

The Rottweiler

By

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It was a cold, brittle day in late December when I came to the apartments of 442D Butcher Street, London, and met my cousin, the illustrious Sir Roderick Rottswilde for the first time. But Sir Roderick was known by another more famous name. He was familiar to all Londoners as not-quite-the-World's-Greatest-Detective, and second-only-to-that-august-personage-himself-Mr. Sherlock Holmes. My elder cousin was, in fact, *The Rottweiler*.

And now, Sir Roderick – The Rottweiler – had done the impossible. He'd recovered the Crown Jewels of the Tower of London itself and captured the brigands who'd stolen them. And, today, amid a sea of reporters, he was turning both over to the highest ranking officers of Scotland Yard.

“Yes, yes, yes! Gather round! Come on then,” said Sir Roderick. “Squeeze in! There's room for everyone! Woosy! Do keep the doors closed – that wind is awful!”

“Sir Roderick! Sir Roderick! Rotty! Rotty!” the press couldn't contain themselves. Sir Roderick looked pleased as punch.

“Ladies and gentlemen of the press, beloved officers of Scotland Yard, friends and associates – I will now present to you three of the most heinous blackguards known throughout London. Indeed, these louts had the audacity to pilfer from the Towers of London, itself! And they would surely be halfway to South America by now, if not for the superior deductive skills of...The Rottweiler!”

The room erupted in *huzzahs* – mine, perhaps, loudest of all.

“But how?! How?!” shouted one reporter.

“If I told you that, my friend, you certainly wouldn’t pay five pence a copy to read Colonel Woolsy’s account of it in *The Straggler* this Sunday, now, would you? But you can be certain that – for your well-earned coin - therein lies a tale with all the intrigue, spills, chills, and derring-do that you’re so used to at this point. Isn’t that right, Colonel Woolsy?”

Colonel Woolsy, lapping up all the attention, had seemed to miss his cue.

“*Isn’t that right, Colonel Woolsy?*” Sir Roderick said, gently slapping him in the back of the head.

“Yes, yes!” harrumphed Colonel Woolsy. “Read all about it! Derring-do!”

“Shows us the thieves!” yelled one reporter.

“Ah, yes, the thieves! Bring them out, Mrs. Hoover!”

Mrs. Hoover, Sir Roderick’s spindly landlady, marched out three of the smelliest, nastiest, most loathsome, non-clean-shaven hoodlums I’d ever seen – all shackled to one another by chains at the hands and feet.

“First,” said Sir Roderick, “we have Black Jack Lymon – a ruffian known for his keen interest in bludgeoning London bobbies with his favorite blunt instrument.”

“*In-deed!*” roared Black Jack, proudly, his ebon mane bristling. The police in the room gave a collective shudder.

“Don’t get too close,” said Sir Roderick. “He hasn’t eaten in ten minutes. Next, we have Aleutious “Squinty” Leicester. Squinty’s criminal mind is said to work so

quickly that having both eyes open produces too much information for his diabolical mind to bear; thus...*the squint!*”

“I see ya! I see the whole lot of ya!” said Squinty, hunched over in that way that felons do.

“Thank you, Squinty. And finally, perhaps the most insidious of the trio, Alphonse LeMurge, aka ‘The Detonator’ aka ‘The Demolitionist’ aka ‘TNTommy’ aka ‘That Bomb-Making Guy’ aka ‘Say, Alfie, what’s the lit stick you’re holding there? Whoops!’ aka – well, you get the idea.”

“BOOM!” yelled LaMurge, and then a maniacal “HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA!” causing the entire room to jump and cover their heads.

“Ah, what’s a bomb-maker without a sense of humor?” said The Rottweiler. “And now, it’s my pleasure to turn these fiends over to London’s finest. And to accept from them my terribly insignificant finder’s fee. Thank you.”

And the head officer handed Sir Roderick a fairly large sack.

“And now,” said Sir Roderick. “I bid you all a ‘Good Afternoon,’ and a very happy holiday.”

“Sir Roderick! Sir Roderick!” one reporter yelled. “What about Holmes?!”

“Yes!” said another. “He’s been missing for weeks! Will you aid in the search for him?!”

