" at Christie's auction house and was to be sold, in May, for millions of dollars by three of Conan Doyle's distant relatives; instead of going to the British Library, the contents would be scattered among private collectors around the world, who might keep them inaccessible to scholars. Green was sure that a mistake had been made, and hurried to

Christie's to inspect the materials. Upon his return, he told friends that he was certain that many of the papers were the same as those he had uncovered. What's more, he alleged, they had been stolen–and he had proof.

Over the next few days, he approached members of the Sherlock Holmes Society of London, one of hundreds of fan clubs devoted to the detective. (Green had once been chairman.) He alerted other so–called Sherlockians, including various American members of the Baker Street Irregulars, an invitation–only group that was founded in 1934 and named after the street urchins Holmes regularly employed to ferret out information. Green also contacted the more orthodox scholars of Conan Doyle, or Doyleans, about the sale. (Unlike Green, who moved between the two camps, many Doyleans distanced themselves from the Sherlockians, who often treated Holmes as if he were a real detective and refused to mention Conan Doyle by name.)

Green shared with these scholars what he knew about the archive's provenance, revealing what he considered the most damning piece of evidence: a copy of Dame Jean's will, which stated, "I give to The British Library all . . . my late father's original papers, personal manuscripts, diaries, engagement books, and writings." Determined to block the auction, the makeshift group of amateur sleuths presented its case to Members of Parliament. Toward the end of the month, as the group's campaign intensified and its objections appeared in the press, Green hinted to his sister, Priscilla West, that someone was threatening him. Later, he sent her a cryptic note containing three phone numbers and the message "please keep these numbers safe." He also called a reporter from the London *Times*, warning that "something" might happen to him.

On the night of Friday, March 26th, he had dinner with a longtime friend, Lawrence Keen, who later said that Green had confided in him that "an American was trying to bring him down." After the two men left the restaurant, Green told Keen that they were being followed, and pointed to a car behind them.

The same evening, Priscilla West phoned her brother, and got his answering machine. She called repeatedly the next morning, but he still didn't pick up. Alarmed, she went to his house and knocked on the door; there was no response. After several more attempts, she called the police, who came and broke open the entrance. Downstairs, the police found the body of Green lying on his bed, surrounded by Sherlock Holmes books and posters, with a cord wrapped around his neck. He had been garroted.

"I will lay out the whole case for you," John Gibson, one of Green's closest friends, told me when I phoned him shortly after learning of Green's death. Gibson had written several books with Green, including "My Evening with Sherlock Holmes," a 1981 collection of parodies and pastiches of the detective stories. With a slight stammer, Gibson said of his friend's death, "It's a complete and utter mystery."

Not long after, I travelled to Great Bookham, a village thirty miles south of London, where Gibson lives. He was waiting for me when I stepped off the train. He was tall and rail–thin, and everything about him–narrow shoulders, long face, unruly gray hair–seemed to slouch forward, as if he were supported by an invisible cane. "I have a file for you," he said, as we drove off in his car. "As you'll see, there are plenty of clues and not a lot of answers."

He sped through town, past a twelfth–century stone church and a row of cottages, until he stopped at a red brick house surrounded by hedges. "You don't mind dogs, I hope," he said. "I've two cocker spaniels. I only wanted one but the person I got them from said that they were inseparable, and so I took them both and they've been fighting ever since."

When he opened the front door, both spaniels leaped on us, then at each other. They trailed us into the living room, which was filled with piles of antique books, some reaching to the ceiling. Among the stacks was a near–complete set of *The Strand Magazine,* in which the Holmes stories were serialized at the turn of the twentieth century; a single issue, which used to sell for half a shilling, is now worth as much as five hundred dollars. "Altogether, there must be about sixty thousand books," Gibson said.

We sat on a couch and he opened his case file, carefully spreading the pages around him. "All right, dogs. Don't disturb us," he said. He looked up at me. "Now I'll tell you the whole story."

Gibson said that he had attended the coroner's inquest and taken careful notes, and as he spoke he picked up a magnifying glass beside him and peered though it at several crumpled pieces of paper. "I write everything on scraps," he said. The police, he said, had found only a few unusual things at the scene. There was the cord around Green's neck–a black shoelace. There was a wooden spoon near his hand, and several stuffed animals on the bed. And there was a partially empty bottle of gin.

The police found no sign of forced entry and assumed that Green had committed suicide. Yet there was no note, and Sir Colin Berry, the president of the British Academy of Forensic Sciences, testified to the coroner that, in his thirty-year career, he had seen only one suicide by garroting. "One," Gibson repeated. Self-garroting is extremely difficult to do, he explained; people who attempt it typically pass out before they are asphyxiated. Moreover, in this instance, the cord was not a thick rope but a shoelace, making the feat even more unlikely.

Gibson reached in his file and handed me a sheet of paper with numbers on it. "Take a look," he said. "My phone records." The records showed that he and Green had spoken repeatedly during the week before his death; if the police had bothered to obtain Green's records, Gibson went on, they would no doubt show that Green had called him only hours before he died. "I was probably the last person to speak to him," he said. The police, however, had never questioned him.

During one of their last conversations about the auction, Gibson recalled, Green had said he was afraid of something.

"You've got nothing to worry about," Gibson told him.

"No, I'm *worried*," Green said.

"What? You fear for your life?"

"I do."

Gibson said that, at the time, he didn't take the threat seriously but advised Green not to answer his door unless he was sure who it was.

Gibson glanced at his notes. There was something else, he said, something critical. On the eve of his death, he reminded me, Green had spoken to his friend Keen about an "American" who was trying to ruin him. The following day, Gibson said, he had called Green's house and heard a strange greeting on the answering machine. "Instead of getting Richard's voice in this sort of Oxford accent, which had been on the machine for a decade," Gibson recalled, "I got an American voice that said, 'Sorry, not available.' I said, 'What the hell is going on?' I thought I must've dialled the wrong number. So I dialled really slowly again. I got the American voice. I said, 'Christ almighty.' "

Gibson said that Green's sister had heard the same recorded greeting, which is one reason that she had rushed to his house. Reaching into his file, Gibson handed me several more documents. "Make sure you keep them in chronological order," he said. There was a copy of Jean Conan Doyle's will, several newspaper clippings on the auction, an obituary, and a Christie's catalogue.

That was pretty much all he had. The police, Gibson said, had not conducted any forensic tests or looked for fingerprints. And the coroner-who had once attended a meeting of the Sherlock Holmes Society to conduct a mock inquest of the murder from a Conan Doyle story in which a corpse is discovered in a locked room-found himself stymied. Gibson said that the coroner had noted that there was not enough evidence to ascertain what had happened, and, as a result, the official verdict regarding whether Green had killed himself or been murdered was left open.

Within hours of Green's death, Sherlockians seized upon the mystery, as if it were another case in the canon. In a Web chat room, one person, who called himself "inspector," wrote, "As for self-garroting, it is like trying to choke oneself to death by your own hands." Others invoked the "curse," as if only the supernatural could explain it. Gibson handed me an article from a British tabloid that was headlined " 'curse of conan doyle' strikes holmes expert."

