

# **Chameleon - The Death of Sherlock Holmes**

**Annette Siketa**

**Based on the original characters of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle**

## Other Books

The Sisterhood – Curse of Abbot Hewitt

The Sisterhood – Cathy’s Kin

Those Ghostly Victorians

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## Author's Preface

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle never 'killed off' his famous Detective, and his one attempt to do so was met with public disfavour. In the anthology, 'The Return of Sherlock Holmes', the story, 'The Adventure of the Empty House', begins with Holmes providing an account of his life & death struggle with Professor Moriarty on the precipice of the Reichenbach Falls. But why was he Holmes's enemy? Though Doyle penned a smattering of teasers, he never provided a definitive answer for this antagonism.

There is a literary maxim that runs, 'there's nothing new in writing', meaning that somebody, somewhere, at some time, has written it before. And yet, given the wealth of material featuring Sherlock Holmes, to the best of my knowledge, nobody has written a 'death of' story.

Doyle, like Agatha Christie many years later, formulated his plots from a series of set patterns. But unlike Christie - and much to his credit, Doyle rarely introduced a 'convenient' fact or element at the end of a story to bring about a successful, though not always satisfying, conclusion.

According to several websites, Holmes was born in 1858, and although Conan Doyle continued to publish until 1927, many Holmes stories were either undated, retrospective, or only gave a vague reference as to the year the story was set. It is therefore difficult to ascertain in terms of timeline, which was the 'last' Holmes story. I have therefore set this novel when Holmes is no longer in his prime, but not too old that he's in his dotage.

It would have been near impossible and arguably ridiculous, to have written this book in the Victorian style, mainly because most authors of the era were fantasists. They painted the world how they preferred to see it and not how it really was. The following brief summation of the life of a servant will perhaps exemplify this point. It will also provide some social and psychological insight as to why 'real'

people, and not the incredulous characters created by romantic authors, behaved as they did.

In his book, 'The King in Love: Edward the VII's Mistresses', respected author and historian, Theo Aronson, provides an uncompromising account of life in Victorian England. Indeed, it is compulsory reading for anyone interested in the period. Some of the data and quotations in the following are taken from Aronson's book, for which I extend my gratitude and thanks.

Once upon a time there was a magical land where nobody had a care in the world. Nobody was allowed to go hungry, the Queen and her family were loved and respected, and servants worked tirelessly without complaint.

Regrettably, much of the nostalgia associated with the Victorian era, and unashamedly exploited by movies and television over the decades since, is like the above fairytale, complete bunkum. The notions of inconspicuous, long serving family retainers, flat-capped dothing outdoorsmen, and jolly apple-cheeked cooks, are myths to disguise the awful truth.

What slavery was to the Americas, servitude was to the British Empire. The symptoms and causes may have been different, but the disease was the same – inbred superiority.

The Victorian era had three distinct levels, the lower class, the middle or upper class, and the monarchy, and the gap between each was a seemingly unbridgeable void. By the end of the 19th century, over one and a half million people worked in London as domestic servants, thereby forming the largest single group of working class, with the majority being either illiterate or illegitimate, or both.

Domestic servants had few if any employment rights, were governed by inconsistent rules and regulations issued by intimidating mistresses, domineering upper-servants, rigid housekeepers, and tyrannical masters, and were often poorly and irregularly paid.

"Class distinctions permeated the whole social structure, and could be as rigid in the servant's hall and in the village as they were in the castle. Their distinctions were however, tempered by gracious manners, and in general, a courteous consideration for others, alas so

rare today, governed the relationship between all ranks of society." Princess Alice, Countess of Athlone, C. 1881.

Like many other aspects of Victorian society, the concept of a family retainer dying in his kind mistresses arms after years of faithful service, is also pure fairytale. The average length of service in a household was eighteen months.