“Look,” said The Rottweiler, seeming extremely peeved. “Holmes – that great and brilliant detective is probably doing what he does every year at this time – lounging in some far east opium den! And if not – well, he’s such a super-genius, I’m sure he can

find his own way home in no time. Thank you! Thank you! Pick up *The Straggler!*
This Sunday! Thank you!”

And with that, Mrs. Hoover ushered all reporters, police and brigands to the door, until only Sir Roderick, Woolsy, Lieutenant Grimsby and I remained.

“A-hem,” said Lieutenant Grimsby.

“Oh good,” said Sir Roderick. “Someone with no sense of when to leave.”

“Have an urchin for you, Guvnor,” said Grimsby.

“I’m sorry I don’t eat fish,” said Sir Roderick.

“Not fish kind, Guvnor – *boy* kind.”

“Ah, yes. Orphan tours are Thursdays,” said Sir Roderick. “Don’t forget to buy advance tickets. Thank you!”

“Not an orphan, Guvnor. ‘E’s got a blood relative.”

“Wonderful,” said Sir Roderick, sifting through his mail. “Why don’t you drop him off with that wretch, then?”

“Very good, Guvnor,” said Grimsby, and with that he disappeared.

And Sir Roderick looked over at me, somewhat confused.

“Woolsy,” he said. “Why’s that boy still here?”

“I think,” said Woolsy, harrumphing, again, “*you’re* the wretch.”

“Oh no,” said Sir Roderick, rushing to the window, and calling down to the street.

“No! No! Come back here!”

“I’d say we have a new houseguest, Rotty!” laughed Woolsy.

“We most certainly do not,” said Sir Roderick. “Don’t get cozy, boy. You’re not staying!”

“I have a note, sir,” I said, fishing a worn, rumpled note out of my pocket.

“I don’t want to read any notes! Thank you. I don’t want any more information than I’ve already – ”

“Give it here, boy,” said Woosy. “I’ll take a look.”

Sir Roderick glared at me.

“Well, what’s your name, then?”

“A,” I said.

“A? Just ‘A’?”

“A, sir. It’s the only name I’ve ever known, sir. It was embroidered...on this.”

And I handed him my most prized possession, a soiled, worn-through rag.

“Euugh. What’s this?”

“My swaddling diaper.”

Sir Roderick dropped it in disgust – which was actually how most people reacted to it.

“You only hand one?”

“That I know of, sir, yes.”

“And you’ve been carting it around for all these years...because...?”

“It’s the only connection I’ve got to family, sir. You see the monogram?”

Looking as close as he could bear to, Sir Roderick saw the name.

“A. Dodger. Dodger? Oh...Oh no...”

“Relatives, Rotty?” asked Woosy, still trying to decipher the note with a spyglass.

“Distant. Distant, distant, distant, distant, distant. Extremely. A very bad lot.”

“Well...according to this,” said Woolsey, “the boy – and his closest living relative – stand to gain let’s see –”

“14 million –” I added.

“ – pounds upon the boy’s 16th birthday. Such sum to be held till then by the Bank of London.”

“14 – ?” said Sir Roderick, studying me. “And how old are you, boy?”

“Almost 13, sir.”

“That’s another three years, thereabouts,” said Woolsey.

“Oh please let me stay, sir! I’ve read all your exploits! I know I could help The Rottweiler in his work.”

“*14 million!*” said Woolsey.

“Somehow, I’ve a feeling it won’t be worth the money. Alright, boy! We’ll have a *brief* trial period. But one step out of line, and you’re out.”

“Thank you, sir.”

“Where’d you grow up, anyway?”

“In a wayward boys’ home, sir. Living conditions were miserable, filthy and horrible.”

“Oh good. Then you’ll feel right at home in our stables.”

“Thank you, sir! Your kindness is immeasurable.”

“It is, isn’t it? Tell me, boy. What do you know about dogs?”

“Dogs, sir? What kind?”

“Rottweilers, of course.”

Life with Sir Roderick was hard, but pleasant. I was responsible for polishing his boots, clothes, carriage, all the floors of his apartments, mucking out the stables where I slept and ate, and of course tending to the dogs: two monstrous, black, mentally deficient rottweilers that salivated buckets and buckets of glop.

