

**B**  
*Barbara Hambly*

Further Adventures  
**Sherlock Holmes**

**The Adventure of  
The Antiquarian's Niece**

*A Novelette of 10,000 wds*



**Sherlock Holmes**  
**The Adventure of the Antiquarian's Niece**

by  
**Barbara Hambly**

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**A note to the Reader:**

This story first appeared in the anthology *Shadows Over Baker Street*, whose stories concerned Sherlock Holmes within the context of H.P. Lovecraft's Cthulhu mythos.

**SHERLOCK HOLMES**  
**THE ADVENTURE OF THE ANTIQUARIAN'S NIECE**

(by John H. Watson, M.D.)

by  
**Barbara Hambly**

In my career as the chronicler of the cases of Mr. Sherlock Holmes, I have attempted (his assertions to the contrary) to present both his successes and his failures. In most instances his keen mind and logical deductive facility led him to the solutions of seemingly insoluble puzzles. Upon some occasions, such as the strange behavior of Mrs. Effie Munro, his conclusions were astray due to unknown and unforeseen facts; on others, such as the puzzle of the dancing men or the horrifying contents of the letter received by Mr. John Openshaw, his correct assessment of the situation came too late to save the life of his client.

In a small percentage of his cases, it was simply not possible to determine the correctness or incorrectness of his reasoning because no conclusion was ever reached. Such a case was that of Mr. Burnwell Colby and his fiancée, and the abominable inhabitants of Depewatch Priory. Holmes long kept the singular memento of his investigation in a red cardboard box in his room, and if I have not written of these events before, it is because of the fearful shadow which they left upon my heart. I only now write of them now in the light of the new findings of Mr. Freud concerning the strange workings of the human mind.

Burnwell Colby came to the lodgings that I shared with Holmes in Baker Street in the summer of 1894. It was one of those sticky London afternoons that make one long for the luxury of the seashore or the Scottish moors. Confirmed Londoner that Holmes was, I am sure he was no more aware of the heat than a fish is of water: whatever conditions prevailed in the city, he preferred to be surrounded by the noise and hurry, the curious street-scenes and odd contretemps engendered by the close proximity of over a million fellow-creatures than by any amount of fresh air. As for myself, the expenses incurred by my dear wife's final illness prevented me from even thinking of quitting the metropolis – and the depression of spirits that had overtaken me from the same source sometimes prevented me from thinking at all. While Holmes never by word or look referred to my bereavement, he was an

astonishingly restful companion in those days, treating me as he always had instead of offering a sympathy which I would have found unendurable.

He was, as I recall, preparing to concoct some appalling chemical mess at the parlor table when Mrs. Hudson's knock sounded at the door. "A Mr. Burnwell Colby to see you, sir."

"What, at this season of the year?" Holmes thumbed the card she handed him, angled it to the window's glaring light. "Heavy stock, one-and-six the hundred, printed in America in a typeface of a restraint generally only found in the most petrified of diplomatic circles but smelling of..." He broke off, and glanced at Mrs. Hudson with eyes suddenly sharp with wary interest. "Yes," he said. "Yes, I shall see this gentleman. Watson, if you would remain I would much appreciate an outsider's unbiased view of our guest."

For I had folded together the newspaper which for the past hour I had stared at, unseeing, preparatory to making a retreat to my bedroom. To tell the truth I welcomed the invitation to remain, and helped Holmes in his rapid disposal of alembic and pipettes into his own chamber. As I reached down for the card, still lying on the much-scarred rosewood, Holmes twitched it from my fingers and slipped it into an envelope, which he set in an obscure corner of the bookcase. "Let us not drip premature surmise into the distilled waters of your observation," he said with a smile. "I am curious to read what would be writ upon a *tabula rasa*."

"Behold me unbesmirched," I replied, throwing up my hands, and settled back onto the settee as the door opened to admit one of the most robust specimens of American manhood that it has ever been my privilege to encounter. Six feet tall, broad of shoulder and chest, he had dark eyes luminous with intelligence under a noble brow in a rather long face, and by his well-cut, if rather American, brown suit and gloves of fawn kid, he clearly added material wealth to the blessings of kindly nature. He held out his hand to Holmes and introduced himself, and Holmes inclined his head.

"And this is my partner and amanuensis, Dr. Watson," said Holmes, and Mr. Colby turned unhesitatingly to shake my hand. "Anything that may be said to me, may be said in his presence as well."

"Of course," said Colby, in his deep, pleasing voice, "of course. I have no secrets - that's what gravels me." And he shook his head with a ghost of a chuckle. "The Colbys are one of the wealthiest families in New England: we've traded with China for fifty years and with India for twice that, and our railroad interests now will better those profits a thousand percent. I've been educated at Harvard and Oxford, and if I may say so without tooting my own horn, I'm reasonably good to look on and I don't eat with my knife or sleep in my boots. So what would there be about me, Mr. Holmes, that would cause a

respectable girl's guardians to reject my suit out of hand and forbid me to exchange a word with her?"

"Oh, I could name a dozen commonplace possibilities," replied Holmes, gesturing him to a chair. "And a score more if we wished to peruse a catalogue of the *outré*. Perhaps you could tell me, Mr. Colby, the name of this unfortunate young lady and the circumstances under which you were so rudely ejected from her parents' favor?"

"Guardians," corrected our visitor. "Her uncle is the Honorable Carstairs Delapore, and her grandfather, Gaius, Viscount Delapore of Depewatch Priory in Shropshire. It's a crumbling, mouldering, Gothic old pile, sinking into decay. My family's money could easily rescue it – as I've said to Mr. Delapore, any number of times, and he agrees with me."

"A curious thing to do, for a man rejecting your suit."

Colby's breath gusted again in exasperated laughter. "Isn't it? It isn't as if I were a stranger off the street, Mr. Holmes. I've been Mr. Delapore's pupil for a year, have lived in his household on week-ends, eaten at his table. When I first came to study with him I could have sworn he approved of my love for Judith."

"And what, precisely, would you say is the nature of Mr. Delapore's teaching?" Holmes leaned back in the basket-chair, fingertips pressed lightly together, closely watching the young American's face.

"I guess you'd say he's ... an antiquarian." Colby's voice was hesitant, as if picking his words. "One of the most remarkable students of ancient folklore and legend in the world. Indeed, it was in the hopes of studying with him that I came to Oxford. I am – I guess you might call me the intellectual black sheep of the Colby family." He chuckled again. "My father left the firm to my brothers and myself, but on the whole I've been content to let them run it as they wished. The making of money ... the constant clamor of stocks and rail-shares and directors ... From the time I was a small boy I sensed there were deeper matters than that in the world, forgotten shadows lurking behind the gaslights' artificial glare."