"So what do you think?" Gibson asked.

"I'm not sure," I said.

Later, we went through the evidence again. I asked Gibson if he knew whose phone numbers were on the note that Green had sent to his sister.

Gibson shook his head. "It hadn't come up at the inquest," he said.

"What about the American voice on the answering machine?" I asked. "Do we know who that is?"

"Unfortunately, not a clue. To me that's the strangest and most telling piece of evidence. Did Richard put that on his machine? What was he trying to tell us? Did the murderer put it on there? And, if so, why would he do that?"

I asked if Green had ever displayed any irrational behavior. "No, never," he said. "He was the most levelheaded man I ever met."

He noted that Priscilla West had testified at the inquest that her brother had no history of depression. Indeed, Green's physician wrote to the court to say that he had not treated Green for any illnesses for a decade.

"One last question," I said. "Was anything taken out of the apartment?"

"Not that we know of. Richard had a valuable collection of Sherlock Holmes and Conan Doyle books, and nothing appears to be missing."

As Gibson drove me back to the train station, he said, "Please, you must stay on the case. The police seem to have let poor Richard down." Then he advised, "As Sherlock Holmes says, 'When you have eliminated the impossible, whatever remains, however improbable, must be the truth.' "

Some facts about Richard Green are easy to discern–those which illuminate the circumstances of his life, rather than the circumstances of his death. He was born on July 10, 1953; he was the youngest of three children; his father was Roger Lancelyn Green, a best–selling children's author who popularized the Homeric myths and the legend of King Arthur, and who was a close friend of C. S. Lewis and J. R. R. Tolkien; and Richard was raised near Liverpool, on land that had been given to his ancestors in 1093, and where his family had resided ever since.

Nathaniel Hawthorne, who was the American consul in Liverpool in the eighteen–fifties, visited the house one summer, and he later described it in his "English Notebooks":

We passed through a considerable extent of private road, and finally drove through a lawn, shaded with trees, and closely shaven, and reached the door of Poulton Hall. Part of the mansion is three or four hundred years old. . . . There is a curious, old, stately staircase, with a twisted balustrade, much like that of the old Province House in Boston. The drawing–room looks like a very handsome modern room, being beautifully painted, gilded, and paper–hung, with a white–marble fire–place, and rich furniture; so that the impression is that of newness, not of age.

By the time Richard was born, however, the Green family was, as one relative told me, "very English–a big house and no money." The curtains were thin, the carpets were threadbare, and a cold draft often swirled through the corridors.

Green, who had a pale, pudgy face, was blind in one eye from a childhood accident, and wore spectacles with tinted lenses. (One friend told me that, even as an adult, Green resembled "the god of Pan," with "cherubic–like features, a mouth which curved in a smile which was sympathetic, ironic, and always seeming to suggest that there was just one little thing that he was not telling you.") Intensely shy, with a ferociously logical mind and a precise memory, he would spend hours roaming through his father's enormous library, reading dusty first editions of children's books. And by the time he was eleven he had fallen under the spell of Sherlock Holmes.

Holmes was not the first great literary detective–that honor belongs to Edgar Allan Poe's Inspector Auguste Dupin–but Conan Doyle's hero was the most vivid exemplar of the fledgling genre, which Poe dubbed "tales of ratiocination." Holmes is a cold, calculating machine, a man who is, as one critic put it, "a tracker, a hunter–down, a combination of bloodhound, pointer, and bull–dog." The gaunt Holmes has no wife or children; as he explains, "I am a brain, Watson. The rest of me is a mere appendix." Rigidly scientific, he offers no spiritual bromides to his bereaved clients. Conan Doyle reveals virtually nothing about his character's interior life; he is defined solely by his method. In short, he is the perfect detective, the superhero of the Victorian era, out of which he blasted with his deerstalker hat and Inverness cape.

Richard read the stories straight through, then read them again. His rigorous mind had found its match in Holmes and his "science of deduction," which could wrest an astonishing solution from a single, seemingly unremarkable clue. "All life is a great chain, the nature of which is known whenever we are shown a single link of it," Holmes explains in the first story, "A Study in Scarlet," which establishes a narrative formula that subsequent tales nearly always follow. A new client arrives at Holmes's Baker Street consulting room. The detective stuns the visitor by deducing some element of his life by the mere observation of his demeanor or dress. (In "A Case of Identity," he divines that his client is a shortsighted typist by no more than the worn "plush upon her sleeves" and "the dint of a pince–nez at either side of her nose.") After the client presents the inexplicable facts of the case, "the game is afoot," as Holmes likes to say. Amassing clues that invariably boggle Watson, the stories' more earthbound narrator, Holmes ultimately arrives at a dazzling conclusion–one that, to him and him only, seems "elementary." In "The Red–Headed League," Holmes reveals to Watson how he surmised that an assistant pawnbroker was trying to rob a bank by tunnelling underneath it. "I thought of the assistant's fondness for photography, and his trick of vanishing into the cellar," Holmes says, explaining that he then went to see the assistant. "I hardly looked at his face. His knees were what I wished to see. You must yourself have remarked how worn, wrinkled and stained they were. They spoke of those hours of burrowing. The only remaining point was what they were burrowing

for. I walked round the corner, saw the City and Suburban Bank abutted on our friend's premises, and felt that I had solved my problem."

Following the advice that Holmes often gave to Watson, Green practiced how to "see" what others merely "observed." He memorized Holmes's rules, as if they were catechism: "It is a capital mistake to theorize before one has data"; "never trust to general impressions, my boy, but concentrate yourself upon details"; "there is nothing more deceptive than an obvious fact."

Not long after Green turned thirteen, he carried an assortment of artifacts from local junk sales into the dimly lit attic of Poulton Hall. Part of the attic was known as the Martyr's Chamber and was believed to be haunted, having once "been tenanted by a lady, who was imprisoned there and persecuted to death for her religion," according to Hawthorne. Nevertheless, up in the attic, Green assembled his objects to create a strange tableau. There was a rack of pipes and a Persian slipper stuffed with tobacco. There was a stack of unpaid bills, which he stabbed into a mantle with a knife, so that they were pinned in place. There was a box of pills labelled "Poison"; empty ammunition cartridges and trompe-l'oeil bullet marks painted on the walls ("I didn't think the attic would stand up to real bullets," he later remarked); a preserved snake; a brass microscope; and an invitation to the Gasfitters' Ball. Finally, outside the door of the room, Green hung a sign: "Baker Street."

Relying on the stray details sprinkled throughout Conan Doyle's stories, Green had pieced together a replica of Holmes and Watson's apartment-one so precise that it occasionally drew Holmes aficionados from other parts of England. One local reporter described the uncanny sensation of climbing the seventeen stairs-the same number specified in the stories-as a tape recording played in the background with the sounds of Victorian London: the rumble of cab wheels, the clopping of horses' hooves on cobblestones. By then, Green had become the youngest person ever inducted into the Sherlock Holmes Society of London, where members sometimes dressed in period costumes-in high-waisted trousers and top hats.