But I longed to spend more time with Sir Roderick, himself. I had followed his adventures in *The Straggler* for years – when I could nick a copy – and I knew deep down that he was even better than Holmes, no matter what the papers said. So, you can imagine my delight when the Bank of London genealogist determined that he and I might actually be blood relations. On that day my life changed forever. I had lived 12 years in filth and squalor, but now, not only might I actually get to live in a real house, with a real family – but with the world’s greatest detective.

“Slop out that manure yet, boy?” called the stable manager.

“Doing it now, sir!”

Yes, life was grand!

Once, when I was in the middle of polishing the 40,000 floor tiles in the Great Hall, I overheard Sir Roderick and Woolsey discussing the most recent report concerning Holmes.

“Still missing,” said Woolsey. “Been weeks now. The Observer suggests a kidnapping.”

“Good,” said Sir Roderick, putting a golf ball into a priceless Greek urn. “We’ll be rid of the git once and for all.”

It was too much. I couldn't control myself.

"Sir Roderick! You've got to rescue him! You've got to!"

"Who's this again?" asked Sir Roderick.

"Dodger," said Woolsey.

"Oh yes. Is he 16 yet?"

"Mm... Two years, seven months."

"Sir," I implored, "you've got to help Holmes! He could be in terrible danger! If the police can't find him –"

"Shouldn't you be de-licing the hounds or something?"

"Done, sir."

"And the horses?"

"Before the hounds, sir."

"And Woolsey...?"

"Yesterday, sir."

"Well, do the hounds again. You'd be surprised how quickly they breed."

"The hounds, sir?"

"The lice."

One night soon after I awoke from my sleep to a distant clattering – as if someone – or ones – had broken into the house. And though I was forbidden to traverse the domicile at night, I snuck inside anyway and searched each room for the source. As I neared the expansive fireplace in the den, the sound grew louder. Looking closer, I brushed against the flue lever, dislodging it, and the entire fireplace gave way, opening to

a darkened set of stairs leading down. Nervously, I descended and found myself in a long, dimly lit hallway. The clattering grew louder, but now there were voices – shouting – not one, but many, and soon, I came to a large metal doorway. I pressed against it – just enough to creak it open – but it suddenly gave way and I fell through with a thud.

Inside was a massive, brightly lit room – something like a counting room crossed with a saloon, and mobbed with more lay-about, hoodlums and madmen than you’d think London had to offer. The mood was gay and frivolous. Men and women danced, carousing, and shouting to one another. My presence was hardly noticed at all. And as my eyes adjusted, I realized that – in the center of the room – were Sir Roderick and Woolsy. My instinct was to rescue them.

“Sir Roderick! Don’t worry! I’ll get the police!”

And with that, a hush fell across the room, and hundreds of angry eyes turned towards me. I ran to the door but it slammed shut before I could exit. The mob moved in on me.

“Get your filthy hands off of me!” I shouted.

A moment later, Sir Roderick and Woolsy, pushed through, regarding me with little more than curiosity.

“Well, he’s in on it, now,” said Woolsy.

“I suppose,” concurred Sir Roderick.

“What’s going on?!” I said. “Who are these thugs!?”

“These ‘thugs’,” laughed Sir Roderick, “are *my team*. May I present the Butcher Street Semi-Irregulars!”

The entire mob laughed horrifically. And then out stepped Lymon, Leicester, and LaMurge – the three criminals The Rottweiler had sent to jail scant weeks ago. And they, too, laughed and pointed at me. It was too much to comprehend. At that moment I succumbed to my own fear and lost consciousness.

Hours later, I awoke in Sir Roderick's study. Only he and Colonel Woosy were there. And I hoped it had all been a bad dream.

"Drink this," said Sir Roderick handing me a glass.

"What is it?" I asked.

"Brandy," he said. "It'll make you feel better."

I sipped. It was foul, nasty stuff and I coughed.

"It makes me feel worse!"

"Well, drink more then. Works for me," and he strode about the room. "The way I see it – we have two choices. We bring you in on our little scheme ..."

"Or?"

"We kill you."

I choked and spat out the brandy.

"Kill me!?"

"On the plus side – if we kill you – we don't have to put up with all this fuss and noise all the time. On the negative side...mm...Woosy, what was the negative side, again?"