Holmes said nothing to this, but his eyelids lowered, as if he were listening for something behind the words. Colby, hands clasped, seemed almost to have forgotten his presence, or mine, or the reality of the stuffy summer heat. He went on, "I had corresponded with Carstairs Delapore on ... on the subject of some of the more obscure Lammas-tide customs of the Welsh borderlands. As I'd hoped, he agreed to guide my studies, both at Oxford and, later, among the books of his private collection – marvelous volumes that clarified ancient folkloric rites and put them into contexts of philosophy, history, the very fabric of time itself! Depewatch Priory..."

He seemed to come to himself with a start, glanced at Holmes, then at me, and went on in a more constrained voice, "It was at Depewatch Priory that I first met Mr. Delapore's niece, Judith. She is eighteen, the daughter of Mr. Delapore's brother Fynch, a spirit of light and innocence in that ... in that dreary old pile. She had just returned from finishing-school in Switzerland, though plans for her come-out into London society had run aground on the family's poverty. Any other girl I know would have been pouting and in tears at being robbed of her season on the town. Not she! She bore it bravely and sweetly, though it was clear that she faced a lifetime of stagnation in a tiny mountain town, looking after a decrepit house and a ... a difficult old man."

From his jacket pocket Colby withdrew an embossed cardboard photograph-case, opening it to show the image of a most beautiful young lady. Thin and rather fragile-looking, she wore her soft curls in a chignon. Her eyes seemed light, blue or hazel so far as I could tell from the photograph, her hair a medium shade – perhaps red, but more likely light brown – and her complexion pale to ghostliness. Her expression was one of grave innocence, trusting and unself-conscious.

"Old Viscount Delapore is a grim old autocrat who rules his son, his niece, and every soul in the village of Watchgate as if it were 1394 instead of 1894. He owns all of the land thereabouts – the family has, I gather, from time immemorial – and so violent is his temper that the villagers dare not cross him. From the first moment Judith declared her love for me, I offered to take her away from the place – to take her clean out of the country, if need be, though I hardly think he would come after her, as she seems to fear."

"Does she fear her grandfather?" Holmes turned the photograph thoughtfully over in his hands, examining the back as well as the front most minutely.

Colby nodded, his face clouding with anger. "She claims she's free to come and go, that there's no influence being brought to bear upon her. But there is, Mr. Holmes, there is! When she speaks of Viscount Gaius she glances over her shoulder, as if she imagines he could hear her wherever she is. And the look in her lovely eyes ...! She fears him, Mr. Holmes. He has some evil and unwholesome hold upon the girl. He's not her legal guardian – that's Mr. Carstairs Delapore. But the old man's influence extends to his son as well. When I received this –" He drew from the same pocket as the photograph a single sheet of folded paper, which he passed across to Holmes, "I begged him to countermand his father's order, to at least let me present my case. But this card ..." He handed a large, stiff note to Holmes, "was all I got back."

The letter was dated August 16, four days ago.

*“My best beloved,*

*“My heart is torn from my breast by this most terrible news. My grandfather has forbidden me to see you again, forbidden even that your name be mentioned in this house. He will give no reason for this beyond that it is his will that I remain here with him, as his servant – I fear, as his slave! I have written to my father but fear he will do nothing. I am in despair! Do nothing, but wait and be ready.*

*“Thine only,  
Judith.”*

The delicate pink paper, scented with patchouli and with the faint smoke of the oil-lamp by which it must have been written, was blotted with tears.

Her father's card said merely:

“Remove her from your thoughts. There is nothing which can be done.”

Burnwell Colby smote the palm of one hand with the fist of the other, and his strong jaw jutted forward. “My grandfather didn't let the mandarins of Hong Kong chase him away, and my father refused to be stopped by Sioux Indians or winter snows in the Rockies,” he declared. “Nor shall this stop me. Will you find out for me, Mr. Holmes, what vile hold Lord Gaius has upon his granddaughter and his son, that I may free the gentlest girl that ever lived from the clutches of an evil old man who seeks to make a drudge of her forever?”

“And is this all,” asked Holmes, raising his eyelids to meet the American's earnest gaze, “that you have to tell me about Carstairs Delapore and his father? Or about these 'lurking shadows' that are Delapore's study?”

The young man frowned, as if the question took him momentarily aback. “Oh, the squeamish may speak of decadence,” he said after a moment, not off-handedly, but as if carefully considering his words. “And some of the practices which Delapore has uncovered are fairly ugly by modern standards. Certainly they'd make my old pater blink, and my poor hidebround brothers.” He chuckled, as if at the recollection of a schoolboy prank. “But at bottom it's all only legends, you know, and bogies in the dark.”

“Indeed,” said Holmes, rising, and held out his hand to the young suitor. “I shall learn of this what I can, Mr. Colby. Where might I reach you?”

“The Excelsior Hotel in Brighton.” The young man fished from his vest-pocket a card to write the address upon – he seemed to carry everything loose in his pockets, jumbled together like cabbages in a barrow. “I always stay there,” he explained as he scribbled. “It was how Miss Delapore knew where to reach me. How you can abide to remain in town in weather like this beats

me!” And he departed, apparently unaware that not everyone's grandfather rammed opium down Chinese throats in order to pay the Excelsior's summer-holiday prices.

“So what do you think of our American Romeo?” inquired Holmes, as the rattle of Colby's cab departed down Baker Street. “What sort of man does he appear to be?”

“A wealthy one,” I said, still stung by that careless remark about those who remained in town. “One not used to hearing the word 'No.' But earnest and good of heart, I would say. Certainly he takes a balanced view of these 'decadent' studies – to which the Delapores can scarcely object, if they share them.”

“True enough.” Holmes set letter and note upon the table, and went to the bookcase to draw out his copy of the *Court Gazette*, which was so interleaved with snipped-out society columns, newspaper clippings, and notes in Holmes' neat, strong handwriting as to bulge to almost double its original size. “But what are the nature of these folkloric 'practices' which are 'fairly ugly by modern standards?' Ugliness by the standards of a world which has invented the Maxim gun can scarcely be termed bogies in the dark.

“Carstairs Delapore,” he read, opening the book upon his long arm. “Questioned concerning his whereabouts on the night of the 27th August, 1890, when the owner of a public house in Whitechapel reported her ten-year-old son Thomas missing; a man of Delapore's description – he is evidently of fairly unforgettable appearance – seen speaking with the boy that evening. Thomas never found. I thought I recognized the name. Delapore was also questioned in 1873 by the Manchester police – he was in that city, for no discernable reason, when two little mill-girls went missing ... I must say I'm astonished that anyone reported their disappearance. Mudlarks and street-urchins vanish every day from the streets of London and no one inquires after them anymore than one inquires the whereabouts of butterflies once they flutter over the garden fence. A man need not even be very clever, to kidnap children in London.” He shut the book, his eyes narrowing as he turned his gaze to the endless wasteland of brick that lay beyond the window. “Merely careful to pick the dirtiest and hungriest, and those without parents or homes.”

