

*The following appeared in the Christmas 1987 issue of The Listener:*

The literary editor, when clearing out her office preparatory to the move to *The Listener's* new quarters, discovered a bundle of papers wedged at the back of a drawer. The find appeared to be an autograph manuscript of a previously unpublished Sherlock Holmes story. Uncertain of its authenticity, she asked Stephen Fry, a noted Sherlockian, to edit the text and reflect on its provenance.

*Hand-written on nineteenth-century foolscap the document certainly appears to be genuine. According to Edinburgh University's pioneering 'particle method' a quick count of prepositions, final clauses and image clusters tells us that the balance of probability is that the text was indeed written by Watson. Three or four strange inconsistencies, however, which do not become apparent until the very end of the story, throw some doubt on this conclusion. Alert readers will detect these anomalies and draw their own inferences. Apart from trimming back the typically profuse growth of commas and semi-colons familiar to scholars of the canon, I have left the body of the text unedited. I should be interested to hear the opinion of enthusiasts everywhere. In my view, if the story is not genuine then it ought to be.*

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## The Adventure of the Laughing Jarvey

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The year 18— saw my friend Sherlock Holmes at the very height of his considerable powers. On leafing through the journals for that year my attention is caught by a number of cases; some startling, some macabre, some seemingly commonplace, but all demonstrating to a great extent Holmes's remarkable gifts of deduction. The Affair of the Stranded Macaw, for which he received the Order of the Silver Myrtle from the hands of His

Majesty the King Miroslaw himself, presents several peculiar features of interest but in the more delicate of its details touches too many figures in public life to allow me to retell it here. The Tale of the Punctual Railway Clerk, while remaining one of Holmes's favourite triumphs, is perhaps of too technical a nature to be of interest to the general reader. The Case of the Copper Beeches I have chronicled elsewhere and the Story of the Tooting Schoolmaster and the Harness, while displaying as perhaps no other the extraordinary meticulousness and patience that characterised my friend's methods, has no place outside specialist journals.

Towards the very end of that year however, when it seemed to us that London had given up on sensation for the winter and was content to prepare itself comfortably for the festive season without throwing up those *outré* mysteries that were as oxygen to Sherlock Holmes, there exploded upon us a case which wrenched him from the indolence and melancholy to which that great mind was prey when there was nothing to engage it and hurtled us into as extraordinary an adventure as any we had known. Although it is his oft repeated assertion that this problem tested his reasoning powers only to the smallest degree, there can be no doubt that its solution yielded to Holmes the richest fee he ever earned in the course of an illustrious career.

I remember that one evening in mid-December I was engaged in the task of decorating our bachelor lodgings with some seasonal sprigs of holly and mistletoe, enduring the while some tart criticisms from my friend.

'Really Watson,' said he, 'is it not enough that Mrs Hudson must come in laden with mince pies and indefatigable good cheer every hour of the day? Must we also deck ourselves out like a pagan temple?'

'I must say, Holmes,' I returned with some asperity, for the effort of standing upon a chair and reaching for the picture rail was taking its toll on the old Jezail bullet wound, 'I think this uncommonly poor-spirited of you! Christmas used to mean something, I remember. Do you not recall the Blue Carbuncle? That adventure saw you as full of Yuletide charity as any man.'

'Watson you are confusing the real facts of that affair with the gaudy version of it that you were pleased to set down before a gullible public. Pray do not start upon the course of believing

your own fictions. As I remember it, the case was a matter for calm analysis.'

'Really, Holmes,' I ejaculated, 'you are most unfair!'

'You must forgive me Watson. But the infernal *dullness* of it all! A spreading canker of bumbling good cheer seems to infect everybody at this time of year, even the most hardened of scoundrels, who are as likely to give money as they are to abstract it. Here is the *Evening News*. What foul murders or daring larcenies are there here to engage the interest? A woman is injured in a derailment at Lewisham, some one has stolen a statue from Charing Cross, a horse has bolted in Hoxton. I despair, Watson. Let us have an end to this sickening season of good will and peace, I say.'

