

A Scandal in Fordlandia

To Sherlock Holmes he was always *the* client. He was the client that beyond all others had the ability bring down disaster on his own head. Yet Holmes was strangely fascinated with him and for many years afterwards referred to him as “that impossible Canadian.”

I had seen little of Holmes since we arrived in Toronto. He had accepted a post of lecturer in the Criminology Department of the University and had insisted that I be also offered a position so that I could accompany him. So during that spring of 2014 I was lecturing in the Faculty of Medicine.

The University had provided Holmes with offices in the Royal Conservatory of Music at 221 Bloor Street. Here he had a small balcony on which he could smoke and peer out over Philosophers’ Walk.

On the thirteenth of June I was walking back north along The Walk when I saw the Holmes on his balcony. His attitude and manner told their own story. He greeted me with a warm smile. “Welcome. Please take a look at this and give me your thoughts.”

He handed me a note on stiff linen writing paper.

Hey Sherlock. We got us a problem. I can't even come and talk about it myself so I'm sending my driver, Salim. But its such a mess he has to come in disguise.

“The man who wrote this is well-to-do. His style is quite informal and he does not hesitate from being dramatic.”

“Well done, Watson,” said Holmes. “And the watermark? That building is Toronto’s City Hall. Our client is likely most employed there, and . . .”

He was interrupted by loud thumping on the door.

“Come in!”

The door opened and I saw the backside of an enormous man. He turned to us and involuntarily I let out a cry of terror. There in front of me was a three hundred and fifty pound monster wearing the mask of Sarah Palin.

“It’s ok. Sorry about the mask,” he said.

He was well over six and a half feet tall and of tremendous girth. His cotton shirt had inched up so that below the lowest button there was a bulging triangle of hairy belly. He was wearing hand-tooled cowboy boots with two inch heels that completed the impression of barbaric opulence.

“Hey bros, which one is Holmes?”

“I am,” replied the great detective. “And this is my associate, Dr. Watson. Whom have I the honour to address?”

“My name’s Salim. But you can call me Sal. My boss really needs your help. He’s got himself into another fine mess.”

“Well then, if Your Worship the Mayor would state your case, I should be able to advise you.”

The man tore Sarah Palin from his face. "You are right! I am the Mayor and I know I’m supposed to be in Muskoka. My brother always looks after this stuff. But I’ve got myself into some incredibly deep s***. You gotta help me. Otherwise all hell is gonna break loose.”

“What is it this time?

“It’s a photo from years ago. Now that reporter has it.”

“Is it incriminating?” said Holmes.

“Naw. It was from before I got married.”

“Then who cares these days. Claim it was photo-shopped.”

“Won’t work. They’re real negatives. The old type.”

“You have wealth Buy it back.”

“Tried. He won’t budge.”

“What is he demanding from you?”

“That I will never run for office again.”

“You will never win again regardless. What is your problem? You cannot be humiliated anymore than you already have been.”

“I know. But it’s not about me. It’s about saving Canada.” He spoke with conviction indicating delusions of importance.

He reached into his pocket. “Look. This is just a photocopy but it’s pretty clear.”

I have known Sherlock Holmes for over quarter of a century. I have seen him make close and careful examination of the most gruesome of murdered bodies, and explore the most miserable sloughs and sewers, but I had never seen his face contort with a stronger look of disgust. I came around the back of his chair so I could see what occasioned such a reaction.

“That is unspeakably horrifying!” I gasped. In the centre of the photo was our client, although much younger. Except for a pair of rubber Wellingtons he was almost stark naked, but clearly at least one hundred pounds heavier than at present. Around his neck was a leather collar, with a chain extending from it. Partially hidden by his massive body was a woman, athletic bordering on scrawny, wearing a pair of black vinyl boots that extended over her knees. In one hand she held the end of the chain and in the other a whip.

I looked at her face. “Is *that* . . . isn’t she . . .?”

“That’s her alright. She just got re-elected premier,” said the Mayor.

“But I thought,” I said, “that she . . . swung for the other team.”

“Now she does. I guess I was the last one, and after me she didn’t want to look at another male body, ever.”