Though Holmes had first appeared in print nearly a century earlier, he had spawned a literary cult unlike that of any other fictional character. Almost from his inception, readers latched onto him with a zeal that bordered on "the mystical," as one Conan Doyle biographer has noted. When Holmes made his debut, in the 1887 *Beeton's Christmas Annual*, a magazine of somewhat lurid fiction, he was considered not just a character but a paragon of the Victorian faith in all things scientific. He entered public consciousness around the same time as the development of the modern police force, at a moment when medicine was finally threatening to eradicate common diseases and industrialization offered to curtail mass poverty. He was the proof that, indeed, the forces of reason could triumph over the forces of madness.

By the time Green was born, however, the worship of scientific thinking had been shattered by other faiths, by Nazism and Communism and Fascism, which had often harnessed the power of technology to demonic ends. Yet, paradoxically, the more illogical the world seemed, the more intense the cult surrounding Holmes became. This symbol of a new creed had become a figure of nostalgia-a person in "a fairy tale," as Green once put it. The character's popularity even surpassed the level of fame he had attained in Conan Doyle's day, as the stories were reenacted in some two hundred and sixty movies, twenty-five television shows, a musical, a ballet, a burlesque, and six hundred radio plays. Holmes inspired the creation of journals, memorabilia shops, walking tours, postage stamps, hotels, themed ocean cruises.

Edgar W. Smith, a former vice-president of General Motors and the first editor of the *Baker Street Journal*, which publishes scholarship on Conan Doyle's stories, wrote in a 1946 essay, "What Is It That We Love in Sherlock Holmes?":

We see him as the fine expression of our urge to trample evil and to set aright the wrongs with which the world is plagued. He is Galahad and Socrates, bringing high adventure to our dull existences and calm, judicial logic to our biased minds. He is the success of all our failures; the bold escape from our imprisonment.

What has made this literary escape unlike any other, though, is that so many people conceive of Holmes as a real person. T. S. Eliot once observed, "Perhaps the greatest of the Sherlock Holmes mysteries is this: that when we talk of him we invariably fall into the fancy of his existence." Green himself wrote, "Sherlock Holmes is a real character . . . who lives beyond life's span and who is constantly rejuvenated."

At the Sherlock Holmes Society of London, Green was introduced to "the great game," which Sherlockians had played for decades. It was built around the conceit that the stories' true author was not Conan Doyle but Watson, who had faithfully recounted Holmes's exploits. Once, at a gathering of the elite Baker Street Irregulars (which Green also joined), a guest referred to Conan Doyle as the creator of Holmes, prompting one outraged member to exclaim, "Holmes

is a man! Holmes is a great man!" If Green had to invoke Conan Doyle's name, he was told, he should refer to him as merely Watson's "literary agent." The challenge of the game was that Conan Doyle had often written the four Holmes novels and fifty-six short stories-"the Sacred Writings," as Sherlockians called them-in haste, and they were plagued with inconsistencies that made them difficult to pass off as nonfiction. How, for instance, is it possible that in one story Watson is described as having been wounded in Afghanistan in the shoulder by a Jezail bullet, though in another story he complains that the wound was in his leg? The goal was thus to resolve these paradoxes, using the same airtight logic that Holmes exhibits. Similar textual inquiries had already given birth to a related field, known as Sherlockiana-mock scholarship in which fans tried to deduce everything from how many wives Watson has (one to five) to which university Holmes attended (surely Cambridge or Oxford). As Green once conceded, quoting the founder of the Baker Street Irregulars, "Never had so much been written by so many for so few."

After Green graduated from Oxford, in 1975, he turned his attention to more serious scholarship. Of all the puzzles surrounding the Sacred Writings, the greatest one, Green realized, centered on the man whom the stories had long since eclipsed-Conan Doyle himself. Green set out to compile the first comprehensive bibliography, hunting down every piece of material that Conan Doyle wrote: pamphlets, plays, poems, obituaries, songs, unpublished manuscripts, letters to the editor. Carrying a plastic bag in place of a briefcase, Green unearthed documents that had long been hidden behind the veil of history.

In the midst of this research, Green discovered that John Gibson was working on a similar project, and they agreed to collaborate. The resulting tome, published in 1983 by Oxford University Press, with a foreword by Graham Greene, is seven hundred and twelve pages long and contains notations on nearly every scrap of writing that Conan Doyle ever produced, down to the kind of paper in which a manuscript was bound ("cloth," "light blue diaper-grain"). When the bibliography was done, Gibson continued in his job as a government property assessor. Green, however, had inherited a sizable sum of money from his family, who had sold part of their estate, and he used the bibliography as a launching pad for a biography of Conan Doyle.

Writing a biography is akin to the process of detection, and Green started to retrace every step of Conan Doyle's life, as if it were an elaborate crime scene. During the nineteen-eighties, Green followed Conan Doyle's movements from the moment he was born, on May 22, 1859, in a squalid part of Edinburgh. Green visited the neighborhood where Conan Doyle was raised, by a devout Christian mother and a dreamy father. (He drew one of the first illustrations of Sherlock Holmes-a sketch of the detective discovering a corpse, which accompanied a paperback edition of "A Study in Scarlet.") Green also amassed an intricate paper record that showed his subject's intellectual evolution. He discovered, for instance, that after Conan Doyle studied medicine, at the University of Edinburgh, and fell under the influence of rationalist thinkers like Oliver Wendell Holmes-who undoubtedly inspired the surname of Conan Doyle's detective-he renounced Catholicism, vowing, "Never will I accept anything which cannot be proved to me."

In the early eighties, Green published the first of a series of introductions to Penguin Classics editions of Conan Doyle's previously uncollected works-many of which he had helped to uncover. The essays, written in a clinical style, began garnering him attention outside the insular subculture of Sherlockians. One essay, running more than a hundred pages, was a small biography of Conan Doyle unto itself; in another, Green cast further light on the short story "The Case of the Man Who Was Wanted," which had been found in a chest more than a decade after Conan Doyle's death and was claimed by his widow and sons to be the last unpublished Holmes story. Some experts had wondered if the story was a fake and even if Conan Doyle's two sons, in search of money to sustain their lavish life styles, had forged it. Yet Green conclusively showed that the story was neither by Conan Doyle nor a forgery; instead, it was written by an architect named Arthur Whitaker, who had sent it to Conan Doyle in hopes of collaborating. Scholars described Green's essays variously as "dazzling," "unparalleled," and-the ultimate compliment-"Holmesian."

Still, Green was determined to dig deeper for his now highly anticipated biography. As the mystery writer Iain Pears has observed, Conan Doyle's hero acts in nearly the same fashion as a Freudian analyst, piecing together his clients' hidden narratives, which he alone can perceive. In a 1987 review of Conan Doyle's autobiography, "Memories and Adventures," which was published in 1924, Green noted, "It is as if Conan Doyle-whose character suggested kindliness and trust-had a fear of intimacy. When he describes his life, he omits the inner man."