'Holmes, I will not allow this assault on Christmas! You know perfectly well that -'

But my strictures were interrupted by a wild jangling of the bell downstairs.

'Ah,' said Holmes, 'I am spared your homily. Perhaps a mistaken address, perhaps a client. Such extravagant pealing denotes some urgency at any rate. Well, Billy?'

Our honest pageboy had entered the room, but before he had time to make any formal announcement there burst in like a tornado the most wildly agitated man I think I have ever laid eyes upon.

'Mr Sherlock Holmes? Which one of you is Mr Holmes?' gasped the unfortunate creature, looking wildly from one to the other of us.

'I am he,' said Holmes, 'and this is my friend Dr Watson. If you will be seated he will pour you a glass of brandy.'

'Thank you, a little brandy, yes indeed. That would be most . . . really Mr Holmes, you must forgive me, I am not given to . . . thank you, most kind, no seltzer I beg! Just so. Let me catch my breath . . . splendid rooms, most snug. Charming holly . . . so festive. I congratulate you. Ah! that is much better, I am obliged to you, Doctor.'

Despite the pitiable distress of the man I could not forbear to smile at this twittering and inconsequential monologue. I had seen physical pain induce such loquacity and delirium in wounded men and knew it to be a common sign of mental anxiety also.

Sherlock Holmes sat deep in his arm chair, touching together

the tips of his fingers and running an expert eye over the extraordinary gentleman seated opposite him. Our visitor was dressed fashionably for the evening, but I could not set him down as a Society figure. Prosperity gleamed in the refulgent shirt and hand-made boots, for all the fresh traces of mud upon them, but too lively an intelligence shone in his piercingly blue eyes to suppose that he did not use his brain for a living. His thin face, in its rare moments of repose, seemed of a melancholy cast, but when it became animated the features fairly quivered with movement, a wiry beard wagged and jerked in time to his speech and the wild, disordered locks upon his head tossed about as if in a tempest.

'Such *very* good brandy . . . oh dear, oh dear, oh dear. Whatever am I to do, Mr Holmes?'

'Well, when you have caught your breath, you had better lay your problem before us,' said Holmes. 'To have come from at least as far as Gray's Inn all the way to Baker Street on such a night would take its toll on any man.'

Our visitor started visibly. 'But how on earth? Oh dear me, that is most extraordinary! I have indeed run all the way from Gray's Inn, though how you could know that is beyond me.'

'Tush, sir, it is as clear as day. That you have been running a child could tell from your breathlessness alone. The line of the splashes upon the toes of your boots could not be caused any other way.'

'Well,' chuckled the other, momentarily diverted from the cause of his peculiar worry, 'I see *that*, but how the deuce can you read Gray's Inn in my appearance?'

'I was there this morning,' said Holmes. 'They are painting the iron railings that fence off the north side from the pavement. The palings themselves are painted black, but the tip is gilded, in your hurry you have brushed your left arm against the wet paint. See upon your sleeve, black topped with a smudge of gold. It is possible that there is another railing freshly painted in like manner somewhere in London, but it is highly unlikely.'

'Remarkable, remarkable. A capital game! What else, sir? What else?'

'I am afraid,' said Holmes, 'there is very little else to tell.'

'Ah, I am freshly changed into my evening clothes, after all. Every clue starched over, I fancy.'

'Beyond the obvious facts that you are a writer, that you suffered deprivation in your boyhood, that money is a little harder to come by for you than it once was and that you are fond of conjuring tricks, there is certainly very little to be seen,' said Holmes.

Our visitor started up. 'You know me then! This is a pretty trick to play, sir, upon my word! It is unworthy of you.'

'Be seated, I beg' said Holmes, 'I have never set eyes upon you before. When I see a man with so pronounced an indentation upon the inside of his middle finger it is surely no great matter to assume that he is a writer?'