Even though the industrial revolution was touted as the great leap forward, no care was given to the swarm of humanity eager to capitalise on its benefit. Consequently, London and the provinces were bursting at the seams. Buildings that might have once housed a single family, now accommodated five or six or even seven, proliferating such slum suburbs as Holborn, St. Giles, and Whitechapel.

Despite the prophesised prosperity, the only people reaping the promised reward were unscrupulous landlords and their exorbitant rents. They thrived while their tenants starved to death. The same streets that were allegedly paved with gold, were also littered with shattered dreams and corpses. Anger and frustration festered like an open wound, and violence and unspeakable cruelty became an everyday occurrence.

Yet there was work to be had. To run their home, even a modest aristocratic family employed the bare minimum of servants - butler, cook, governess & nanny (if required), and two maids and a boy, the latter being a general dogs body. Typically, the butler and boy slept in the basement, the governess & nanny on the nursery floor, the cook and the maids in the attic, and all taking their meals in what was grandly titled "The servants hall", which in actuality was nothing but a separate room in the kitchen.

By the standards of the day, this ratio of servants - 2 for each member of the family, was extremely conservative. 4 to 1 was more usual, with the ratio in wealthier families being 8 to 1. At Eaton Hall in Cheshire, the Duke of Westminster employed over 300 servants, while the Duke of Portland employed even more.

When the Prince of Wales (later Edward VII), brought an especially large house party to stay with Lord Derby during Grand National week, and questioned the accommodation arrangements, his lordship was unflustered.

“That makes sixty extra servants,” he calculated. “And with the 37 who live in, nothing could be simpler.”

Not that one needed to be especially wealthy or well-born to employ servants. A bank manager or a doctor might have three – cook, parlourmaid, and kitchen maid. Even the humblest tradesman could afford a skivvy. The wages for a 13 year old were only a shilling a week. The average wage for a housemaid employed by a family whose annual income might exceed £30,000, was £20 a year.

It is little wonder then that the vast majority of aristocratic homes could afford an army of servants. It was not uncommon in stately homes to find the following staff: housekeeper, cook, lady's maid, nurse, housemaids, kitchen maids, scullery maids, laundry maids, maids of all work, butler, under butler, valets, footmen, pantry & lamp boys, odd-job men and kitchen porters. All these in addition to outdoor servants which included coachmen, grooms, stable lads, gardeners, and gamekeepers.

Many aristocrats compounded the toil of their servants by imposing ludicrous conditions. The 10th Duke of Beaufort would instantly dismiss any female servant he saw after midday, by which time her work was supposed to have been finished. The 3rd Lord Crewe was even more tyrannical, stipulating that no housemaids were to be visible at any time of the day.

“Masters and servants,” said Lady Cynthia Asquith, “knew their places, and kept too the like the planets to their orbits.”

The life of the average female servant was demeaning and wretched at best. They were poorly and often irregularly paid, had no job security or pension right, and lived under the threat of dismissal for a minor infraction without a reference. The ultimate degradation was seduction by a master or his son, and then thrown out if found pregnant.

The term 'job satisfaction' was still over 100 years away. According to a former butler of a landed estate, the scullery maids were, “Poor little devils, washing-up and scrubbing away at the dozens of pots, pans, saucepans, and platters, up to their elbows in suds and grease, their hands red raw with soda, which was the only form of detergent in those days. I have seen them crying with exhaustion and

pain, the degradation too I shouldn't wonder. Well lets hope they get their reward in heaven."

There were exceptions of course. Servants, if they worked for a good-natured employer or in congenial company, could enjoy a comfortable life. But the widely accepted image of a securitous 'below stairs' existence, full of happy contented servants with unquestionable loyalty to their masters, is grossly exaggerated.

Given the almost unendurable hardship, many servants turned to prostitution. By the time of the Jack the Ripper murders in the 1880s, London alone boasted over 250,000 prostitutes, both men and women, and by 1898, most women preferred to work in shops or factories rather than a home.