“That's a serious conclusion to jump to,” I said, startled and repelled.

“It is,” Holmes replied. “Which is why I jump to nothing. But Gaius, Viscount Delapore was mentioned three times in the early reports of the Metropolitan police – between 1833 and 1850 – in connection with precisely such investigations, at the same time that he was publishing a series of monographs on 'Demonic Ritual Survivals along the Welsh Borders' for the discredited Eye of Dawn Society. And in 1863 an American reporter

disappeared while investigating rumors of a pagan cult in western Shropshire, not five miles from Watchgate village, which lies below the hill upon which Depewatch Priory stands.”

“But even so,” I said, “even if the Delapores are involved in some kind of theosophistic studies – or white slaving for that matter – would they not seek rather to get an outsider like Delapore's niece out of the house, rather than keeping her there as a potential source of trouble? And how would the old man use a pack of occult rubbish to dominate his granddaughter and his son against their will?”

“How indeed?” Holmes went to the book-case again, and took down the envelope in which he had bestowed Burnwell Colby's card. “I, too, found our American visitor – despite his patent desire to disown association with his hidebound and boring family – an ingenuous and harmless young man. Which makes this all the more curious.”

He held out the envelope to me, and I took it out and examined it as he had. The stock, as he had said, was expensive and the typeface rigidly correct, although the card itself bore slight traces of having been carried about loose in Mr. Colby's pockets with pens, notes, and photographs of his beloved Judith. Only when I brought it close to examine the small dents and scratches on its surface was I conscious of the smell that seemed to imbue the thick, soft paper, a nauseating mix of frankincense, charred hair, and...

I looked up at Holmes, my eyes wide. I had been a soldier in India, and a physician for most of my life. I knew the smell.

“Blood,” I said.

\*

The note Holmes sent that afternoon received an answer within hours, and after we had finished our supper he invited me to accompany him to the home of a friend on the Embankment near the Temple: “A curious customer who may fill in for you some hitherto unsuspected colors in the palette of London life,” he said. Mr. Carnaki was a thin young man of medium height and attenuated build, whose large gray eyes regarded one from behind thick spectacle lenses with an expression it is hard to define: as if he were always watching for something that others do not see. His tall, narrow house was filled with books, even lining the walls of the hallways on both sides so that a broad-built man would have been obliged to sidle through crab-wise, and through the darkened doorways I glimpsed the flicker of gas-light across what appeared to be complex chemical and electrical apparatus. He listened to Holmes' account of Burnwell Colby's visit without comment, his chin resting

on one long, spidery hand, then rose from his chair and climbed a pair of steps to an upper shelf of one of the many book-cases that walled the small study at the back of the house to which he'd led us.

“Depewatch Priory,” he read aloud, “stands on a cliff above the village of Watchgate in the wild hill country on the borders of Wales, where in 1215 King John confirmed the appointment of an Augustinian prior over an existing 'hooly howse' of religious said to date back to foundation by Joseph of Arimathea. It appears from its inception to have been the center of a cycle of legends and whispers: indeed, the King's original intent was apparently to have the place pulled down and salt strewed on its foundations. One Philip of Mundberg petitioned Edward IV, describing the monks there engaged in 'comerce wyth daemons yt did issue forth from Hell, and make knowne theyr wants by means of certain dremes,' but he apparently never reached the King himself and the investigation was dropped. There were repeated accusations of heresy involving the transmigration of the souls of certain priors, rumors which apparently transferred themselves to the Grimsley family to whom Henry VIII presented the priory in 1540, and surfaced in the 1780s in connection with the Delapores, who succeeded them through marriage.

“William Punt ...” He tapped the black leathern covers of the volume as he set it on the table beside Holmes, “in his *Catalogue of Secret Abominations* described the place in 1793 as being a 'goodly manor of gray stone' built upon the foundations of the Plantagenet cloister, but says that the original core of the establishment is the ruin of a tower, probably Roman in origin. Punt speaks of stairs leading down to a sub-crypt, where the priors used to sleep upon a crude altar after appalling rites. When Lord Rupert Grimsley was murdered by his wife and daughters in 1687, they apparently boiled his body and buried his bones in the sub-crypt, reserving his skull, which they placed in a niche at the foot of the main stair in the manor-house itself, 'that evil dare not pass.'”

I could not repress a chuckle. “As protective totems go, it didn't do Lord Rupert much good, did it?”

“I daresay not,” returned Holmes with a smile. “Yet my reading of the 1840 Amsterdam edition of Punt's *Catalogue* leads me to infer that the local population didn't regard Rupert Grimsley's murder as particularly evil; the villagers impeded the Metropolitan police in the pursuit of their duties to such effect that the three murderesses got completely away.”

“Good heavens, yes.” Carnaki turned, and drew out another volume, more innocuous than the sinister-looking tome of abominations: this one was simply a *History of West Country Families*, as heavily interleaved with clippings and notes as was Holmes' *Gazette*. “Rupert Grimsley was feared as

a sorcerer from Shrewsbury to the Estuary; he is widely reputed to have worked the roads as a highwayman, carrying off, not valuables, but travelers who were never seen again. Demons were said to come and go at his command, and at least two lunatics from that section of the Welsh border – one in the early part of the eighteenth century and one as recently as 1842 – swore that old Lord Rupert dwelled in the bodies of all the successive Lords of Depewatch.”

“You mean that he was being constantly reincarnated?” I admit this surfacing of this Thibetan belief in the prosaic hill-country of Wales startled me considerably.

Carnaki shook his head. “That the spirit – the consciousness – of Rupert Grimsley passed from body to body, battenning like a parasite upon that of the heir and driving out the younger man's soul, as the human portion of each Lord of Depewatch died.”

The young antiquarian looked so serious as he said this that again I was hard-put to suffocate a laugh; Carnaki's expression did not alter, but his eyes flicked from my face to Holmes'. “I suppose,” said the young man after a moment, “that this had something to do with the fact that each of the gentlemen in question were rumored to be involved with mysterious disappearances among the coal-miners of the district: Viscount Gerald Delapore, who is reputed to have undergone so terrifying a change in personality at his accession to the title that his wife left him and fled to America ... and the young Gaius Delapore himself.”