To reveal this "inner man," Green examined facts that Conan Doyle rarely, if ever, spoke of himself-most notably, that his father, an epileptic and an incorrigible alcoholic, was eventually confined to an insane asylum. Yet the more Green tried to plumb his subject, the more he became aware of the holes in his knowledge of Conan Doyle. He didn't want just to sketch Conan Doyle's story with a series of anecdotes; he wanted to know everything about him. In the draft of an an

early mystery story, "The Surgeon of Gaster Fall," Conan Doyle writes of a son who has locked his raving father inside a cage–but this incident was excised from the published version. Had Conan Doyle been the one to commit his father to the asylum? Was Holmes's mania for logic a reaction to his father's genuine mania? And what did Conan Doyle mean when he wrote, in his deeply personal poem "The Inner Room," that he "has thoughts he dare not say"?

Green wanted to create an immaculate biography, one in which each fact led inexorably to the next. He wanted to be both Watson and Holmes to Conan Doyle, to be his narrator and his detective. Yet he knew the words of Holmes: "Data! Data! Data! I can't make bricks without clay." And the only way to succeed, he realized, was to track down the lost archive.

"Murder," Owen Dudley Edwards, a highly regarded Conan Doyle scholar, said. "I fear that is what the preponderance of the evidence points to."

I had called him in Scotland, after Gibson informed me that Edwards was pursuing an informal investigation into Green's death. Edwards had worked with Green to stop the auction, which took place, in spite of the uproar, almost two months after Green's body was found. Edwards said of his friend, "I think he knew too much about the archive."

A few days later, I flew to Edinburgh, where Edwards promised to share with me his findings. We had arranged to meet at a hotel on the edge of the old city. It was on a hill studded with medieval castles and covered in a thin mist, not far from where Conan Doyle had studied medicine under Dr. Joseph Bell, one of the models for Sherlock Holmes. (Once, during a class, Bell held up a glass vial. "This, gentlemen, contains a most potent drug," he said. "It is *extremely* bitter to the taste." To the class's astonishment, he touched the amber liquid, lifted a finger to his mouth, and licked it. He then declared, "Not one of you has developed his power of perception . . . while I placed my *index* finger in the awful brew, it was my *middle* finger–aye–which somehow found its way into my mouth.")

Edwards greeted me in the hotel lobby. He is a short, pear–shaped man with wild gray sideburns and an even wilder gray beard. A history professor at the University of Edinburgh, he wore a rumpled tweed coat over a V–neck sweater, and carried a knapsack on his shoulder.

We sat down at the restaurant, and I waited as he rummaged through the books in his bag. Edwards, who has written numerous books, including "The Quest for Sherlock Holmes," an acclaimed account of Conan Doyle's early life, began pulling out copies of Green's edited collections. Green, he said, was "the world's greatest Conan Doyle expert. I have the authority to say it. Richard ultimately became the greatest of us all. That is a firm and definite statement of someone who knows."

As he spoke, he tended to pull his chin in toward his chest, so that his beard fanned out. He told me that he had met Green in 1981, while researching his book on Conan Doyle. At the time, Green was still working on his bibliography with Gibson; even so, he had shared all his data with Edwards. "That was the kind of scholar he was," he said.

To Edwards, Green's death was even more baffling than the crimes in a Holmes story. He picked up one of the Conan Doyle collections and read aloud from "A Case of Identity," in the cool, ironical voice of Holmes:

Life is infinitely stranger than anything which the mind of man could invent. We would not dare to conceive the things which are really mere commonplaces of existence. If we could fly out of that window hand in hand, hover over this great city, gently remove the roofs, and peep in at the queer things which are going on, the strange coincidences, the plannings, the cross–purposes, the wonderful chains of events, working through generations, and leading to the most *outre* results, it would make all fiction with its conventionalities and foreseen conclusion most stale and unprofitable.

After Edwards closed the book, he explained that he had spoken frequently with Green about the Christie's sale. "Our lives have been dominated by the fact that Conan Doyle had five children, three of whom became his literary heirs," Edwards said. "The two boys were playboys. One of them, Denis, was, I gather, utterly selfish. The other one, Adrian, was a repulsive crook. And then there was an absolutely wonderful daughter."

Green, he said, had become so close to the daughter, Dame Jean, that he came to be known as the son she never had, even though in the past Conan Doyle's children had typically had fractious relationships with their father's biographers. In the early nineteen–forties, for example, Adrian and Denis had cooperated with Hesketh Pearson on "Conan Doyle: His Life and Art," but when the book came out and portrayed Conan Doyle as "the man in the street," a phrase Conan Doyle himself had used, Adrian rushed into print his own biography, "The True Conan Doyle," and Denis allegedly challenged Pearson to a duel. Dame Jean had subsequently taken it upon herself to guard her father's legacy against scholars who

might present him in too stark a light. Yet she confided in Green, who had tried to balance his veneration of his subject with a commitment to the truth.

Edwards said that Dame Jean not only gave Green a glimpse of the treasured archive; she also asked for his help in transferring various papers to her solicitor's office. "Richard told me that he had physically moved them," Edwards said. "So his knowledge was really quite dangerous."

He claimed that Green was "the biggest figure standing in the way" of the Christie's auction, since he had seen some of the papers and could testify that Dame Jean had intended to donate them to the British Library. Soon after the sale was announced, Edwards said, he and Green had learned that Charles Foley, Sir Arthur's great-nephew, and two of Foley's cousins were behind the sale. But neither he nor Green could understand how these distant heirs had legally obtained control of the archive. "All we were clear about was that there was a scam and that, clearly, someone was robbing stuff that should go to the British Library," Edwards said. He added, "This was *not* a hypothesis-it was quite certain in our own minds."

Edwards also had little doubt that somebody had murdered his friend. He noted the circumstantial details-Green's mention of threats to his life, his reference to the American who was "trying to bring him down." Some observers, he said, had speculated that Green's death might have been the result of autoerotic asphyxiation, but he told me that there were no signs that Green was engaged in sexual activity at the time. He added that garroting is typically a brutal method of execution-"a method of murder which a skilled professional would use." What's more, Green had no known history of depression. Edwards pointed out that Green, on the day before he died, had made plans with another friend for a holiday in Italy the following week. Moreover, he said, if Green had killed himself, there surely would have been a suicide note; it was inconceivable that a man who kept notes on everything would not have left one.

"There are other things," Edwards continued. "He was garroted with a bootlace, yet he always wore slip-on shoes." And Edwards found meaning in seemingly insignificant details, the kind that Holmes might note-particularly, the partially empty bottle of gin by his bed. To Edwards, this was a clear sign of the presence of a stranger, since Green, an oenophile, had drunk wine at supper that evening, and would never have followed wine with gin.

"Whoever did this is still at large," Edwards said. He put a hand on my shoulder. "Please be careful. I don't want to see you garroted, like poor Richard." Before we parted, he told me one more thing-he knew who the American was.

The American, who asked that I not use his name, lives in Washington, D.C. After I tracked him down, he agreed to meet me at Timberlake's pub near Dupont Circle. I found him sitting at the bar, sipping red wine. Though he was slumped over, he looked strikingly tall, with a hawkish nose and a thinning ring of gray hair. He appeared to be in his fifties and wore bluejeans and a button-down white shirt, with a fountain pen sticking out of the front pocket, like a professor.