"*The mess.*"

"Right."

“I won’t make noise,” I cried. “No fuss!”

“Alright, then. Here it is: I imagine you think The Rottweiler is some insanely brilliant detective? Am I right?”

“Yes, sir! Of course.”

“Well, he’s not, boy. The fact is – the truth is – he – I – I’m a thief.”

And he nodded at Woolsy in affirmation.

“A what?”

“A thief. A very good – no – a *brilliant* thief! Honestly, I may be the best all-round criminal genius London has to offer – ”

“Except for M,” said Woolsy.

“He’s a myth,” said Sir Roderick.

“But – you’re not a thief!” I said. “You’re a hero!”

“I *play* the hero, yes. But it’s a fiction, boy. The men and women you encountered earlier – they and I have an extremely accommodating arrangement. We commit crimes – and then I – ”

“The Rottweiler!” corrected Woolsy.

“Solves them.”

I was stunned. I couldn’t believe what I was hearing. And what of me? Was I still among harmless family? Or was I now in mortal danger?

“But – the jewels,” I said. “You recovered the jewels!”

“Yes, well, let’s see – first my men – Lymon, Leicester, and LaMurge - stole the jewels - one of my finer plots, recently – and brought them to me here - where I could announce that I’d recovered them. I then turned a fake set of the jewels over to Scotland

Yard, along with the men who stole them. I collect the recovery fee. Woolsy pretties the whole thing up in *The Straggler* and The Rottweiler's reputation as a highly sought-after detective grows.”

“That's horrible!”

“Yes, well - this might be a good time to choose your words judiciously, don't you think?”

“And those three men? They just rot in jail?”

“After we turn them over to the police, we – ah – typically arrange for their – ”

“Release -” offered Woolsy.

“Yes, well, I can't just go abandoning my men, can I? Kill the whole operation, really.”

“But the cops – someone will eventually realize the jewels are false!”

“Of course. And if I know Scotland Yard they'll beg my services to help find them all over again!”

Rage filled me.

“You're despicable!” I said.

“Its true.”

“You're a thief and a cheat and a liar!”

“And a scoundrel! Don't forget scoundrel...” offered Woolsy.

He and Sir Roderick seemed quite pleased with themselves, which made me all the more angrier.

“I can't believe I'm hearing this! Millions of people read about you! They believe in you!”

“And I truly hope,” said Sir Roderick, “That they'll continue to do so. Magazine royalties are what – ?”

“Eight percent – ” offered Woolsy.

“Of total net income. I understand,” he said, almost tenderly, “that people need stories of adventure, of good men righting wrongs - and that's exactly what we give them. And quite successfully!”

“But its all lies! You're not a real hero!”

“My boy - if there's anything I've learned in life, its this: *there are no real heroes.*”

“There are!” I said. “Sherlock Holmes!”

And Sir Roderick's eyes blistered with a rage I had not yet seen. He looked around for a thick gold bell on his desktop and rang it fiercely. Immediately, two thugs entered the room.

“Lock him up, until we can figure out what to do with him!”

“You don't have to do this!” I shouted. “I believed in you! I still do!”

And so, for the next few days I was locked in the stables and forgotten. I was miserable. Certainly, I had know hardship in my life – what bothered me was that I had truly believed in the myth of The Rottweiler – and I was so terribly disappointed. I packed my things. I had spent a good part of my life running. I could certainly run again. And yet...maybe there was something more I could do.

“Sir Roderick! Sir Roderick!”

“What?! What?!” Sir Roderick awoke in bed, alarmed. I was there, across from him, crouching on his reading chair. “How did you - ?”

He reached for his bell, but I showed I had it in my hand.

“Give me that!”

“I’ve decided,” I said. “You’re going to rescue Sherlock Holmes!”

“What?! Bug off!” he yelled and sunk his head back into the pillow. I jumped onto his bed and jumped up and down on it.

“Come on,” I said. “It’s the perfect thing!”

“For who? You?!”

“For everybody! For you – ”

“Me?!”

“Then you’ll be a real hero?! You really will be everything you pretend to be!”

“Boy!” He said, sitting up and holding me still. “I *like* what I pretend to be! I enjoy it! I do it well! And I make a frightening amount of money doing it *exactly* the way I do it. No one in this house is looking to change a bloody thing!”