Yet the impoverished and grinding existence of women was not the exclusive domain of the Victorian era. As Francoise Dubinet, former mistress to Louis XIV of France said in 1647, "Modesty should be the lot of women. Your sex obliges you to obedience. Suffer much before you complain about it." Clearly in both eras, female subjugation was deemed inviolable.

Like the American plantation owners, English society was built on three supposedly unassailable principals – power, money, and status. This so-called 'natural superiority' even encompassed the church. Pious yet no less hypocritical, the aristocracies observance of Sunday services and the supposed 'day of rest', did not extend to their servants - the maids and valets who dressed them, the cooks who prepared the huge meals, and the stable men, coachman, and grooms who provided the transport.

Moreover, there was a strict hierarchy inside the church, gentry to the front and lower classes to the back. Should anyone need reminding of their position in society, or lack of it, the following verse from the hymn 'All things bright and beautiful', left no room for doubt.

The rich man in his castle,  
The poor man at his gate,  
God made them high and lowly,  
He ordered their estate.

And yet, suffering notwithstanding, the life of a servant was pretty uncomplicated compared to their 'betters'. Trapped by their own omnipotence, the lives of the aristocracy were constantly subjected to scrutiny. Interaction between polite society was basically limited to one outlet, entertaining, and even then it was fraught with social suicide. If the wrong 'type' of person were invited to a function, then a much sought after invitation may inexplicably go astray.

Persons who directly represented 'queen & Country', such as military officers, diplomats, and cabinet ministers, could attend luncheon or supper parties, but only if the latter were strictly informal. The reason for this limited access to the echelon was that these trained, and arguably highly skilled professions, were regarded as 'lower class'. Consequently, they would not be invited to a formal function where high nobility or royalty were in attendance. The exception being if the person concerned was a member of the peerage themselves, Lord Kitchener or Queen Victoria's private secretary, Sir Henry Ponsonby for example.

The clergy, along with maiden aunts, were generally restricted to Sunday afternoon tea, but even then only if of good character. Doctors, solicitors, accountants, or other learned professions, could be invited to a garden party but nothing more familiar. Those involved in trade or commerce or other common professions, such as policemen, were never invited to any function beyond their 'class'. But, the ultimate betrayal of the 'social bible' was to claim an association with an artisan, no matter how slight.

"London has gone mad over the principal actress, Sarah Bernhardt, a woman of notorious character. Not content with being run off on the stage, this woman is asked to respectable people's houses, to act or even to luncheon and dinner, and all the world goes. It is an outrageous scandal." Lady Frederick Cavendish, 1879.

This view was reinforced in 1880 by Lady 'Daisy' Brooke, future Countess of Warwick and mistress to the Prince of Wales. "The majority of the people who made up society...disliked making the effort necessary to appreciate books, pictures, music or sculpture, and what they disliked they distrusted. We acknowledge that it was necessary that pictures should be painted, books written, the law administered, we even acknowledge that there was a certain class whose job it might be to do these things, but we did not see why their

achievements entitled them to our recognition. They might disturb, over stimulate, or even bore."

Social relations were a fine balancing act, and repeated offences could result in ridicule and scorn, or the ultimate punishment, complete ostracisation.

This delicate etiquette aside, the zenith of the social mountain was the country house weekend. Popular hosts included the Duke of Devonshire at Chatsworth, the Duke of Beaufort at Badmington, the Duke of Sutherland at Dunrobbin, the Duke of Westminster at Eaton Hall, and the Duke of Portland at Wellbeck.

At least 20-40 guests were invited, and with the exception of the private quarters, the entire house was accessible. The meals were gargantuan. Breakfast usually consisted of fried, poached, or scrambled eggs, bacon, sausages, mushrooms, tomatoes, kedgeree, and cold ham. Lunch was often a picnic which might include various types of game pie, and afternoon tea included scones, tarts, cakes, sandwiches, muffins, and crumpets, and all freshly baked by an army of cooks. Dinner was usually comprised of 10 courses, each with its own wine, and should hunger persist, there was always a supper of cold chicken or lobster available.