After pausing a moment to deduce who I was, he stood and led me to a table in the back of the room, which was filled with smoke and sounds from a jukebox. We ordered dinner, and he proceeded to tell me what Edwards had loosely sketched out: that he was a longtime member of the Baker Street Irregulars and had, for many years, helped to represent Conan Doyle's literary estate in America. It is his main job, though, that has given him a slightly menacing air-at least in the minds of Green's friends. He works for the Pentagon in a high-ranking post that deals with clandestine operations. ("One of Donald Rumsfeld's pals," as Edwards described him.)

The American said that after he received a Ph.D. in international relations, in 1970, and became an expert in the Cold War and nuclear doctrine, he was drawn into the Sherlockian games and their pursuit of immaculate logic. "I've always kept the two worlds separate," he told me at one point. "I don't think a lot of people at the Pentagon would understand my fascination with a literary character." He met Green through the Sherlockian community, he said. As members of the Baker Street Irregulars, both had been given official titles from the Holmes stories. The American was "Rodger Prescott of evil memory," after the American counterfeiter in "The Adventure of the Three Garridebs." Green was known as "The Three Gables," after the villa in "The Adventure of the Three Gables," which is ransacked by burglars in search of a scandalous biographical manuscript.

In the mid-nineteen-eighties, the American said, he and Green had collaborated on several projects. As the editor of a collection of essays on Conan Doyle, he had asked Green, whom he considered then "the single most knowledgeable living person on Conan Doyle," to write the crucial chapter on the author's 1924 memoir. "My relationship with Richard was always productive," he recalled. Then, in the early nineteen-nineties, he said, they had had a falling out-a result, he added, of a startling rupture in Green's relationship with Dame Jean.

"Richard had gotten very close to Dame Jean, and was getting all sorts of family photographs, having represented himself as a great admirer of Conan Doyle," he said. "And then she saw something in print by him and suddenly realized that he had been representing his views very differently, and that was kind of the end of it."

The American insisted that he couldn't remember what Green had written that upset her. But Edwards, and others in Holmesian circles, said that the reason nobody could recall a specific offense was that Green's essays had never been particularly inflammatory. According to R. Dixon Smith, a friend of Green's and a longtime Conan Doyle book dealer, the American played on Dame Jean's sensitivities about her father's reputation and seized upon some of Green's candid words, which had never upset her before, then "twisted" them like "a screw." Edwards said of the American, "I think he did everything he possibly could to injure Richard. He drove a wedge between Richard and Dame Jean Conan Doyle." After Dame Jean cast Green out, Edwards and others noted, the American grew closer to her. Edwards told me that Green never got over the quarrel with Dame Jean. "He used to look at me like his heart was breaking," he said.

When I pressed the American further about the incident, he said simply, "Because I was Jean's representative, I got caught in the middle of it." Soon after, he said, "the good feeling and cooperation by Green toward me ended." At Sherlockian events, he said, they continued to see each other, but Green, always reserved, would often avoid him.

Smith had told me that in Green's final months he often seemed "preoccupied" with the American. "He kept wondering, What's he gonna do next?" During the last week of his life, Green told several friends that the American was working to defeat his crusade against the auction, and he expressed fear that his rival might try to damage his scholarly reputation. On March 24th, two days before he died, Green learned that the American was in London and was planning to attend a meeting that evening of the Sherlock Holmes Society. A friend said that Green called him and exclaimed, "I don't want to see him! I don't want to go." Green backed out of the meeting at the last minute. The friend said of the American, "I think he scared Richard."

As I mentioned some of the allegations of Green's friends, the American unfolded his napkin and touched the corners of his mouth. He explained that during his visit to London he had offered counsel to Charles Foley–whom he now served as a literary representative, as he had for Dame Jean–and discussed the sale of the archive at Christie's. But the American emphasized that he had not seen or spoken to Green for more than a year. On the night that Green died, he revealed with some embarrassment, he was walking through London with his wife on a group tour of Jack the Ripper's crime scenes. He said that he had learned only recently that Green had become fixated on him before his death, and he noted that some Sherlockians blurred the line between fandom and fanaticism. "It was because of the way people felt about the character," he said. Holmes was a sort of "vampire–like creature," he said; he consumed some people.

The waiter had served our meals, and the American paused to take a bite of steak and onion rings. He then explained that Conan Doyle had felt oppressed by his creation. Though the stories had made him the highest–paid author of his day, Conan Doyle wearied of constantly "inventing problems and building up chains of inductive reason," as he once said bitterly. In the stories, Holmes himself seems overwhelmed by his task, going days without sleep, and, after solving a case, often shooting up cocaine ("a seven–percent solution") in order to spell the subsequent drain and boredom. But, for Conan Doyle, there seemed to be no similar release, and he confided to one friend that "Holmes is becoming such a burden to me that it makes my life unendurable."

The very qualities that had made Holmes invincible–"his character admits of no light or shade," as Conan Doyle put it–eventually made him intolerable. Moreover, Conan Doyle feared that the detective stories eclipsed what he called his "more serious literary work." He had spent years researching several historical novels, which, he was convinced, would earn him a place in the pantheon of writers. In 1891, after he finished "The White Company," which was set in the Middle Ages and based on tales of "gallant, pious knights," he proclaimed, "Well, I'll never beat that." The book was popular in its day, but it was soon obscured by the shadow of Holmes, as were his other novels, with their comparatively stilted, lifeless prose. After Conan Doyle completed the domestic novel "A Duet with an Occasional Chorus," in 1899, Andrew Lang, a well–known editor who had helped publish one of his previous books, summed up the sentiment of most readers: "It may be a vulgar taste, but we decidedly prefer the adventures of Dr. Watson with Sherlock Holmes."

Conan Doyle was increasingly dismayed by the great paradox of his success: the more real Holmes became in the minds of readers, the less the author seemed to exist. Finally, Conan Doyle felt that he had no choice. As the American put it, "He had to kill Sherlock Holmes." Conan Doyle knew that the death had to be spectacular. "A man like that mustn't die of a pin–prick or influenza," he told a close friend. "His end must be violent and intensely dramatic." For months, he tried to imagine the perfect murder. Then, in December, 1893, six years after he gave birth to Holmes, Conan Doyle published

"The Final Problem." The story breaks from the established formula: there is no puzzle to be solved, no dazzling display of deductive genius. And this time Holmes is the one pursued. He is being chased by Professor Moriarty, "the Napoleon of crime," who is "the organizer of half that is evil and of nearly all that is undetected in this great city" of London. Moriarty is the first true counterpart to Holmes, a mathematician who is, as Holmes informs Watson, "a genius, a philosopher, an abstract thinker." Tall and ascetic-looking, he even physically resembles Holmes.