“I don’t believe that! And I don’t believe you! Not for a second!”

“Go back to your room!”

“I won’t,” I said. “You know what I think?”

“No – but I’ve got a horrible feeling – ”

“I think you started out as a real hero – and when it got to be hard work – you took the easy way out – *oh look at me! Look at me! Look how fancy I am! I’m a crook! And no one knows it! La dee da dee da!*”

“I was *never* a hero, boy. Everything I own – *everything* – is stolen. These sheets. Those shoes. Everything!”

“Not everything!”

“*Everything.*”

“Your cab?”

“Stolen.”

“The dogs?”

“Stolen – from a priest.”

“Even this bell?”

“Stolen twice. Stole it. Gave it to a lady. Stole it back. It’s a problem, I admit.”

“It doesn’t matter! No one just makes up a Rottweiler. It has to come from somewhere. From deep inside. I think it just got buried under – I don’t know – a lot of garbage, it seems to me.”

“Are you done yet?”

“No! Come on! Let’s go! Let’s go rescue – “

“Go back to bed.”

“Come on!”

“I’ll call my men – ”

“Oh, they can’t touch me! I’m much smarter than they are.”

He stared at me sideways.

“Fine,” he said. “Then stay. Stay right there. Shout all you want. It makes no difference to me.”

And with that, he tipped over on his side and fell fast asleep. I shouted and jumped and kicked at him, but it was no use. He was dead to the world. Still, my mission was clear. I had found the crack in his armor. I would reform The Rottweiler.

For the next few days I was relentless. At every opportunity I chided and nagged him. Each time, he'd have his men cart me off and lock me up, and each time I laughed and returned. To his astonishment, no room in his house could hold me. (And locking me out of the house didn't work either.) And after three days, he called me to his study. There, he and Woolsy waited, pacing the room.

"Boy, I've had just about enough of you," he said.

"Yes, sir."

"You've taxed my patience. If I thought I could keep you out of the house, I'd've locked you out days ago."

"Yes, sir."

"But the fact is – as much as I could give a fig what's happened to the man – I decided to... extend some of my feelers. Purely on a whim."

"Yes, sir. And?"

"My dear friend Squinty has suggested that useful information may be gained this very evening at Red's Alley."

"Red's Alley, sir?"

"Yes, it's league night. There's likely to be quite a lot of action. Woolsy and I were just readying to leave."

"Wonderful! I'm coming, too," I said. "You may need me!"

“I think not,” he said. “The only reason I told you was – ”

“Filial obligation?”

“ – to stop you picking my locks! You’re ruining all the doors on my house, boy!

They don’t grow on trees!”

“Sorry, sir.”

Then Sir Roderick and Woolsy packed up their service revolvers, and were gone.

I feigned going back to the stables and hid myself on the back of their cab, where I stayed, undetected.

After twenty minutes or so, we drove onto a seamy, deserted street on the lower east side, and parked outside “Red’s Alley,” a tavern. Sir Roderick and Woolsy went inside. I snuck around to observe from the side window.

When Sir Roderick spoke of an “alley,” I didn’t take him literally – but that’s exactly what it was: a ten-pin alley with some 30 lanes and – to my astonishment – every bowler inside – no matter how grungy or grotesque – had a shock of scarlet hair. A huge, scrawled sign on the side wall read: *Thursday Night - Red Headed Bowling League!* (*Beer half-price.*)

Sir Roderick and Woolsy – no strangers to this midnight world – clearly knew most of the men, and wasted no time carousing. Eventually, they were brought to a back room where a giant, orange-haired man with a white apron was carrying an immense barrel. I assumed this was Red. He was none too keen to hear Sir Roderick’s questions, and for a moment, it looked as if a fight might break out. But Sir Roderick calmed him down and Red started talking. After listening intently, they bid him goodbye and went back to the cab. A moment later we were bustling towards the waterfront.

“Well?” I said, sticking my head down through the opening in the carriage, half scaring them both to death.

“Boy!” shouted Sir Roderick, enraged.

“What did you learn?”

“I learned my bowling team can’t last five minutes without me,” harrumphed Woolsy.