'A clerk! I might be a clerk!'

'In Lobb boots? I hardly think so.'

'Hum, the deprivation then?'

'Your face is lined beyond your years, but not, I perceive, by the trouble that has brought you here. That is too recent to have yet written itself across your brow. I have seen such marks only on those who grew up knowing misery and want.'

'True enough, Mr Holmes – but the money, the conjuring tricks?'

'Those fine boots were made some three or four years ago, I fancy. The excellently cut coat you are wearing dates from that time also. The sudden burst of prosperity that their purchase betokens has receded a little into the past, therefore. As for the conjuring, you will have noticed, I am sure, Watson, the small metal cone that protrudes a little from our visitor's waistcoat? Flesh-pink in colour, it is called a thumb-tip: an essential part of an illusionist's apparatus.'

'Bravo, Mr Holmes!' cried our guest, applauding with great energy. 'Miraculous!'

'Meretricious.'

'And a happy new year, my dear sir. Meretricious and a happy new year! Dear me,' said he, sinking in spirits once more, 'you quite take my mind from the purpose of this visit. Such a calamity, Mr Holmes. Such a dreadful calamity. I am beside myself!'

'I am all attention Mr – ?'

'Oh! My name? Yes. Ah, Bosney, Culliford Bosney, novelist. You have heard of me perhaps?' He scanned our bookshelves eagerly.



'I am afraid, Mr Bosney, that with only a few exceptions I do not have much time for novels. Dr Watson is the literary man.'

Culliford Bosney turned his lively gaze upon me. 'Ah yes, Dr Watson – of course. I read your works with great interest. Accept the compliments of a fellow scribbler, I beg.'

'Thank you,' said I, 'I am afraid Mr Holmes does not share your good opinion of my efforts.'

'Nonsense, Watson! As exotic romances they stand in a class of their own,' said Holmes, filling his briar.

'You see what I have to contend with, Mr Bosney?' said I, with a rueful grin.

'Oh, Dr Watson!' answered he, with a pitiable return to his former woe. 'You will understand my misery when I tell you that it is lost! It is lost, and I am at my wits' end!'

'What is lost?' I asked in bewilderment.

'The manuscript, of course! It is lost and I am sure I shall lose my mind with worrying over it.'

'I think,' said Holmes, leaning back in his chair, 'that you had better favour us with all the facts of your narrative, Mr Bosney.'

'Of course, Mr Holmes. Omitting no details, however trivial they may seem, eh?'

'Quite so.'

'Well, you must know that I have been labouring now for some six weeks on the manuscript of a story. I was due today to deliver it to my publishers – it is necessary that they publish it within the week you understand, for it has a Yuletide theme. I have high hopes for this story, Mr Holmes. I will not palter with you, my last novel did not take at all well and I have been at great pains to do something which will in some way recoup my fortunes and restore the good opinion of the reading public. I have not been on the best of terms with my publishers for some time and I am hoping that this newest work will earn me enough by way of royalties to enable me to leave them and seek a more congenial firm.'

'Are they aware of this ambition?' asked Holmes.

'No, Mr Holmes, I do not believe that they are. I have great hopes of this story however. *Had* great hopes, for I am sure I shall

never see it again!' The agonised novelist sprang up from his seat with a gesture of despair. 'Mr Holmes, it is useless. How can one find a needle in a haystack?'

'Given a strong enough magnet, Mr Bosney, it is an elementary task. Put me in possession of the relevant facts and who knows but that we will not be able to find just such a magnet?'

'Yes, yes. I must beg your pardon gentlemen, but I have been tried these past few hours, sorely tried. Well then, at half past four this afternoon I had finished reading the story back to myself and was satisfied that it was ready to be printed. Rather than have the manuscript collected I thought that I would deliver it myself, on my way to the theatre. I also wanted to give some last-minute instructions for the printing. I wished the book to be lavishly presented, Mr Holmes, in gilt and red. I thought that would be appropriately festive.