What is most striking about the story, though, is that the two great logicians have descended into illogic-they are paranoid, and consumed only with each other. At one point, Moriarty tells Holmes, "This is not danger. . . . It is inevitable destruction." Finally, the two converge on a cliff overlooking Reichenbach Falls, in Switzerland. As Watson later deduces from evidence at the scene, Holmes and Moriarty struggled by the edge of the precipice before plunging to their deaths. After finishing the story, Conan Doyle wrote in his diary, with apparent delight, "Killed Holmes."

As the American spoke of these details, he seemed stunned that Conan Doyle had gone through with such an extraordinary act. Still, he pointed out, Conan Doyle could not escape from his creation. In England, men reportedly wore black armbands in mourning. In America, clubs devoted to the cause "Let's Keep Holmes Alive" were formed. Though Conan Doyle insisted that Holmes's death was "justifiable homicide," readers denounced him as a brute and demanded that he resuscitate their hero; after all, no one had actually seen him go off the cliff. As Green wrote in a 1983 essay, "If ever a murderer was to be haunted by the man he had killed and to be forced to atone for his act, it was the creator, turned destroyer, of Sherlock Holmes." In 1901, under increasing pressure, Conan Doyle released "The Hound of the Baskervilles," about an ancient family curse, but the events in the story antedated Holmes's death. Then, two years later, Conan Doyle succumbed completely, and began writing new Holmes stories, explaining, less than convincingly, in "The Adventure of the Empty House," that Holmes had never plunged to his death but merely arranged it to look that way so he could escape from Moriarty's gang.

The American told me that even after Conan Doyle died Holmes continued to loom over his descendants. "Dame Jean thought that Sherlock Holmes was the family curse," he said. Like her father, he said, she had tried to draw attention to his other works but was constantly forced to tend to the detective's thousands of fans-many of whom sent letters addressed to Holmes, requesting his help in solving real crimes. In a 1935 essay entitled "Sherlock Holmes the God," G. K. Chesterton observed of Sherlockians, "It is getting beyond a joke. The hobby is hardening into a delusion."

Several actors who played Holmes were also haunted by him, the American said. In a 1956 autobiography, "In and Out of Character," Basil Rathbone, who played the detective in more than a dozen films, complained that because of his portrayal of Holmes his renown for other parts, including Oscar-nominated ones, was "sinking into oblivion." The public conflated him with his most famous character, which the studio and audience demanded he play again and again, until by the end he, too, lamented that he "could not kill Mr. Holmes." Another actor, Jeremy Brett, had a breakdown while playing the detective and was eventually admitted to a psychiatric ward, where he was said to have cried out, "Damn you, Holmes!"

At one point, the American showed me a thick book, which he had brought to the pub. It was part of a multivolume history that he was writing on the Baker Street Irregulars and Sherlockian scholarship. He had started the project in 1988. "I thought if I searched pretty assiduously I'd find enough material to do a single hundred-and-fifty-page volume," he said. "I've now done five volumes for more than fifteen hundred pages, and I've only gotten up to 1950." He added, "It's been a slippery slope into madness and obsession."

As he spoke of his fascination with Holmes, he recalled one of the last times he had seen Green, three years earlier, at a symposium at the University of Minnesota. Green had given a lecture on "The Hound of the Baskervilles." "It was a multimedia presentation about the origins of the novel, and it was just dazzling," the American said. He repeated the word "dazzling" several times ("It's the only word to describe it"), and as he sat up in his chair and his eyes brightened I realized that I was talking not to Green's Moriarty but to his soul mate. Then, catching himself, he reminded me that he had a full-time job and a family. "The danger is if you have nothing else in your life but Sherlock Holmes," he said.

In 1988, Richard Green made a pilgrimage to Reichenbach Falls to see where his childhood hero had nearly met his demise. Conan Doyle himself had visited the site in 1893, and Green wanted to repeat the author's journey. Standing at the edge of the falls, Green stared at the chasm below, where, as Watson noted after he called out, "My only answer was my own voice reverberating in a rolling echo from the cliffs around me."

By the mid-nineteen-nineties, Green knew that he would not have access to the Conan Doyle archive until Dame Jean died-presuming that she bequeathed the papers to the British Library. In the meantime, he continued researching

his biography, which, he concluded, would require no less than three volumes: the first would cover Conan Doyle's childhood; the second, the arc of his literary career; the third, his descent into a kind of madness.

Relying on public documents, Green outlined this last stage, which began after Conan Doyle started using his powers of observation to solve real-world mysteries. In 1906, Conan Doyle took up the case of George Edalji, a half-Parsi Indian living near Birmingham, who faced seven years of hard labor for allegedly mutilating his neighbors' cattle during the night. Conan Doyle suspected that Edalji had been tagged as a criminal merely because of his ethnicity, and he assumed the role of detective. Upon meeting his client, he noticed that the young man was holding a newspaper inches from his face.

"Aren't you astigmatic?" Conan Doyle asked.

"Yes," Edalji admitted.

Conan Doyle called in an ophthalmologist, who confirmed that Edalji's malady was so severe that he was unable to see properly even with glasses. Conan Doyle then trekked to the scene of the crime, traversing a maze of railroad tracks and hedges. "I, a strong and active man, in broad daylight, found it a hard matter to pass," he later wrote. Indeed, he contended, it would have been impossible for a nearly blind person to make the journey and then slaughter an animal in the pitch black of night. A tribunal soon concurred, and the New York *Times* declared, "conan doyle solves a new dreyfus case."

Conan Doyle even helped in solving a case of a serial killer, after he spotted newspaper accounts in which two women had died in the same bizarre manner: the victims were recent brides, who had "accidentally" drowned in their bathtubs. Conan Doyle informed Scotland Yard of his theory, telling the inspector, in an echo of Holmes, "No time is to be lost"; the killer, dubbed "the Bluebeard of the Bath," was subsequently caught and convicted in a sensational trial.

Around 1914, Conan Doyle tried to apply his rational powers to the most important matter of his day–the logic of launching the First World War. He was convinced that the war was not simply about entangling alliances and a dead archduke; it was a sensible way to restore the codes of honor and moral purpose that he had celebrated in his historical novels. That year, he unleashed a spate of propaganda, declaring, "Fear not, for our sword will not be broken, nor shall it ever drop from our hands." In the Holmes story "His Last Bow," which is set in 1914, the detective tells Watson that after the "storm has cleared" a "cleaner, better, stronger land will lie in the sunshine."

Though Conan Doyle was too old to fight, many of his relatives heeded his call "to arms," including his son Kingsley. The glorious battle Conan Doyle envisioned, however, became a cataclysm. The products of scientific reason–machines and engineering and electronics–were transformed into agents of destruction. Conan Doyle visited the battlefield by the Somme, where tens of thousands of British soldiers died, and where he later reported seeing a soldier "drenched crimson from head to foot, with two great glazed eyes looking upwards through a mask of blood." In 1918, a chastened Conan Doyle realized that the conflict was "evidently preventable." By that time, ten million people had perished, including Kingsley, who died from battle wounds and influenza.