“Some things,” said Holmes, “are quite understandable. But you have not in any way convinced me that there is anything here that is at all criminal.”

The Mayor responded in disbelief. “You really don’t know much about Canadian politics. I can’t quite remember the date that this pic was taken. We were celebrating and my buddies thought it would be a big laugh if they rented a . . . a dom . . .”

“A dominatrix?” I offered.

“Yeah. I was kinda s***-faced drunk and she was sort of 420 friendly back then. It was around the time of my eighteenth birthday and mighta been the night before. I can’t remember if anything sexual happened. But if it did, you know what that means?”

Holmes nodded. “She could have been engaged in an illegal act.”

“Right on, Sherlock. If it were anybody else, nobody would care. But if it coulda been criminal the Feds could get involved. That means Harper and Mackay and their gang. And they don’t like her one bit, and would start comin’ after her like flies on . . . you know.

“The cops in Toronto love her. So they’ll tell Ottawa to stick it right up their . . . sorry doc. Then the Tories’ll send in the Army. Next thing we got a standoff in Ontario. The unions’ll side with the Premier and they’ll call a general strike. The whole economy collapses and everything is *FUBAR*. It means . . .”

“We know what *FUBAR* means,” I replied.

“Okay, so when Ontario collapses those rednecks in Alberta announce that they want to be annexed by Texas. Since they’re talking about getting annexed President Vlad the Thug Putin sees his opportunity and says he’s protecting migrating Russian polar bears and he annexes the Canadian arctic. Then Obama would grow a pair and we’d have the whole freaking world war three getting fought with Canada right in the middle of it. Do you *get THAT?!?*”

Holmes said nothing. He looked at our distraught client and slowly nodded in acknowledgement.

“Very well, Your Worship. We can help you. Please come back to this office in six weeks and I will have your negatives for you.”

“Six weeks!?! This needs to get done now!”

“Summer has begun and I have been told that nothing of importance will happen in the entire country before Labour Day.”

“Yeah. Okay, see you in six weeks.” With that he levered his heavy body from the settee and walked slowly out the door.

Summer slowly passed. Nothing of importance took place. The deadline of six weeks approached and Holmes had said naught to me about the case.

On the day before the deadline he said, “If you could be available tomorrow afternoon I would be most grateful for your cooperation. You don’t mind breaking the law?”

At three o’clock the following day I received a text. “Come Watson, the game is afoot. Meet me at the Museum Underground station.”

As I approached the station entrance I saw no sign of Holmes. Instead I saw a man with a backpack surrounded by a group of young women asking for his autograph. I recognized him as that Benjamin Cumberbund actor chap who is currently pretending to be Sherlock Holmes.

Upon closer visual expression I saw that I had things completely turned around. The idol on the sidewalk was Sherlock Holmes pretending to be Benjamin Cumberbund. He excused himself from his fans.

“Now let us be on our way. I don’t suppose you brought your service revolver did you?”

“Holmes. We are in Canada. Such things are illegal. A school boy was recently arrested for pointing his finger at his playmate and saying, ‘BANG.’”

“Quite so. I have acquired for you a weapon more deadly but entirely legal.” He handed me a cell phone.

“I believe they call it a *burner*. The rest of your weapons will be found in the backpack.”

We walked to the foot of Yonge St. where there is an ugly concrete edifice that boasts of being home to

“Canada’s Unbelievably Largest Newspaper.”

Holmes entered, pretending to be what’s-his-name who is pretending to be Holmes, and walked up to the reception desk. The young lady there became wide-eyed. He whispered “Please deliver this note to a certain reporter?” She did so and returned forthwith saying that a meeting had been arranged in the reporter’s office, and could Holmes please wait five minutes and then follow her.

“Holmes, “I whispered, “what did you write that made him agree so quickly?”

“I wrote: *I have a tape. It has that guy from the TV hockey game who wears those silly clothes. He’s with the Prime Minister in a gay bath house and they’re getting it on. It’s a BEAUTY! Meet me now or I’m calling CITY TV.*”

“But that’s impossible!” I protested. “There is no way on God’s good earth that *Grapes* and the Prime Minister would be found together in a bath house. Not a chance in a million. Such a video could not possibly exist!”