'I changed into evening clothes, tucked the manuscript under my arm and went out into the street to hail a cab. My street runs into Theobald's Road, Mr Holmes, just opposite Gray's Inn. There is usually no difficulty in finding a hackney carriage on that thoroughfare. To my surprise, however, there was already a hansom standing right outside my house. I called to the driver to ask if he were waiting for anybody. He seemed startled but replied that he was not. I opened the door, put the manuscript onto the seat and was on the point of climbing in, when I noticed that the seat was already occupied. Mr Holmes, I am not a fanciful man, but the sight of the figure sitting in the corner of that hansom made my blood run cold! A deathly pale countenance, with blank unseeing eyes. I shudder at the memory of him.'

'You recollect how the figure was dressed?' asked Holmes sharply.

'I do indeed, it was most striking. I recall a many-caped driving coat buttoned up to the throat, a billycock hat and a woollen scarf. There was something so incongruous about this strange apparel and those inhumanly blanched and spectral features that I could not help but step backwards with a cry. No sooner had I done so than the jarvey whipped up his horse with a shout and rattled down the street, disappearing into the mist.'

'Really?' said Holmes, rubbing his hands together. 'Most intriguing. Pray continue, Mr Bosney, I beg.'

'I must own, Mr Holmes, that I was at first relieved that the vision had fled so fast. I stood trembling upon the pavement, wondering at the meaning of so horrid a sight. Perhaps I had imagined it, perhaps I was still in the grip of the fever of imagination with which I had finished my story. But then I remembered that my manuscript was still lying on the seat of the vanished cab and I became quite mad with fright. I ran down into Theobald's Road and stared about me. There were dog-carts and broughams and hansoms by the dozen rattling in both directions. But which was my hansom, I could not tell. I have sent my servants out to the cab companies offering large rewards for the safe return of the manuscript Mr Holmes, but so far with no success. I am at my wits' end!'

'A piquant mystery,' said Holmes, looking dreamily up at the ceiling. 'Can you describe the jarvey to me, I wonder?'

'I cannot Mr Holmes!' groaned the other. 'I usually have an excellent memory for faces, but this man was so muffled up against the chill that I had no opportunity to read his features. I have an impression from his voice that he was a young man, but I may be wrong. Also -'

'Yes?'

'Well, it may only be my fancy, but I could swear that as the cab hurtled away from me I heard laughter. I attributed it to the medical students who have just moved in to lodgings next door to me and are rowdy at the best of times, but thinking back I am sure it came from the jarvey himself! What can that mean, Mr Holmes?'

'A laugh you say? Now, that is really most revealing.' Holmes rose and began to pace about the room. 'You have mentioned students, Mr Bosney, what other neighbours do you have?'

'For the most part we are a quiet lot - solicitors and stockbrokers in the main. The street is handy for both the Inns of Court and the City of London. I am not on especially intimate terms with any of my neighbours, however. Colonel Harker, whose house adjoins mine, has recently returned from India and staffs his household with native servants, at whom he bellows with immoderate choler. I do not think that I have ever exchanged above two words with him. He is away in Hampshire for Christmas in any case, so I do not think he can have any bearing on the matter.'

'Well, Mr Bosney,' said Holmes, buttoning up his cape, 'I will look into this little problem for you.'

'Thank you, Mr Holmes!'

'Come Watson, let us all take ourselves to Gray's Inn and see what we can discover.'

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As the three of us were whisked through the dark London streets, Sherlock Holmes and Culliford Bosney looked out the window at the fog-wrapped streets and alleyways of the great capital, the former keenly, the latter with comical anxiety. Holmes, drawing heavily on his most pungent shag mixture, noted off the street names as we flew down the Euston Road. I have remarked before that his knowledge of London streets was profound, from the lowest and vilest alleys in the east to the broadest and most fashionable squares and avenues in the west. I was surprised to discover that Mr Bosney too was possessed of an exact acquaintance with the capital. The pair of them talked enthusiastically of their love for the great city, Bosney even contriving to surprise Holmes on occasion with some obscure fragment of history or local anecdote.