Though the house party might be designated as 'informal', a strict code of dress was usually observed. Men would be required to change clothes three times a day - tweeds for daily activity, white tie and tails for evening, and velvet smoking jackets for nighttime 'pursuits'. This code was even more rigid for women. For breakfast, a plain morning gown would suffice, for a picnic lunch it was tweeds, or if the lunch was indoors, something a little more formal was acceptable. Afternoon tea permitted the gowns to be slightly ostentatious, after which, the ladies retired to rest and dress for dinner. And they needed the time, for it was during dinner when they could finally parade their femininity. Evening gowns were sumptuous creations. Necklines plummeted, waistlines were 'thinned', and jewellery enhanced the extremities, and all accentuated by an ostrich plumed fan.

But, if adherence to social etiquette was a minefield, then sex was a never ending battle. It was a quirk of social engineering that the higher one climbed, the less inhibited one became. The attitudes to morality and fidelity were so diametrically opposed, that it was the

gentry and not their servants who were disloyal and unfaithful. The sexual experience of many unmarried society women was virtually non-existent, propriety dictating that they should be ‘unspoilt’ on their wedding night. To be accused otherwise could lead to brandishment and social disgrace. A little coquettish flirting was permitted, but anything more forward was considered brazen.

Not surprisingly, the opposite was acceptable and even expected for men. Experience was primarily garnered from chorus girls, shop assistants, prostitutes, and servants, whether consent was mutual or not. The number of illegitimate children produced under this circumstance is incalculable, with very few acknowledged let alone accepted.

Given the harsh reality of the 19th century, perhaps it is not surprising that poets and authors tried to be more ‘up beat’. Unfortunately, by modern standards, most of this literature is virtually unreadable. Convoluted dialogue, irrelevant repetitiveness, and superfluous descriptions, were the requisite format, so that many writers had little opportunity to express their individual style.

There were exceptions of course, otherwise names such as Poe, Dickens, and Wilde, would have faded into obscurity. But even these works in their original format make for hard if not incomprehensible reading.

Fortunately, Conan Doyle did not always adhere to this ‘template’, and as this book contains a considerable amount of his original narratives and dialogues, it allowed for greater freedom of construction. But this is not to suggest that the compilation was easy. Far from it. It was, to put it mildly, a heck of a ‘cut & paste job’, though it should be noted that, in order to conform to modern standards, some of the original writing has been edited.

Further, to ignore progress and advances in technology would have been foolhardy. However, for the purists, I have retained as much of the ambience of the late Victorian era as possible. Indeed, the horse & carriage was still in use until the late 1920’s, though sadly, its days were severely numbered.

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## Legal Notice

We, Messers Upton, Johnson, and Peak, in accordance with the last Will & Testament of the late Doctor John Watson, do hereby release this manuscript for public consumption. We understand it to be a faithful account of the death of Mr Sherlock Holmes, commonly associated with 221b Baker Street, London. We accept no liability for any misrepresentation of character or fact, implied or otherwise.

## Forward by Doctor John Watson.

As regular readers of my chronicles will know, my great friend, Sherlock Holmes, was responsible for the unmasking of numerous criminals and murderers, many of whom received their just dessert at the end of a hangman's rope. What is not commonly known however, are the precise details of his own death. Indeed, considering the number of persons involved, it is surprising that the circumstances have continued to remain obscure.

Such was my grief at the loss of my friend, that I lost all inclination to chronicle his last cases. However, it would not serve justice nor his memory to maintain my silence. I have therefore decided, though not without trepidation, to commit the facts concerning his death to paper.

When a major event occurs in one's life, especially an event involving strong emotion, at what point can you declare, 'yes, that was the start of it'. Take a penniless widow with three young children for example. Cold and hungry, she is hurrying down a street when a gust of wind blows a crumpled £5 note into her path. The money literally saves her life and those of her children, one of whom will grow-up to be a famous artist. What circumstances conspired to bring the woman to that particular place and time? This was the dilemma confronting me when I decided to record the demise of arguably the greatest analytical mind of the age, that of Sherlock Holmes.