“Absolutely true. Bath houses have standards and would never grant them entry. The content was *prima facie* false. But since when has that ever stood in the way of publishing a sensational story? And remember that a million is a very large number. The science of probability tells us that even the most

highly improbable event could, in one million different circumstances, possibly occur. If true, it would be the news story of a million. So the reporter has arranged a meeting in his office.”

Sherlock Holmes was then escorted up the elevator. I waited in lobby, holding the cell phone in my hand. When the text message arrived I went into action.

From the backpack I retrieved numerous smoke grenades and surreptitiously set them off them in the stairwells and elevator shafts, then pulled the fire alarms.

A general shriek went up of “Fire! Terrorist attack!” Complete pandemonium ensued. Everyone ran for the stairwells.

A few minutes later Holmes emerged into the lobby looking thoroughly pleased with himself.

“Come, Watson. Our client will arrive at 221 in a few minutes.”

I turned to him in the back seat of the cab. “Out with it. What happened up there?”

“When reporters think that their offices are on fire their instinct is to rush to save the thing that they value most. The reporter rushed to his closet. I could see him bend over and retrieve from his boots that item that we are in quest of. He hurried out of the room. I inspected the closet and saw that on the floor there was a set of what Canadians call *galoshes*. All I had to do was remove A boot from his closet and place it on his desk with a document protruding that would require him to bend to my wishes.”

On returning to 221 Bloor Street he turned to me with a slight smile. “A glass of brandy, Watson?”

I had no sooner begun the brandy than there came again that same loud thumping on our door.

“Come in,” shouted Holmes, and our massive client entered.

“You are not in disguise, Your Worship,” I noted.

“Nah. I’m outa re-hab now. Completely clean for the past two weeks. Now I need people to see me walking on the sidewalk. I’m losin’ mucho pounds. By election time I’ll be at linebacker weight, and then that Chinese babe . . . Hey, You got my negatives?”

“You will have them before five o’clock,” said Holmes. He then opened his violin case and began to play Barcarolle.

At five minutes before five o’clock we heard a loud crash as if a body had run into the door. Then came a polite knock and I opened the door.

The young man was clad in various types of body His lean body was covered with tattoos. He was sweating and had made an extreme effort to reach our office.

“It’s just 4:57, right? I made it. S*** I’ve never pedaled so fast. One of you guys is named Holmes, right?” he asked, looking at the three of us in the room.

His visual inspection stopped at the Mayor. “Holy S***!” It’s The Man Himself! No wonder it’s a f*****’ rush job. Your Dudeness, we are your fans! Can’t wait to let my buds know I did one for The Man. Hold on a sec.” He extracted his phone and held it at arms’ length. “Gotta get a selfie with The Mayor. Oh yeah, I gotta get a package too.”

Holmes handed the courier a brown envelope and sent him on his way.

The package was opened and Holmes handed a small waxed paper envelope to the Mayor. “I believe that these are your negatives.”

The Mayor held up the film. “Yup. These are them. Okay. Gotta go.” He gave both of us a hearty handshake and departed.

“What did you do to the poor reporter to have him give up his story?” I inquired.

“Everyone has a skeleton in their closet. Some sleuthing allowed me to know which high school he had attended and to secure a most unfortunate essay he had written long ago.”

He extended a photocopied document. The title read *Why Mike Harris Should be Prime Minister of Canada*. I laughed out loud. “He did not really write *that* did he?”

“The contents are even more damning. He complements Ronald Reagan and Brian Mulroney, says nasty things about, feminists, gays, and immigrants, and advocates for workfare, zero corporate taxes, and unrestricted ownership of handguns.

“Why,” I exclaimed, “if this was ever seen by his fellow journalists he would never live it down.

“Precisely,” said Holmes. “I demanded that the negatives be returned to or the essay would *go viral*. He had to cooperate. Our client is safe until his next folly.

“Dinner, Watson?”