“Indeed?” Holmes leaned forward eagerly in his chair, his hand still resting on the *Catalogue*, which he had been examining with the delighted reverence of a true lover of ancient volumes. He had hardly taken his eyes from the many tomes that stacked every table and most of the corners of Carnaki's little study, some of them the musty calf or morocco of Georgian bookbinders, others the heavier, more archaic black-letter incunabula of the early days of printing, with not a few older still, hand-written in Latin upon parchment or vellum and illuminated with spidery marginalia that even at a distance disturbed me by their anomalous *bizarrité*. “And what, precisely, is the evil that is ascribed by legend to Depewatch Priory, and for what purpose did Rupert Grimsley and his successors seek out those who had no power, and whom society would not miss?”

Carnaki set aside his History and seated himself on the oak bookcase steps, his long, thin arms resting on his knees. He glanced again at me, not as if I had offended him with my earlier laughter but as if gauging how to phrase things so that I would understand them; then his eyes returned to Holmes.

“You have heard, I think, of the six thousand steps, that are hinted at –

never directly – in the remote legends of both the old Cymric tribes that preceded the Celts, and of the American Indian? Of the pit that lies deep at the heart of the world, and of the entities that are said to dwell in the abysses beyond it?”

“I have heard of these things,” said Holmes quietly. “There was a case in Arkham, Massachusetts, in 1869...”

“The Whateley case, yes.” Carnaki's long, sensitive mouth twitched with remembered distaste, and his glance turned to me. “These legends – remembered only through two cults of quite shockingly degenerate Indian tribes, one in Maine and the other, curiously, in northeastern Arizona, where they are shunned by the surrounding Navajo and Hopi – speak of things, entities, sentient yet not wholly material, that have occupied the lightless chasms of space and time since the days before humankind's furthest ancestors first stood upright. These elder beings fear the light of the sun, yet with the coming of darkness would creep forth from certain places in the world to prey upon human bodies and human dreams, through the centuries making surprising and dreadful bargains with individuals of mankind in return for most hideous payment.”

“And this is what Gaius Delapore and his son believe they have in their basement?” My eyebrows shot up. “It should make it easy enough for us to assist young Mr. Colby in freeing his fiancée from the influence of two obvious lunatics.”

Holmes said softly, “So it should.”

\*

We remained at Carnaki's until nearly midnight, while Holmes and the young antiquarian – for so I assumed Carnaki to be – spoke of the appalling folkloric and theosophical speculations that evidently fuelled Viscount Delapore's madness: hideous tales of creatures beyond human imaginings or human dreams, monstrous legends of dim survivals from impossibly ancient aeons, and of those deluded madmen whose twisted minds accepted such absurdities for truth. Holmes was right in his assertion that the visit would supply the palette of my knowledge of London with hitherto unsuspected hues. What surprised me was Holmes' knowledge of such things, for on the whole he was a man of practical bent, never giving his attention to a subject unless it was with some end in view.

Yet when Carnaki spoke of the abomination of abominations, of the terrible amorphous shuggoths and the Watcher Of the Gate, Holmes nodded, as one does who hears familiar names. The shocking rites engaged in by the

covens of ancient believers, whether American Indians or decayed cults to be found in the fastnesses of Greenland or Thibet, did not surprise him, and it was he, not our host, who spoke of the insane legend of the shapeless god who plays the pipe in the dark heart of chaos, and who sends forth the dreams that drive men mad.

“I did not know that you made a study of such absurdities, Holmes,” I said, when we stood once more on the fog-shrouded Embankment, listening for the approaching clip of a cab-horse's hooves. “I would hardly have said theosophy was your line.”

“My line is anything that will – or has – provided a motive for men's crimes, Watson.” He lifted his hand and whistled for the Jehu, an eerie sound in the muffled stillness. His face in the glare of the gaslight seemed pale and set. “Whether a man bows down to God or Mammon or to Cthulhu in his dark house at R'lyeh is no affair of mine... Until he sheds one drop of blood not his own in his deity's name. Then God have mercy upon him, for I shall not.”

All of these events took place on Monday, the 20th of August. The following day Holmes was engaged with turning over the pages of his scrapbooks of clippings regarding unsolved crimes, seeming, it appeared to me, to concentrate on disappearances during the later part of the summer in years back almost to the beginning of the century. On Wednesday Mrs. Hudson sent up the familiar elegantly restrained calling-card of the American folklorist, the man himself following hard upon her heels and almost thrusting her out of the way as he entered our parlor.

“Well, Holmes, it's all settled and done with,” he declared, in a loud voice very unlike his own. “Thank you for your patience with old Delapore's damned rodomontade, but I've seen the old man myself – he came down to town yesterday, damn his impudence – and made him see reason.”

“Have you?” asked Holmes politely, gesturing to the chair in which he had first sat.

Colby waved him impatiently away. “Simplest thing in nature, really. Feed a cur and he'll shut up barking. And here's for you.” And he drew from his pocket a small leather bag which he tossed carelessly onto the table. It struck with the heavy, metallic ring of golden coin. “Thank you again.”

“And I thank you.” Holmes bowed, but he watched Colby's face as he spoke, and I could see his own face had turned very pale. “Surely you are too generous.”

“S'blood, man, what's a few guineas to me? I can tear up little Judi's poor letter, now we're to be wed all right and tight...” He winked lewdly at Holmes, and held out his hand. “And her old Dad's damned impudent note as well, if you would.”

Holmes looked around him vaguely, and picked up various of his scrapbooks from the table to look beneath them: "Didn't you tuck it behind the clock?" I asked.

"Did I?" Holmes went immediately to the mantle – cluttered as always with newspapers, books, and unanswered correspondence – and after a brief search shook his head. "I shall find it, never fear," he said, his brow furrowing. "And return it, if you would be so kind as to give me your direction once more."

Colby hesitated, then snatched the nearest piece of paper from the table – a bill from Holmes' tailor, I believe it was – and scribbled an address upon it. "I'm off to Watchgate this afternoon," he said. "This will find me."

"Thank you," said Holmes, and I noticed that he neither touched the paper, nor came within arms' reach of the man who stood before him. "I shall have it in the post before nightfall. I can't think what can have become of it. It has been a pleasure to make your acquaintance, Mr. Colby. My felicitations on the happy outcome of your suit."

When Colby was gone Holmes stood for a time beside the table, looking after him a little blankly, his hands knotted into fists where they rested among the scrap-books. He whispered, "Damn him," as if he had forgotten my presence in the room. "My God, I had not believed it..."

Then, turning sharply, he went to the mantelpiece and immediately withdrew from behind the clock the note which Carstairs Delapore had sent to Colby. This he tucked into an envelope and sealed. As he copied the direction he asked in a stiff, expressionless tone, "What did you make of our guest, Watson?"