'Yes indeed, Mr Holmes!' cried he, 'London is alive, believe me. Every citizen is like a cell of the great organism, connected to every other. The meanest tapster in Limehouse and the grandest duke in Grosvenor Square are bound together and give life each to each! You think me fanciful perhaps?'

'Not at all, sir,' replied Holmes, 'my work largely depends upon that fact. What is a crime but a disease? My work is largely diagnostic: just as Watson here might see a deficiency of iron in a swollen elbow, so I might detect a suburban murder in a frayed cuff. A death in Houndsditch may leave the inhabitants of Belgravia unmoved, but they mistake the matter if they do not believe themselves involved.'

'Mr Holmes, you are a man after my own heart,' said Bosney warmly. 'And is this not the season for just such reflections?'

'As to that, Mr Bosney,' said Holmes with a wry look towards me, 'I must confess that what with the weather on the one hand and the false civilities on the other, Christmas leaves me quite cold.'

'Why then,' returned the other in some surprise, 'you are a perfect – ah, here is Gray's Inn. See how they have now put up signs warning the unwary of the fresh paint upon the palings. Good cheer, Tom!' This last remark was addressed to a young crossing-sweeper who had stepped smartly up to open the door for us as we drew up, and to whom Bosney tossed some pennies.

My heart sank as I looked at the tide of traffic roaring past us and crossing the Gray's Inn Road. How could Holmes hope to recover one lost bundle of papers in such a vast confusion of humanity?

As always when Sherlock Holmes was engaged on a case, his reflective lassitude gave way to an extraordinary vigour and his demeanour took on the keen expression of a greyhound loosed from the slips.

'This is your street down here, I take it?' he inquired of our companion. 'John's Street, I think it is called.'

'Exactly so, I inhabit one of the houses further down, where it changes its name before joining Guildford Street,' replied Mr Bosney, scampering to keep up with Holmes as he strode down the well-lit thoroughfare. 'Here we are, allow me to invite you in for some warming negus, I beg.'

'Thank you. Later perhaps. Now the cab stood here, I perceive? Quite so. No rain has fallen this afternoon, that is good.'

Holmes whipped out his lens, dropped onto all fours and began to scramble about on the ground outside Culliford Bosney's house. To one so well acquainted with Sherlock Holmes and his methods, the minuteness of the scrutiny and the animal energy with which he conducted it held no real surprises for me, but the novelist watched with frank astonishment as Holmes, with blithe disregard for the knees of his trousers, crawled in the mud of the cobbled kerbside, now scooping tiny objects into a fold of paper produced from an inside pocket, now measuring invisible marks upon the ground with a tape.

At last, Holmes rose to his feet. 'Now, Mr Bosney, this house here that adjoins yours, this belongs to the Colonel from India, or to the medical students?'

'To the students. That house there, all shut up, is Colonel Harker's.'

'As I assumed. We must make haste if we are to recover your manuscript. I think now I will go into the house.'

I followed Mr Bosney to his front door, but turned in surprise to see Holmes proceeding down the front path of the neighbouring house.

'Why Holmes!' I cried, 'this is the house.'

'On the contrary Watson. You were a medical student once, you should be aware that *this* is the house.' So saying he pulled at the door bell. 'Read the ground, gentlemen, it is the skin of the great organism we were discussing and bears battlescars that can testify to many a strange history.' The door opened and a maid admitted Holmes into the dwelling.

'Well!' said Mr Bosney. 'Most extraordinary! What can these students have to do with the matter?'

'I think we should wait,' said I, 'Holmes very rarely makes a mistake. If he thinks that they have some connection with the mystery, then you may depend upon it that they have. Come, let us look at the ground and see if we cannot follow his reasoning.'