After the war, Conan Doyle wrote a handful of Holmes stories, yet the field of detective fiction was changing. The all-knowing detective gradually gave way to the hardboiled dick, who acted more on instinct and gin than on reason. In "The Simple Art of Murder," Raymond Chandler, while admiring Conan Doyle, dismissed the tradition of the "grim logician" and his "exhausting concatenation of insignificant clues," which now seemed like an absurdity.

Meanwhile, in his own life, Conan Doyle seemed to abandon reason altogether. As one of Green's colleagues in the Baker Street Irregulars, Daniel Stashower, relates in a 1999 book, "Teller of Tales: The Life of Arthur Conan Doyle," the creator of Holmes began to believe in ghosts. He attended seances and received messages from the dead through "the power of automatic writing," a method akin to that of the Ouija board. During one session, Conan Doyle, who had once considered the belief in life after death as "a delusion," claimed that his dead younger brother said, "It is so grand to be in touch like this."

One day, Conan Doyle heard a voice in the seance room. As he later described the scene in a letter to a friend:

I said, "Is that you, boy?" He said in a very intense whisper and a tone all his own, "Father!" and then after a pause, "Forgive me!" I said, "There was never anything to forgive. You were the best son a man ever had." A strong hand descended on my head which was slowly pressed forward, and I felt a kiss just above my brow. "Are you happy?" I cried. There was a pause and then very gently, "I am so happy."

The creator of Sherlock Holmes had become the St. Paul of psychics. Conan Doyle claimed to see not only dead family members but fairies as well. He championed photographs taken in 1917 by two girls that purported to show such phantasmal creatures, even though, as one of the girls later admitted, "I could see the hatpins holding up the figures. I've always marvelled that anybody ever took it seriously." Conan Doyle, however, was convinced, and even published a book called "The Coming of Fairies." He opened the Psychic Bookshop, in London, and told friends that he had received messages that the world was coming to an end. "I suppose I am Sherlock Holmes, if anybody is, and I say that the case for spiritualism is absolutely proved," he declared. In 1918, a headline in the *Sunday Express* asked, "is conan doyle mad?"

For the first time, Green struggled to rationalize his subject's life. In one essay, Green wrote, "It is hard to understand how a man who had stood for sound common sense and healthy attitudes could sit in darkened rooms watching for ectoplasm." Green reacted at times as if his hero had betrayed him. In one passage, he wrote angrily, "Conan Doyle was deluding himself."

"One thing Richard couldn't stand was Conan Doyle's being involved with spiritualism," Edwards said. "He thought it crazy." His friend Dixon Smith told me, "It was all Conan Doyle. He pursued him with all his mind and body." Green's house became filled with more and more objects from Conan Doyle's life: long-forgotten propaganda leaflets and speeches on spiritualism; an arcane study of the Boer War; previously unknown essays on photography. "I remember once, I discovered a copy of 'A Duet with an Occasional Chorus,' " Gibson said. "It had a great red cover on it. I showed it to Richard and he got really excited. He said, 'God, this must have been the salesman's copy.' " When Green found one of the few surviving copies of the 1887 *Beeton's Christmas Annual*, with "A Study in Scarlet," which was worth as much as a hundred and thirty thousand dollars, he sent a card to a friend with two words on it: "At last!"

Green also wanted to hold things that Conan Doyle himself had held: letter openers and pens and spectacles. "He would collect all day and all night, and I mean night," his brother, Scirard, told me. Green covered many of his walls with Conan Doyle's family photographs. He even had a piece of wallpaper from one of Conan Doyle's homes. " 'Obsession' is by no means too strong a word to describe what Richard had," his friend Nicholas Utechin, the editor of *The Sherlock Holmes Journal*, said.

"It's self-perpetuating and I don't know how to stop," Green confessed to an antiques magazine in 1999.

By 2000, his house resembled the attic at Poulton Hall, only now he seemed to be living in a museum dedicated to Conan Doyle rather than to Holmes. "I have around forty thousand books," Green told the magazine. "Then, of course, there are the photographs, the pictures, the papers, and all the other ephemera. I know it sounds a lot, but, you see, the more you have, the more you feel you need."

And what he longed for most remained out of reach: the archive. After Dame Jean died, in 1997, and no papers materialized at the British Library, he became increasingly frustrated. Where he had once judiciously built his conjectures about Conan Doyle's life, he now seemed reckless. In 2002, to the shock of Doyleans around the world, Green wrote a paper claiming that he had proof that Conan Doyle had had a tryst with Jean Leckie, his delicately beautiful second wife, before his first wife, Louisa, died of tuberculosis, in 1906. Though it was well known that Conan Doyle had formed a bond with Leckie during his wife's long illness, he had always insisted, "I fight the devil and I win." And, to maintain an air of Victorian rectitude, he often brought along chaperones when he and Leckie were together. Green based his allegation on the 1901 census, which reported that on the day the survey was taken Conan Doyle was staying at the Ashdown Forest Hotel, in East Sussex. So, too, was Leckie. "Conan Doyle could not have chosen a worse weekend on which to have a private tryst," Green wrote. Yet Green failed to note one crucial fact also contained in the census report-Conan Doyle's mother was staying in the hotel with him, apparently as a chaperone. Later, Green was forced to recant, in a letter to *The Sherlock Holmes Journal*, saying, "I was guilty of the capital mistake of theorising without data."

Still, he continued to lash out at Conan Doyle, as Conan Doyle once had at Sherlock Holmes. Edwards recalled that, in one conversation, Green decried Conan Doyle as "unoriginal" and "a plagiarist." He confessed to another friend, "I've wasted my whole life on a second-rate writer."

"I think he was frustrated because the family wasn't coming to any agreement," Smith said. "The archive wasn't made available, and he got angry not at the heirs but at Conan Doyle."

Last March, when Green hurried to Christie's after the auction of the papers was announced, he discovered that the archive was as rich and as abundant as he'd imagined. Among the thousands of items were fragments of the first tale that Conan Doyle wrote, at the age of six; illustrated logs from when Conan Doyle was a surgeon on a Scottish whaling

ship, in the eighteen–eighties; letters from Conan Doyle's father (whose drawings in the asylum resembled the fairies that his son later seized upon as real); a brown envelope with a cross and the name of his dead son inscribed upon it; the manuscript of Conan Doyle's first novel, which was never published; a missive from Conan Doyle to his brother, which seemed to confirm that Green's hunch had been right, and that Conan Doyle had in fact begun an affair with Leckie. Jane Flower, who helped to organize the papers for Christie's, told reporters, "The whereabouts of this material was previously unknown, and it is for this reason that no modern–day biography of the author exists."

Meanwhile, back at his home, Green tried to piece together why the archive was about to slip into private hands once more. According to Green's family, he typed notes in his computer, reexamining the trail of evidence, which he thought proved that the papers belonged to the British Library. He worked late into the night, frequently going without sleep. None of it, however, seemed to add up. At one point, he typed in bold letters, "stick to the facts." After another sleepless night, he told his sister that the world seemed "Kafkaesque."

Several hours before Green died, he called his friend Utechin at home. Green had asked him to find a tape of an old BBC radio interview, which, Green recalled, quoted one of Conan Doyle's heirs saying that the archive should be given to the British Library. Utechin said that he had found the tape, but there was no such statement on the recording. Green became apoplectic, and accused his friend of conspiring against him, as if he were another Moriarty. Finally, Utechin said, "Richard, you've lost it!"