"That success has made him bumptious," I replied, for I had liked Colby less in his elevated and energized mood than I had when he was merely unthinking about his own and other peoples' money. "Holmes, what is it? What's wrong?"

"Did you happen to notice which hand he wrote out his direction with?"

I thought for a moment, picturing the man scribbling, then said, "His left."

"Yet when he wrote the address of the Hotel Excelsior the day before yesterday," said Holmes, "he did so with his right hand."

"So he did." I came to his side and picked up the tailor's bill, and compared the writing on it with that of the Excelsior address, which lay on the table among the scrapbooks and clippings. "That would account for the hand being so very different."

Holmes said, "Indeed." But he spoke looking out the window into Baker Street, and the harsh glare of the morning sunlight gave his eyes a steely cast, faraway and cold, as if he saw from a distance some terrible event taking

place. "I am going to Shropshire, Watson," he said after a moment. "I'm leaving tonight, on the last train; I should be back..."

"Then you find Viscount Gaius' sudden capitulation as sinister as I do," I said.

He looked at me with blank surprise, as if that construction of young Colby's information had been the farthest thing from his mind. Then he laughed, a single sharp mirthless breath, and said, "Yes. Yes, I find it ... sinister."

"Do you think young Colby is walking into some peril, returning to Depewatch Priory?"

"I think my client is in peril, yes," said Holmes quietly. "And if I cannot save him, then the least that I can do is avenge."

\*

Holmes at first refused to hear of me accompanying him to the borders of Wales, sending instead a note to Carnaki with instructions to be ready to depart by the eight o'clock train. But when Billy the messenger-boy returned with the information that Carnaki was from home and would not return until the following day, he assented, sending a second communication to the young antiquarian requesting that he meet us in the village of High Clum, a few miles from Watchgate, the following day.

It puzzled me that Holmes should have chosen the late train, if he feared for Colby's life should the young man return to fetch his fiancée from the hands of the two monomaniacs at Depewatch Priory. Still more did it puzzle me that, upon our arrival at midnight in the market town of High Clum, Holmes took rooms for us at the Cross of Gold, as if he were deliberately putting distance between us and the man he spoke of – when he could be induced to speak at all – as if he were already dead.

In the morning, instead of attempting to communicate with Colby, Holmes hired a pony trap and a boy to drive us to the wooded ridge that divided High Clum from the vale in which the village of Watchgate stood. "Queer folk there," the lad said, as the sturdy cob leaned into its collars on the slope. "It's only a matter of four mile, but it's like as if they lived in another land. You never do hear of one of their lads come courtin' in Clum, and the folk there's so odd now none of ours'n will go there. They come for the market, oncet a week. Sometimes you'll see Mr. Carstairs drive to town, all bent and withered up like a tree hit by lightnin', starin' about him with those pale eyes: yellow hazel, like all the Delapore; rotten apples my mum calls 'em. And old Gaius with him sometimes, treatin' him like as if he was a dog, the way he treats

everyone.”

The boy drew his horse to a halt, and pointed out across the valley with his whip: “That'll be the Priory, sir.”

After all that had been spoken of monstrous survivals and ancient cults, I had half-expected to see some blackened Gothic pile thrusting flamboyant spires above the level of the trees. But in fact, as Carnaki had read in William Punt's book, Depewatch Priory appeared, from across the valley, to be simply a 'goodly manor of gray stone,' its walls rather overgrown with ivy and several windows broken and boarded shut. I frowned, remembering the casual way in which Colby had thrown his sack of guineas onto Holmes' table: Feed a cur and he'll shut up barking...

Yet old Gaius had originally turned down Colby's offer to help him bring the Priory back into proper repair.

Behind the low roof-line of the original house I could see what had to be the Roman tower Carnaki had spoken of – beyond doubt the original “watch” of both priory and village names. It had clearly been kept in intermittent repair up until the early part of this century, an astonishing survival. Beneath it, I recalled, Carnaki had said the sub-crypt lay: the center of that decadent cult that dated to pre-Roman times. I found myself wondering if old Gaius descended the stairs to sleep on the ancient altar, as the notorious Lord Rupert Grimsley had been said to sleep, and if so, what dreams had come to him there.

After London's stuffy heat the thick-wooded foothills were deliciously cool. The breezes brought the scent of water from the heights, and the sharp nip of rain. Perhaps this contrast was what brought upon me what happened later that day, and that horrible night - -I know not. For surely, after I returned to the Cross of Gold, I must have come down ill, and lain delirious. There is no other explanation – I pray there is no other explanation - -for the ghastly dreams, worse than any delirium I experienced while sick with fever in India, that dragged me through abysses of horror while I slept and have for years shadowed not only my sleep, but upon occasion my waking as well.

I remember that Holmes took the trap to the station to meet Carnaki. I remember, too, sitting by the window of our pleasant sitting-room, cleaning my pistol, for I feared that, if Holmes had in fact found some proof that the evil Viscount had kidnapped beggar-children for some ancient and unspeakable rite, there might be trouble when we confronted the old autocrat with it. I certainly felt no preliminary shiver, no premonitory dizziness of fever, when I rose to answer the knock at the parlor door.

The man who stood framed there could be no one but Carstairs Delapore. “Withered all up like a tree hit by lightning”, the stable-lad had said: had his

back been straight he still would not have been as tall as I, and he looked up at me sideways, twisting his head upon a skinny neck like a bird's.

His eyes were a light hazel, almost golden, as the boy had said.

They are my last memory of the waking world that afternoon.

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I dreamed of lying in darkness. I ached all over, my neck and spine pinched and stiff, and from somewhere near me I heard a thin, harsh sobbing, like an old man in terror or pain. I called out: “Who is it? What is wrong?” and my voice sounded hoarse in my own ears, like the rusty caw of a crow, as alien as my body felt when I tried to move.

“My God,” sobbed the old man's voice, “my God, the pit of six thousand stairs! It is Lammas-tide, the night of sacrifice – dear God, dear God save me! *Iä!* Shub-Niggurath! It waits for us, waits for us, the Goat With Ten Thousand Young!”

I crawled across an uneven floor, wet and slimy, and the smells around me were the scents of deep earth, dripping rock, and far off the terrible foetors of still worse things: corruption, charred flesh, and the sickeningly familiar scent of incense. My hands touched my companion in this darkness and he pulled away: “No, never! Fiends, that you used poor Judith as bait, to bring me to you! The Hooded Thing in the darkness taught you how, as it taught others before you – showed you the passages in the *Book of Eibon* – told you how to take the bodies of others, how to leave their minds trapped in your old and dying body ... the body that you then sacrificed to them! A new body, a strong body, a man's body, healthy and fit...”