The pair of us spent a fruitless quarter of an hour examining the mud of the street with the aid of a lens that Bosney brought out from his house. Whatever code was printed there was too cryptic for us to decipher, however, and we were just climbing the steps of Mr Bosney's house to partake of a hot posset when the door of the students' lodgings opened and a young man shot out, clutching a hat to his head and running at breakneck speed down the street. He was followed a few moments later by Sherlock Holmes, who eyed the retreating figure with benevolent amusement.

'An elementary problem, Mr Bosney. Appropriately frivolous for the time of year. If you would be so good as to return with us to Baker Street, I think I may be able to shed a little light on the matter.'

'But . . . but Mr Holmes!' cried the other. 'The manuscript! You mean you have found it?'

'Unless we are very unfortunate, it should be in your hands within the hour.'

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Not a word would Holmes vouchsafe us, on our homeward



journey, save the observation that were all cases as simple as this one, life would soon become insupportably dull.

When we were ensconced in the comfortable warmth of 221B Baker Street, Holmes plucked a book from the shelves and left Culliford Bosney and I to complete the festive decoration of the rooms while he read. Of a sudden, Holmes closed his book with a laugh.

'Well, Watson, perhaps this will turn out to be a case for your memoirs after all. Most remarkable. I should have known, of course.'

'What should you have known, Holmes?' we cried in exasperation.

'We were remarking earlier, Mr Culliford Bosney,' said Sherlock Holmes, with an uncharacteristic twinkle, 'that all things in this great capital interconnect in surprising ways. The observers of life, such as ourselves, must place ourselves like spiders at the centre of the great web, and train ourselves to interpret every twitch upon the gossamer, every tremble of the fibre. As soon as you mentioned to me that you lived next door to medical students I registered just such a quiver on the web. Perhaps it meant something, perhaps nothing, but I filed it away just the same. Watson may remember my remarking that the only notable crime London had to offer today was the removal of a statue from Charing Cross. You may be aware, Mr Bosney, that it is the habit of medical students to play pranks upon each other. The rivalry between the students of the two great hospitals at Charing Cross and Guy's is legendary.'

'Why, that's true!' I cried, 'I remember in my day that we -'  
'Quite,' said Holmes, always impatient of interruption. 'I had therefore already set down in my mind the theft of the statue as an incident of just such festive exuberance. Your mention of medical students, Mr Bosney, while conceivably immaterial, prepared me for some connection. As soon as I came upon the scene of your meeting with the spectral hansom the true facts of the matter became clear to me. To the trained eye the tracks in the kerbside were easy enough to interpret. I saw at once that the cab had been waiting outside the *students'* house, Mr Bosney, not your own. The signs of movement and restlessness on the part of the horse also told me that no professional London jarvey had

been at the reins. It had been all the driver could do to keep the horse still while the statue was loaded into the cab.'

'A statue!' Culliford Bosney clapped his hands together. 'Of course! The awful fixed stare and the ghostly pallor!'

'You were an excellent witness, Mr Bosney, but you failed to interpret your own evidence. Your senses had already told you that you beheld something inhuman, but you refused to make the logical inference.'

'Ghosts were much on my mind, Mr Holmes. I had after all just completed a fiction and was perhaps still dwelling in the world of the imagination. But what of the manuscript?'

'I called on the students, as you observed. They were most communicative. They revealed to me that for the purposes of the jape one of their number had hired a hansom for the day and bribed the cabbie to stay away. He had purloined the statue and brought it straight to your street, Mr Bosney. There the other students came out and dressed it up. I already knew that something of the sort had taken place from the disposition of footprints outside. The students had then gone back into the house, leaving their ringleader in charge of the cab, while they changed into builders' overalls. It was their mad intention to climb Temple Bar and place the statue in a prominent position overlooking the traffic. The young gentleman who had played the part of the cabbie related to me how you had accosted him while his friends were still inside. You took him so by surprise when you hailed him, that he did not think to say that he was engaged.'