“About Holmes!?” I said.

“According to Red,” said Sir Roderick, “Holmes was last seen at a docking warehouse owned by one A. Troy.”

“Another A!” said Woolsy.

“No relation,” I said.

“Well, I nicked Red’s directory,” continued Woolsy.

“Good man,” said Sir Roderick.

“It lists the owner as ‘Arim Troy’.”

“Arim Troy. Arim Troy. Why is that familiar? Well, we’ll know soon enough.”

It invigorated me to see Sir Roderick in his element, and on a case. As we approached the waterfront, he ordered the cab to halt several hundred yards from the warehouse, so as not to attract attention.

“If Holmes is really here,” said Sir Roderick, “we may not have much time. Woolsy, we’ll cover more ground splitting up. Keep your revolver cocked. Boy – *stay in the cab!*”

“But – yes, sir,” I said.

I watched as the two circled to opposite sides of the building. As soon as they were out of sight, I left the cab and trailed after Sir Roderick. From a darkened alcove, I watched him approach a scene at the edge of the pier, near the back of the warehouse. A thin, lean, bent-over, white-haired figure was directing half a dozen brawny dockworkers to carry boxes onto a ship docked nearby.

And as Sir Roderick approached them a look of – excitement – grew upon his face.

“Of course! Of course!” he cried. “Arim Troy, indeed! Ahoy there!”

The men turned toward him, alarmed.

“*Professor Moriarty, I presume?*”

Moriarty?! No. It couldn't be! No one had ever seen the man before. Yet he was rumored far and wide as Sherlock Holmes' greatest arch-nemesis and the most notorious criminal genius in all London, perhaps even the world! If this was Moriarty, surely Sir Roderick was placing himself in grave, grave danger. But he was acting like a schoolboy!

“Who wants to know?” asked the old man. And then, he took a closer look at Sir Roderick. “Why, you're the pretty boy with the dog's name from *The Straggler*, aren't you? And wandering the docks alone at night? That can't be safe. My dear boy, I daresay, you may have made a mistake tonight.”

My heart froze for Sir Roderick. Indeed, he was gravely outnumbered. Yet...he seemed gleeful!

“Moriarty! Moriarty! Oh my goodness! I – I don't know what to say! What an extraordinary turn of events! I knew ‘Arim Troy’ was familiar. Although, anagram-

wise, I would've expected just a touch more pizzazz – 'Roy Triam' maybe? 'Mary Tiro,' perhaps?"

"Yes, well, I'll consider those next time," said Moriarty. And then, looking at his men, he said, "Kill him."

"Oh no no no no no no no!" laughed Sir Roderick. "You misunderstand, entirely! I've been dying to meet you!"

Moriarty and his men exchanged befuddled looks.

"Napoleon of Crime! Master of the Underworld!" Sir Roderick continued. "Criminal Genius! This is – I'm sorry if I'm getting a bit – emotional! – I thought you were a myth!"

I couldn't believe what I was seeing. It was too much.

"You're my *hero!*" said Sir Roderick, and he seemed absolutely sincere.

"Professor," called one of the men. "Should we kill him?"

"Hold," said Moriarty.

"Professor," said another, "I dunno what he's onto – but that is The Rottweiler there. He's the second greatest –"

"I know who he is, dolt! I can read!"

"He put dozens of men, away, Professor!" said another. "He –"

"Silence!" said Moriarty.

"Oh, no, no, no!" said Sir Roderick. "Don't you see? That was *my scheme!* None of those men went to jail – or not for very long at any rate! No! I'm a criminal genius, too! Like you! Not at your level, of course – but –"

From my hiding spot I didn't like any of what was happening. I realized then that I had trusted too much in Sir Roderick's sudden change of heart. *Stupid me!* And I'd led him straight to the criminal underworld's lord and master!

"He arrested Squinty, Black Jack, and the guy that makes bombs," said another thug.

"The 'Bomb-Making Guy' is his preferred appellation," said Sir Roderick. "And honestly, we're all buddies! Just ask them! Ask anyone in the Red-Headed Bowling League! Ask the Butcher Street Semi-Irregulars!"

"I've never heard of any of them," said Moriarty.

"And I read where he just recovered the stolen crown jewels," said another hood.