The more mature reader will recall the days when the motorcar and the telephone belonged to the realm of science fiction. Nowadays, they have been incorporated into society to such an extent, that the days of the horse & carriage and it's all-knowing driver, and an army of messenger boys' scurrying hither and thither through alleys and streets, seem antiquated by comparison.

Then there are the advances in medicine, education, and forensics, though for me personally, the latter is somewhat bittersweet. How well I recall Holmes crawling across a floor with a magnifying glass in his hand. Nowadays, it only takes a single press of a button and a camera records a crime scene or fingerprint.

Yet even with these advances, the capacity to leap beyond logic, to put in order that which seems chaotic, still remains the purview of the human brain, and it was for this that Sherlock Holmes was renowned. A master of deductive reasoning, he could usually see what others could not, revealing what might be termed 'the blatantly obvious' to the astonishment of those concerned.

This is not to suggest that he went unchallenged. Indeed, many criminals from all classes had tried to outwit him, and Holmes was usually victorious. But, when young Ferris Buckley entered his life, not even Holmes, with his uncanny power of perception, could have foreseen that he would soon encounter, not only his equal in intellect, but his greatest enemy.



## Part One

### Chapter One. 27th December.

#### *The Letter.*

Dear Mr Holmes,

No doubt you are aware from the reports in the newspapers, of the deplorable murder of my grandmother, Lady Halifax, and that her alleged murderer, Charles Lidell, is now a fugitive from justice.

Sir, I beg you not to believe a word that has been printed about him, for I have the upmost conviction that he is innocent, and in this regard, seek your help to clear his name. No doubt you will want to be acquainted with the facts, and whilst there are some particulars to which I was not party, my own recollections of the past few days are so vivid that I can recall them with total accuracy.

My parents were botanists, who died of disease in the tropics some five years ago. I was left an orphan, and my grandmother, Lady Halifax, took charge of my care and education. She was very sweet and kind to me, and such was her regard and reputation for benevolence, that she was received in the highest social circles.

Indeed, it was her kindness that prompted her to invite poor Lady Maddox to spend Christmas with us at Forsythe Hall. Lady Maddox's husband, as I am sure you must also know from the newspapers, disappeared some three weeks ago.

On the evening of the 23rd December, my grandmother held a small supper party at the Hall. With the whereabouts of Lord Maddox still undiscovered, perhaps you might think it indelicate of my grandmother to hold such an intimate and usually joyous occasion. I can assure you the only motive was to shed a little light into the darkness in which Lady Maddox had been plunged.

The guests were as follows: Lady Pamela Halifax, Lady Rita Maddox, Baroness Phillipa de Forneaux (friend of all and known affectionately as ‘Philly’), Mr Justice Cedric Hargreaves (recently retired), the Reverend William Hope (friend of Lady Maddox), Mr Rigby Creswick (co-director of the Trafalgar Bank), Charles Lidell, and myself, Ferris Buckley.

The dinner, which included the taking of photographs for amusement, was over, and we had returned to the drawing room for after-dinner drinks. The fire was crackling, the room was warm, and conviviality abounded. My grandmother, who rarely stood on ceremony when at home, invited the men to smoke, and Dolan – our wonderful butler, poured the drinks. I was even allowed a small sherry, even though I am barely sixteen years of age.

Mr Creswick is perhaps a little austere, and this was his third visit to the Hall in recent weeks. Mr Justice Hargreaves, despite the severity of his former profession, is a jolly old soul who entertained us with reminiscences of his time on the bench. Reverend Hope is what I would term ‘a loveable rogue’. I had not met him before, but there was no doubting his devotion to his vocation, his patroness – Lady Maddox, and his stomach.