One afternoon while I was at my hotel in London, the phone rang. "I need to see you again," John Gibson said. "I'll take the next train in." Before he hung up, he added, "I have a theory."

I met him in my hotel room. He was carrying several scraps of paper, on which he had taken notes. He sat down by the window, his slender figure silhouetted in the fading light, and announced, "I think it was suicide."

He had sifted through the data, including details that I had shared with him from my own investigation. There was mounting evidence, he said, that his rationalist friend was betraying signs of irrationality in the last week of his life. There was the fact that there was no evidence of forced entry at Green's home. And there was the fact, perhaps most critically, of the wooden spoon by Green's hand.

"He had to have used it to tighten the cord" like a tourniquet, Gibson said. "If someone else had garroted him, why would he need the spoon? The killer could simply use his hands." He continued, "I think things in his life had not turned out the way he wanted. This Christie's sale simply brought everything to a head."

He glanced nervously at his notes, which he strained to see without his magnifying glass. "That's not all," he said. "I think he wanted it to look like murder."

He waited to assess my reaction, then went on, "That's why he didn't leave a note. That's why he took his voice off the answering machine. That's why he sent that message to his sister with the three phone numbers on it. That's why he spoke of the American who was after him. He must have been planning it for days, laying the foundation, giving us false clues."

I knew that, in detective fiction, the reverse scenario generally turns out to be true–a suicide is found to have been murder. As Holmes declares in "The Resident Patient," "This is no suicide. . . . It is a very deeply planned and cold–blooded murder." There is, however, one notable exception. It is, eerily enough, in one of the last Holmes mysteries, "The Problem of Thor Bridge," a story that Green once cited in an essay. A wife is found lying dead on a bridge, shot in the head at point–blank range. All the evidence points to one suspect: the governess, with whom the husband had been flirting. Yet Holmes shows that the wife had not been killed by anyone; rather, enraged by jealousy over her husband's illicit overtures to the governess, she had killed herself and framed the woman whom she blamed for her misery. Of all Conan Doyle's stories, it digs deepest into the human psyche and its criminal motivations. As the governess tells Holmes, "When I reached the bridge she was waiting for me. Never did I realize till that moment how this poor creature hated me. She was like a mad woman–indeed, I think she was a mad woman, subtly mad with the deep power of deception which insane people may have."

I wondered if Green could have been so enraged with the loss of the archive that he might have done something similar, and even tried to frame the American, whom he blamed for ruining his relationship with Dame Jean and for the sale of the archive. I wondered if he could have tried, in one last desperate attempt, to create order out of the chaos around him. I wondered if this theory, however improbable, was in fact the least "impossible."

I shared with Gibson some other clues I had uncovered: the call that Green had made to the reporter days before his

death, saying that "something" might happen to him; a reference in a Holmes story to one of Moriarty's main henchmen as a "garroter by trade"; and a statement to the coroner by Green's sister, who said that the note with the three phone numbers had reminded her of "the beginning of a thriller."

After a while, Gibson looked up at me, his face ghastly white. "Don't you see?" he exclaimed. "He staged the whole thing. He created the perfect mystery."

Before I went back to America, I went to see Green's sister, Priscilla West. She lives near Oxford, in a three-story, eighteenth-century brick house with a walled garden. She had long, wavy brown hair, an attractive round face, and small oval glasses. She invited me inside with a reticent voice, saying, "Are you a drawing-room person or a kitchen person?"

I shrugged uncertainly, and she led me into the drawing room, which had antique furniture and her father's children's books on the shelves. As we sat down, I explained to her that I had been struggling to write her brother's story. The American had told me, "There is no such thing as a definitive biography," and Green seemed particularly resistant to explication.

"Richard compartmentalized his life," his sister said. "There are a lot of things we've only found out since he died." At the inquest, his family, and most of his friends, had been startled when Lawrence Keen, who was nearly half Green's age, announced that he had been Richard's lover years ago. "No one in the family knew" that Green was gay, his sister explained. "It wasn't something he ever talked about."

As West recalled other surprising fragments of Green's biography (travels to Tibet, a brief attempt at writing a novel), I tried to picture him as best I could with his glasses, his plastic bag in hand, and his wry smile. West had seen her brother's body lying on the bed, and several times she told me, "I just wish . . ." before falling silent. She handed me copies of the eulogies that Green's friends had delivered at the memorial service, which was held on May 22nd, the day Conan Doyle was born. On the back of the program from the service were several quotes from Sherlock Holmes stories:

I caught a glimpse of a great heart as well as of a great brain. He appears to have a passion for definite and exact knowledge. His career has been an extraordinary one.

After a while, she got up to pour herself a cup of tea. When she sat down again, she said that her brother had willed his collection to a library in Portsmouth, near where Conan Doyle wrote the first two Holmes stories, so that other scholars could have access to it. The collection was so large that it had taken two weeks, and required twelve truckloads, to cart it all away. It was estimated to be worth several million dollars-far more, in all likelihood, than the treasured archive. "He really did not like the idea of scholarship being put second to greed," West said. "He lived and died by this."

She then told me something about the archive which had only recently come to light, and which her brother had never learned: Dame Jean Conan Doyle, while dying of cancer, had made a last-minute deed of apportionment, splitting the archive between herself and the three heirs of her former sister-in-law, Anna Conan Doyle. What was being auctioned off, therefore, belonged to the three heirs, and not to Dame Jean, and, though some people still questioned the morality of the sale, the British Library had reached the conclusion that it was legal.

Green also could not know that after the auction, on May 19th, the most important papers ended up at the British Library. Dame Jean had not allotted those documents to the other heirs, and had willed many of them to the library; at the same time, the library had purchased much of the remaining material at the auction. As Gibson later told me, "The tragedy is that Richard could have still written his biography. He would have had everything he needed."

Two questions, however, remained unclear. How, I asked West, did an American voice wind up on her brother's answering machine?

"I'm afraid it's not that complicated," she said. The machine, she continued, was made in the United States and had a built-in recorded message; when her brother took off his personal message, a prerecorded American voice appeared.

I then asked about the phone numbers in the note. She shook her head in dismay. They added up to nothing, she said. They were merely those of two reporters her brother had spoken to, and the number of someone at Christie's.

Finally, I asked what she thought had happened to her brother. At one point, Scirard Lancelyn Green had told the London *Observer* that he thought murder was "entirely possible"; and, for all my attempts to build a case that transcended doubt, there were still questions. Hadn't the police told the coroner that an intruder could have locked Green's apartment door while slipping out, thus giving the illusion that his victim had died alone? Wasn't it possible that Green had known

the murderer and simply let him in? And how could someone, even in a fit of madness, garrote himself with merely a shoelace and the help of a spoon?

His sister glanced away, as if trying one last time to arrange all the pieces. Then she said, "I don't think we'll ever know for sure what really happened. Unlike in detective stories, we have to live without answers."

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