"And *kept them*, thank you!" said The Rottweiler, and then, "although that may have been more information than...you needed to know... perhaps."

And Moriarty was suddenly curious.

"Did you?" he said.

"Ah...well...that is to say..."

One of the hoods aimed his firearm directly at Sir Roderick.

"Back at the house. 442D Butcher Street."

"Aars, Gustav," said Moriarty. "Search the place. See if he's telling the truth."

The two men disappeared. Then Moriarty leveled his own pistol at Sir Roderick.

"So, you commit crimes and then solve them, eh?"

"Right! Now, you've got it."

"Interesting," said Moriarty. "If it's true. I thought you might be here for another reason entirely."

“Oh no!”

“You just happened to be wandering the docks at night? Alone? Armed?”

“Oh – oh – well – that – ”

And Moriarty removed Sir Roderick’s sidearm from inside his coat.

“Accompanied by your most trusted ally, no less? Also armed?”

And from the corner of the dock, Colonel Woosy was pushed forward, surrounded by more of Moriarty’s goons.

“Woosy...” lamented Sir Roderick.

“Tell me,” said Moriarty. “Of all your myriad ‘crimes’ – do you count among them – *murder*?”

“Murder? Oh – well – yes! Of course! Of course! What criminal genius doesn’t murder? I mean, sure! I murder – sometimes two – three – four times a day! Sometimes all before breakfast!”

“I see,” said Moriarty, a devilish leer rising across his face. “Let’s test that mettle then, shall we?”

He turned and nodded two of his men towards Sir Roderick.

“Take ‘The Rottweiler’ to Room 21B. You know what to do. Tie the other one up here. Be quick! There’s still work to be done.”

The two hoods led Sir Roderick into the warehouse at gun point. I hated to leave Woosy, but Sir Roderick seemed in more immediate danger. I followed them at a distance.

After a while they arrived at Room 21B, and ushered Sir Roderick in. I remained outside the door, peering in through a crack. Inside a gray, square, dimly lit, virtually empty room was a solitary man tied to a chair, his head hung low as if he'd been severely hurt. As I looked closer, I saw the figure stir, trying to lift his head. And then I saw it, clearly. The man in the chair was Holmes.

“Good Lord,” said Sir Roderick, astonished.

Slowly, painfully, the bound detective whispered, “Help me...”

Sir Roderick looked back at his captors. But there was no mercy.

“Do it,” said the hood, and forced a revolver into Sir Roderick’s hand.

“W-what?”

“The test,” he said.

Sir Roderick turned back to the captive detective. I couldn’t believe what I was seeing. I knew Sir Roderick disliked Holmes, but this was too much. And it was all my fault! I had forced him to come here! Brought him to this very spot! What could I possibly do?! My grief was unbearable.

Sir Roderick leveled the revolver at Holmes and girded himself. His hand trembled as he cocked the gun. Sweat collected on his brow. But – it was no use. His shoulders collapsed. His head dropped in shame.

“I can’t,” he said. “I – can’t.”

“Of course you can’t,” came a whisper. “You can’t – because you’re weak – !”

But who was speaking? It was...it was *Holmes!* Holmes, who, a moment ago was on the verge of collapse. Now, he was looking up, leering and grinning, *evilly*. It was too much! Sir Roderick stared, aghast.

“Criminal genius?” Holmes laughed. And then he stood up. The ropes that bound him dropped like loose string.

“You’re no criminal genius,” he said. “I should know!”

And with that, Holmes tore the hair from his own head, removed a nose that was putty and peeled off heavy furrowed eyebrows. And now, standing before us once again, was *Moriarty!* My heart froze.

“Commit crimes and then solve them, do you?! You can’t imagine you’re the first ‘criminal genius’ who ever thought of that?!”

“Then – *you* are Holmes?” stammered Sir Roderick.

Moriarty laughed.

“Stay back!” said Sir Roderick, lifting his revolver, again.

“You can’t think I’d actually provide you with a loaded weapon,” he grinned.

And a short, sharp smile suddenly appeared on The Rottweiler’s face.

“Why, who said it wasn’t loaded?” he said.

And for an instant, I saw all color flee from Moriarty’s face. The Rottweiler lifted his revolver high and shot out the one light illuminating the room. Now, they were in absolute darkness.