The Baroness de Forneaux, I think, needs little introduction, for her patronage of the arts is well known. Indeed, she has a particular interest in Jack Dolan, (son of our butler), who is fast garnering a reputation for his hand-painted pottery. Mr Dolan Snr also has a daughter, Elizabeth. She is two years my senior and lives with her brother in London. Neither were at the Hall on the fateful night.

And now for Charles Lidell. If the surname is familiar to you, perhaps it is because he is the son of Ernst Lidell, the famous anthropologist. This gentleman is a long-time friend of Lady Halifax, and although he spends much of his time on one continent or another, their exchange of correspondence was quite frequent.

Charles spent much of his youth in boarding schools, and as a consequence, rarely saw his father. I think he rather resented his absent parent, for whenever the two were staying at the Hall, rather than a filial bond, there was always a degree of tension between them.

I should explain my use of the singular. Mrs Lidell is highly-strung and rather frivolous, and like her husband, was an absentee parent, residing much of the time in Paris or some other European city. Unfortunately, about a year ago, she was committed to an asylum in Glasgow, and from what I understand, is unlikely to ever be released.

Charles had recently returned from a protracted tour of the Continent, and Lady Halifax declared that she would not allow him to be alone during the holidays. She therefore invited him to spend Christmas with us, telling him upon his arrival that he could stay at the Hall as long as he wished.

I always admired Charles, and would often think about him, alone and parentless at boarding school. I wrote to him quite often, and always tried to make his visits to the Hall as pleasant as possible. I suppose I had a young girl's crush, but then, were not my feelings towards him warranted?

I will now return to the sequence of events. It was about eleven o'clock when Mr Hargraves, Mr Creswick, and Reverend Hope, departed with the Baroness in her yellow motorcar. I think the Reverend was a little intimidated by the mechanical monster, but as it was cold and snowing hard, he did not demure from accepting a ride. The remainder of us went to bed immediately after their departure.

The following morning being Christmas Eve, dawned with all the excitement one might expect. But sadly it was not to be. Annie, the housemaid, awakened me about seven o'clock saying that there had been an accident. One look at her pale face was enough to tell me that it was serious, and my first thought was that something had happened to the car and its occupants. But, the poor girl was in such a state that when I put the question to her, it was all she could do to shake her head and point to my door.

I dressed quickly and went into the corridor, and the first person I saw was Dolan. He was standing outside my grandmother's

room, and like Annie, his face was as pale as death. “No, no, Miss, you mustn’t come near,” he insisted, but I was determined.

Oh, Mr Holmes, what a terrible sight. My grandmother was in bed and lying in a pool of blood. As we now know, her throat had been cut. Naturally the authorities were summoned immediately, and shortly thereafter, Lady Maddox observed that Charles was absent.

Thinking he had gone for an early morning gallop, I went to the stables but no horses were missing. Then, when I returned to the house, Dolan informed me that upon checking Charles’s room, he, Dolan, had found a blood soaked towel in the bathroom, and that there was evidence of blood on the bed, the bedside table, and on the wardrobe. There was even a smear on the handle of the door.

An intensive search was then undertaken but Charles was not to be found. Mr Holmes, I KNOW in my heart he is innocent. Perhaps he saw the murderer, perhaps he even witnessed the deed, but in either event, something happened to frighten him away from the Hall. It would be remiss of me not to mention at this point, that he was terribly concerned he had inherited his mother’s insanity. Even so, he was very fond of Lady Halifax, and would never have done anything to harm or disgrace her.

I will be remaining at the Hall until the 30th December, and thereafter at the Baroness’s home in Birch Grove, telephone Kensington 2121. Unfortunately, the Hall does not have the telephone connected, though my late grandmother was seriously considering having the instrument installed. In consequence of this inconvenience, I would be glad to receive you at the Hall without announcement.

If you can do anything to help, then I beg you to do so as soon as possible.

Yours most sincerely,

Ferris Buckley.