“Hush,” I whispered, “hush, you are raving! Who are you, where is this?” Again I touched his hands, and felt the stick-like bones and flaccid, silky flesh of a very old man. At the same moment those frail hands fumbled at my face, my shoulders in the dark, and he cried out:

“Get away from me! You weren't good enough for him, twisted and crippled and weak! And your daughter only a woman, without the power of a man! It was all a trap, wasn't it? A trap to lure me, thinking it was *she* who sent for me to set her free...” His thin voice rose to a shriek and he thrust me from him with feeble hysteria. “And now you will send me down to the pit, down to the pit of the shuggoths!” As his sobs changed to thin, giggling laughter I heard a stirring, far away in the darkness; a sougning, as if of the movement of things infinitely huge, and soft.

I staggered to my feet, my legs responding queerly; I reeled and limped like a drunken man. I followed the wall in darkness, feeling it to be in places

ancient stones set without mortar, and in others the naked rock of the hill itself. There was a door, dessicated wood strapped with iron that grated, rusty and harsh, under my hands. I stumbled back into the darkness, and struck against something – a stone table, pitted with ancient carvings – and beside it found the only means of egress, a square opening in the floor, in which a flight of worn, shallow steps led downwards.

Gropingly I descended, hands outstretched on either side to feel the wet rock of the wall that sometimes narrowed to the straitest of seams: terrified of what might lie below me, yet I feared to be in the power of the madmen I knew to be above. I was dizzy, panting, my mind prey to a thousand illusions, the most terrifying of which was that of the sounds that I seemed to hear, not above me, but below.

In time the darkness glowed with thin smears of blue phosphor, illuminating the abyss below me. Far down I could descry a chamber, a sort of high-roofed cave where the nitre dripped from the walls and showed up a crumbling stone altar, ruinously ancient and stained black with horrible corruption. There was an obscene aberration to the entire geometry of the chamber, as if the angles of floor and walls should not have met in the fashion they appeared to; as if I viewed an optical illusion, a trick of darkness and shadow. From the innermost angle of that chamber darkness issued, like a thicker flow of night, blackness that seemed one moment to congeal into discrete forms which the next proved to be only inchoate stirrings. Yet there was something there, something the fear of which kept me from moving on, from making a sound – from breathing, even, lest the gasp of my breath bring upon me some unimaginably nightmarish fate.

My fellow captive's high, hysterical giggling on the stair above me drove me into a niche in the wet rock. He was coming down – and he was not alone. Pressed into the narrow darkness I only heard the sounds of bodies passing on the stair. A moment later others followed them, while I crouched, praying to all the gods ever worshipped by fearful man to be spared the notice of anything that walked that eldritch abyss. At the same moment sounds rose from below, a rhythmless wailing or chittering that nevertheless seemed to hold the form of music, underlain by a thick lapping or surging sound, as if of thick, unspeakably vile liquid rising among stones.

Looking around the sheltering coign of rock, I saw by the growing purplish hell-glare below me the tall figure of Burnwell Colby, standing beside the altar, an unfleshed skull held upraised in his hands. Darkness ringed him, but it seemed almost as if the skull itself gave light, a pulsing and horrible radiation that showed me – almost – the shapes of which the utter blackness was comprised. I bit my hand to keep from crying out, and

wondered that the pain of it did not wake me; an old man lay on the altar, and by his sobbing giggles I knew him to be he who had been shut into the stone crypt above with me. Colby's deep voice rang out above the strident piping: "*Ygnaiih ... ygnaiih ... thflthkh'ngha...*"

And the things in the darkness – horrible half-seen suggestions of squamous, eyeless heads, of tentacles glistening and of small round mouths opening and closing with an appalling glint of teeth – answered with a thick and greedy wail.

"*H'ehye n'grkdl'lh, h'ehye ...* in the name of Yog-Sothoth I call, I command..."

Something – I know not what nor do I dare to think – raised itself behind the altar, something shapeless that glowed and yet seemed to swallow all light, hooded in utter darkness. The old man on the altar began to scream, a high thin steady shriek of absolute terror, and Colby shouted, "I command you ... I command ...!" Then it seemed to me that he gasped, and swallowed, as if his breath stopped within his lungs, before he held up the skull again and cried, "*Ngrkdl'lh y'bthnk*, Shub-Niggurath! In the name of the Goat With Ten Thousand Young I command!"

Then the darkness swallowed the altar, and where a moment before I could see the old man writhing there I could see only churning darkness, while a hideous foetor of blood and death rolled up from the pit, nearly making me faint. "Before the Five Hundred," cried Colby ... then he staggered suddenly, nearly dropping the skull he held. "Before the Five Hundred..."

He gasped, as if struggling to speak. The thing upon the altar lifted its hooded head, and in the sudden silence the dreadful lapping sound of the deeper darkness seemed to fill the unholy place, and the far-off answering echo of the now-silenced pipes.

Then with a cry Colby fell to his knees, the skull slipping from his hands. He choked, grasping for it, and from the darkness of the stair behind him another form darted forward, small and slim, and stooped to snatch up the talisman skull of the terrible ancestor who had ruled this place.

"*Ygnaiih, ygnaiih* Yog-Sothoth!" cried a woman's voice, high and powerful, filling the hideous chamber, and the darkness that had surged forward toward her seemed for a moment to close in as it had closed around the old man on the altar, then to fall back. By the queer, actinic luminosity of the skull I could see the woman's face, and recognized her as Judith Delapore, niece and granddaughter of the madmen who ruled Depewatch. Yet how different from the sweet countenance painted on Colby's miniature! Like the ivory mask of a goddess, cold and lined with concentration, she bent her eyes

on the heaving swirl of nightmare that surrounded her, not even glancing at her lover, who lay gasping, twisting in convulsions at her feet. In a high, hard voice she repeated the dreadful words of the incantations, and neither flinched nor wavered as the dreadful things that flittered and crawled and bounced in the darkness.

Only when the hideous rite was ended, and the unspeakable congregation had trickled away through the blasphemous angle of the inner walls, did the young woman lower the skull she held. She stood in her black gown, outlined in the gleam of the nitre on the walls, staring into the abyss from which those dreadful unhuman things had come, barely seeming to notice me as I stumbled and staggered down the last of the stairs.