'The young hound!' exclaimed Culliford Bosney.

'He is most penitent I assure you,' said Holmes. 'I think I may say without conceit that he was a little startled to find Sherlock Holmes on his trail.'

'A hammer to crack a nut, to be sure . . . but the manuscript, Mr Holmes?'

'Ah the manuscript! Your cabbie took advantage of the moment when you sprung back in amazement from the cab to make good his escape. He contrived to smuggle the statue into Charing Cross Hospital itself and put it into a bed where, as far as he knows, it remains still. He returned the hansom to the cab company who had hired it out to him and had reached his lodgings next door to your house not half an hour before we arrived upon the scene.

He has a vague memory of seeing a bundle of papers in the back of the cab, but he paid them no attention. When I made it plain to him that the loss of that manuscript would result in the story of his adventures being made known to the dean of his hospital he rushed from the house to recover it. I think I hear his tread upon the stair now.'

Just at that moment the door opened to admit a flushed young man carrying a large bundle of papers.

'My manuscript!' cried Mr Bosney, leaping to his feet.

'Allow me to present Mr Jasper Corrigan,' said Holmes. 'This is my good friend Dr Watson, and this gentleman, whose manuscript you appear to have found, is your neighbour, the novelist.'

'Well sir, I believe I owe you an apology,' said the medical student, holding out a hand. 'I'm sure Mr Holmes here has told you everything. Believe me when I say that I had no intention of doing you such a wrong.'

'My dear fellow,' said Mr Bosney, warmly shaking hands, 'think nothing of it! If the manuscript is complete . . . let me see . . .' He took the bundle of papers and examined them eagerly. 'Yes, it is all here. I will take it to the printers this instant. Will they be open at this time of the evening? But they have a night staff. Yes, this very instant! Mr Corrigan, I hope you will do me the honour of coming with your friends to my house tomorrow night. We shall have a party! Yes, with chestnuts and games and all manner of fun. A man should know his neighbours. It is disgraceful that I have not invited you before. Marshmallows too, and a hot punch! Please tell me you will come.'

'Sir, we should be honoured. We . . . I do not deserve such generosity.'

'Pooh! Is it not Christmas? As for you, Mr Holmes, I am sure I do not know where to begin . . . such brilliance, such -'

'Really, Mr Bosney, you are too kind,' said Holmes, smiling a little at the author's exuberance. 'I am happy that your story is saved, but I think on reflection that you will see that it was not a testing problem. Indeed it is probable that it would have solved itself without my aid.'

'That I cannot allow,' replied Mr Bosney, 'I insist that you name your fee.'

'As to that,' said Holmes, 'I *will* ask a fee from you.'

'Name it, Mr Holmes, name it!'

'I have a fancy to own that manuscript of yours. When it returns from the printers, I wonder if you will send it to me?'

Mr Bosney blinked slightly. 'Really Mr Holmes, you do me a great honour. You told me you have no time for fiction.'

'Some fiction I have all the time in the world for, Mr Bosney, and I have an idea that I will enjoy your story. I think it is you who are doing me the honour.'

'Shake my hand, sir!' said the other. 'You are a remarkable man. A remarkable man.'

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Mr Bosney was as good as his word and the manuscript arrived a week later through the post. Holmes took it up immediately and for the next two hours sat reading it. When he had finished, he looked up and I saw that there were tears in his eyes.

'Really Watson,' he said at last. 'Couldn't we have more holly about the place? It is Christmas, you know.'

'But Holmes!' I expostulated.

'Read it, Watson,' he said passing the manuscript over to me. 'Just read it.'

I took it up and looked at the cover page. 'But . . . but . . . Holmes!'

'Quite, Watson.'

I looked at the manuscript again. On the cover page was written, 'A Christmas Carol, by Charles Culliford Boz Dickens.'

'And a merry Christmas to us all!' said Holmes.

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