“Now, boy!” he called, and I leapt in.

Of course I was no match for the larger men, but I knew well enough where they were – and it was easy to trip them into one another. Nearby, a struggle went on between The Rottweiler and Moriarty and a pair of shots rang out. A moment later, a wounded body – Moriarty’s – lurched out of the room and down the corridor.

“Sir Roderick!” I cried.

“I’m fine, boy. Come on!”

We moved into the hallway, bracing the door behind us.

“You’ve been shot!”

“Grazed! He got the worst of it. And he’ll have a nice surprise waiting for him back at the docks!”

Giving him my arm, we hurried back to the entrance.

“You *knew* Holmes was Moriarty?”

“I suspected. The moment he said he wanted to ‘test’ me. I had a feeling it involved Holmes – and had Holmes and Moriarty been true rivals, I knew Moriarty would have never kept him alive so long. When I saw Holmes tied to the chair, I assumed it was Moriarty – and therefore knew the gun he gave me couldn’t be loaded.”

“But how did you get the bullets?!”

“Ah – that’s the thief’s secret, boy!”

In a minute, we’d come out of the warehouse – and what a melee! Squinty, Red and number of men from the bowling alley had engaged Moriarty’s men and were overpowering them. Nearby, Woosy had been freed and Sir Roderick’s two rottweilers were encircling a gentleman that could only have been Holmes’ own confidante Dr. Watson. He looked quite terrified.

“There!” cried The Rottweiler.

Sure enough, Moriarty, bleeding heavily at the shoulder, was lowering a gunny sack from the pier to a small boat on the water. The Rottweiler ran over, pulled him up, knocked the gun from his hand and started thrashing him. Looking quickly for a weapon, Moriarty found a massive dockworker’s hook and started slashing with it. A lucky strike

knocked The Rottweiler to the ground, and Moriarty stood over him, a maniacal look on his face, about to administer the killing blow. Without thinking, I reached for the only object I had on me, Sir Roderick's gold bell and flung it with all my strength at Moriarty. It wasn't enough to hurt him – but the sound and impact distracted him – time enough for The Rottweiler to lash Moriarty's own hook into his wounded shoulder, throwing him backwards off the pier, and into the water.

We ran to the edge and looked, but the river was a murky black – and there was no sign of Moriarty.

“Do you think - ?”

“I doubt it,” said Sir Roderick. “His kind never stays down for good.”

“His kind?” I said. “Don't you mean *your* kind?”

The Rottweiler looked at me, surprised. But before he could answer, the sound of police sirens filled the air. The pier hoodlums began to scatter. The Rottweiler gave a sign of thanks to Squinty and Red, who departed seconds before the police arrived. And the few men of Moriarty's who remained were rounded up.

“Moriarty? Really?” said the Chief Inspector. “So, it wasn't Holmes he kidnapped? It was Dr. Watson?”

Dr. Watson stammered. The hounds growled at him, nearby.

“Oh – oh yes,” said Watson. “Yes, The Rottweiler drove Moriarty off. Which is a fine thing since Holmes has gone on something of a permanent holiday.”

“Holiday?” said the Chief Inspector.

“Yes! Well, with men like The Rottweiler around – he just didn't feel useful, anymore.”

“Chief Inspector!” called a policeman nearby. He held up Moriarty’s gunny sack.
“It’s true! Moriarty had the true crown jewels all along!”

“You see?” said The Rottweiler.

“Well! Two mysteries solved at once!” said the Chief Inspector. “Good show!”

And Sir Roderick and Woolsy grinned.

The next morning I ate breakfast in the Great Hall at Sir Roderick’s dining table for the very first time. He seemed extremely pleased.

“You’re not upset about losing the jewels?” I asked.

“If I know Scotland Yard, I doubt they’ll keep them very long,” he said. “And you’re not upset, boy, that you may have just ended the career of the world’s greatest detective?”

“On the contrary, sir,” I said. “I believe I just helped start it!”

I devoured the ham and eggs on my plate, feeling every bit the king.

“Don’t get used to it, boy,” said The Rottweiler. “you’re still sleeping with the dogs.”

And, at that moment, I didn’t even mind.

The End