Of the old man's body that had lain upon the altar nothing whatsoever remained. A thick layer of slime covered the stone and ran down onto the floor, which was perhaps half an inch deep in a brownish liquid that glistened in the feeble blue gleam of the nitre. Having seen Burnwell Colby engulfed by that wriggling darkness I staggered to where he had lain with some confused idea of helping him, but as I dropped to my knees I saw that only a lumpy mass of half-dissolved flesh and bones remained. The bones themselves had the appearance of being charred, almost melted. I looked up in horror at the woman with the skull and her eyes met mine, clear golden hazel, like other eyes I could not quite recall. Her eyes widened and filled with anger and hate:

“You,” she whispered. “So you did not take him after all?”

I only shook my head, her words making no sense to me in my shaken state, and she went on, “As you have seen, Uncle, it is I, now, and not Grandfather – Grandfather who has not existed for over fifty years – who rules now here.” And to my horror she held out her hand toward that hideously anomalous angle of the walls where the darkness lay waiting. “*Y'bfnk – ng'haiie...*”

I cried out. At the same instant light blazed up on the stairway that led to the upper and innocent realms of the ignorant world: blue-white incandescence, like lightning, and the crackle of ozone filled the reeking air.

“My dear Miss Delapore,” said Holmes, “if you will pardon my interruption, I fear you are laboring under a misapprehension.” He came down the last of the stair, bearing in one hand a metal rod, from which a flickering corona of electricity seemed to sparkle, flowing back to a similar rod held up by Carnaki, who followed him down the stair. Carnaki wore a sort of pack or rucksack upon his back, of the kind one sees porters in Constantinople carrying; a dozen wires joined it to the rod in his hand, and lightnings leaped from that rod to Holmes', seeming to surround the two men in a deadly

nimbus of light. The cold glare blanched all color from his face, so that his eyebrows stood out nearly black, like a man who has received a mortal blow and bleeds within.

Looking down at me he asked, as if we shared a cup of tea at Baker Street, “What was your wife's favorite flower?”

Miss Delapore, startled, opened her mouth to speak, but I cried in a convulsion of grief: “How can you ask that, Holmes? How can you speak of my Mary in this place, after what we have seen? Her life was all goodness, all joy, and it was for *nothing*, do you understand? If this – this blasphemy – this monstrous abyss underlies all of our world, how can any good, any joy exist in safety? It is a mockery – love, care, tenderness ... it means nothing, and we are all fools for believing in any of it...”

“Watson!” thundered Holmes, and again Miss Delapore turned her eyes to him in astonishment.

“Watson?” she whispered.

His gaze held mine, and he asked again: “What was Mrs. Watson's favorite flower?”

“Lily of the valley,” I said, and buried my face in my hands. Even as I did so I saw – such was the horror and strangeness of my dream – that they were the hands of an elderly man, thin and twisted with arthritis, and the wedding-band that I had never ceased to wear with my Mary's death was gone. “But none of it matters now, nor ever will again, knowing what I now know of the true nature of this world.”

Through my weeping I heard Carnaki say softly, “We'll have to switch off the electrical field. I don't think we can get him up the stairs.”

“You will be safe,” said Miss Delapore's voice. “I command Them now – as did my grandfather, or the thing that for so many years passed itself off as my grandfather. I knew his goal – its goal – was to take over Branwell's body, as it had taken over my grandfather's fifty years ago. He despised my uncle, as he despised my father, and as he despised me as a woman, thinking us all too weak to withstand the power raised by the Rite of the *Book of Eibon*. Why else did he bring me home from school, save to lure that poor American to his fate?”

“With a letter blotted with tears,” said Holmes drily. “Even in the margins, and the blank upper portion by the address. Hardly the places where a girl's tears would fall while writing, but it's difficult to keep drops from spattering there when they're dipped from a bedroom pitcher with the fingers.”

“Had I not written that letter,” she replied, “it would be I, not Grandfather, who was given to the Hooded One tonight. At least by luring Branwell to me I was able to give him poison – brown spider-mushroom, that does not take

effect for many days. Grandfather would have had him, one way or another – he does not give up easily.”

“And was it you who sent for him, to meet your grandfather in Brighton?”

“No. But I knew it would come. When Grandfather – when Lord Rupert's vampire spirit – entered poor Branwell's body, that body was already dying, though none knew it but I. I knew Uncle Carstairs had mastered the technique too, of crossing from body to body – I assume it is you who were his target, and not your friend.”

“Even so,” said Holmes, and his voice was quiet and bitterly cold. “He underestimated me – and both underestimated you, it seems.”

And there was the smallest touch of defiance in her voice as she replied, “Men do. Yourself included, it seems.”

The snapping hiss of the electricity ceased. I opened my eyes to see them kneeling around me, in the horror of that nighted cavern: Holmes and Carnaki, holding their electrical rods to either of my hands, and Miss Delapore looking into my eyes. Somehow despite the darkness I could see her clearly, could see into her golden eyes, as one can in dreams. What she said to me I do not remember, lost as it was in the shock and cold when Carnaki touched the switch...

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I opened my eyes to summer morning. My head ached; when I brought my hand up to touch it, I saw that my wrists were bruised and chafed, as if I had been bound. “You were off your head for much of the night,” said Holmes, sitting beside the bed. “We feared you would do yourself an injury – indeed, you gave us great cause for concern.”

I looked around me at the simple wall-paper and white curtains of my bedroom at the Cross of Gold in High Clum. I stammered, “I don't remember what happened...”

“Fever,” said Carnaki, coming into the room with a slender young lady whom I instantly recognized from the miniature Burnwell Colby had showed us as Miss Judith Delapore. “I have never seen so rapid a rise of temperature in so short a time; you must have taken quite a severe chill.”

I shook my head, wondering what it was about Miss Delapore's haggard calm, about her golden-hazel eyes, that filled me with such uneasy horror. “I remember nothing,” I said. “Dreams... Your uncle came here, I believe,” I added, after Holmes had introduced the young lady. “At least ... I believe it was your uncle...” Why was I so certain that the wizened, twisted little man who had come to my room – whom I believed had come to my room –

yesterday had been Carstairs Delapore? I could recall nothing of what he had said. Only his eyes...

"It was my uncle," said Miss Delapore, and as I looked at her again I realized that she wore mourning. "You remember nothing of why he came here yesterday? For before he could mention the visit to anyone at the Priory..." And here she glanced across at Holmes; "He fell down the stairs there, and died at the bottom."

I expressed my horrified condolences, while trying to suppress an inexplicable sense of deepest relief that I somehow associated with dreams I had had while delirious. After inclining her head in thanks, Miss Delapore turned to Holmes, and held out to him a box of stout red cardboard, tied up with string. "As I promised," she said.

I lay back, overcome again by a terrible exhaustion – as much of the spirit, it seemed, as of the body. While Carnaki prepared a sedative draught for me Holmes walked Miss Delapore out to our mutual parlor, and I heard the outer door open.

"I have heard much of your deductive abilities, Mr. Holmes," said the young woman's voice, barely heard through the half-open bedroom door. "How did you know that my uncle, who must have come here to take you as my grandfather took Burnwell, had seized upon your friend instead?"

"There was no deduction necessary, Miss Delapore," said Holmes. "I know Watson – and I know what I have heard of your uncle. Would Carstairs Delapore have come down into danger, to see what he could do for an injured man?"

"Do not think ill of my family, Mr. Holmes," said Miss Delapore, after a time of silence. "The way which leads down the six thousand stairs cannot be sealed. It must always have a guardian. That is the nature of such things. And it is always easier to find a venal successor who is willing to trade to Them the things They want – the blood They crave – in exchange for gifts and services, than to find one willing to serve a lonely guardianship solely that the world above may remain safe. They feared Lord Rupert – if the thing that all knew as Lord Rupert was in fact not some older spirit still. His bones, buried in the sub-crypt, shall, I hope, prove a barrier that They are unwilling to cross. Now that the skull, which was the talisman that commanded Their favors, is gone, perhaps there will be less temptation among those who study in the house."

"There is always temptation, Miss Delapore," said Holmes.

"Get thee behind me, Mr. Holmes," replied the woman's voice, with a touch of silvery amusement far beyond her years. "I saw what that temptation did to my uncle, in his desperate craving to snatch the rule of the things from

my grandfather. I saw what my grandfather became. These are things I shall remember, when the time comes to seek a disciple of my own.”

I was drowsing already from Carnaki's draught when Holmes returned to the bedroom. “Did you speak to Colby?” I asked, struggling to keep my eyes open as he went to the table and picked up the red cardboard box. “Is he all right?” For my dreams as to his fate had been foul, terrible, and equivocal. “Warn him ... prevent the old Viscount from doing harm?”

Holmes hesitated for a long time, looking down at me with a concern that I did not quite understand in his eyes. “I did,” he replied at length. “To such effect that Viscount Gaius has disappeared from the district – for good, one hopes. But as for Branwell, he too has ... departed. I fear that Miss Delapore is destined to lead a rather difficult and lonely life.”

He glanced across at Carnaki, who was packing up what appeared to be an electrical battery and an array of steel rods and wires into a rucksack, the purpose of which I could not imagine. Their eyes met. Then Carnaki nodded, very slightly, as if approving what Holmes had said.

“Because of what was revealed,” I asked, stifling a terrible yawn, “about this ... this blackmail that was being practiced? The young hound, to desert a young lady like that.” My eyelids slipped closed. I fought them open again, seized by sudden panic, by the terror that I might slide into sleep and find myself again in that dreadful abyss, watching the horrible things that fluttered and crept from those angles of darkness that should not have been there. “Did you learn ... anything of these studies they practiced?”

“Indeed we did,” said Carnaki. And then, a little airily, “There was nothing in them, though.”

“What did Miss Delapore bring you, then?”

“Merely a memento of the case,” said Holmes. “As for young Mr. Colby, do not be too hard on him, Watson. He did the best he could, as do we all. I am not sure that he would have been entirely happy with Miss Delapore in any event. She was ... much the stronger of the two.”

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Holmes never did elucidate for me the means by which he bridged the gap between his supposition that Viscount Delapore was engaged in kidnapping children for the purposes of some vile cult centered in Depewatch Priory, and evidence sufficient to make that evil man flee the country. If he and Carnaki found such evidence at the Priory – which I assume was the reason he had asked the young antiquarian to accompany us to Shropshire – he did not speak to me of it. Indeed, he showed a great reluctance to refer to the case at all.

For this I was grateful. The effects of the fever I had caught were slow to leave me, and even as much as three years later I found myself prey to the sense that I had learned – and mercifully forgotten – something that would utterly destroy all my sense of what the world is and should be; that would make either life or sanity impossible, if it should turn out to be true.

Only once did Holmes mention the affair, some years later, during a conversation on Freud's theories of insanity, when he spoke in passing of the old Viscount Delapore's conviction – evidently held by others in what is now termed a *folie a deux* – that the old man had in fact been the reincarnated or astrally transposed spirit of Lord Rupert Grimsley, once Lord of Depewatch Priory. And then he spoke circumspectly, watching me, as if he feared to wake my old dreams again and cause me many sleepless nights.

I can only be sorry that the case ended without firm conclusion, for it did, as Holmes promised me that night on the Embankment, show me unsuspected colors in the spectrum of human mentality and human existence. Yet this was not an unmixed blessing. For though I know that my fever-dream was no more than that – a fantastic hallucination brought on by illness and by Carnaki's own curious monomania about otherworld cults and ancient writings – sometimes in the shadowland between sleep and waking I think of that terrible blue-litten abyss that lies beneath an old Priory on the borders of Wales, and imagine that I hear the eerie piping of chaos rising up out of blasphemous angles of night. And in my dreams I see again the enigmatic Miss Delapore, standing before the chattering congregation of nightmares, holding aloft in her hands the skull of Lord Rupert Grimsley: The skull that now reposes in a corner of Holmes' room, wrapped in its red cardboard box.

## About the Author

Since her first published fantasy in 1982 - *The Time of the Dark* - Barbara Hambly has touched most of the bases in genre fiction. She has written mysteries, horror, mainstream historicals, graphic novels, sword-and-sorcery fantasy, romances, and Saturday Morning Cartoons. Born and raised in Southern California, she attended the University of California, Riverside, and spent one year at the University of Bordeaux, France. She married science fiction author George Alec Effinger, and lived part-time in New Orleans for a number of years. In her work as a novelist, she currently concentrates on horror (the Don Simon Ysidro vampire series) and historical whodunnits, the well-reviewed Benjamin January novels, though she has also written another historical whodunnit series under the name of Barbara Hamilton.

A lifelong fan of Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes stories, over the years Hambly has been asked to contribute to a number of Holmes anthologies. When the character went into public domain, she added these stories to her collection.

Professor Hambly also teaches History part-time, paints, dances, and trains in martial arts. Follow her on Facebook, and on her blog at [livejournal.com](http://livejournal.com).

Now a widow, she shares a house in Los Angeles with several small carnivores.

She very much hopes you will enjoy these stories.

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### **Other Sherlock Holmes stories by Barbara Hambly, available on Smashwords:**

The Dollmaker of Marigold Walk (narrated by Mrs. Watson)  
The Adventure of the Sinister Chinaman (narrated by Dr. Watson)  
The Adventure of the Lost Boy (Sherlock Holmes meets Peter Pan - narrated by Mrs. Watson)