

The Novel Stage Adventures of Sherlock Holmes: The Valley of Fear
by Bart Lovins

Characters

Body - non-speaking
Inspector Alec MacDonald
Sherlock Holmes
Dr John Watson
Professor Moriarty
Birdy Edwards (Cecil Barker, Jack Malone)
Ivy Douglas
Bodymaster McGinty
Captain Marvin
The Brotherhood (an a capella quartet)

(All characters may be played by a cast of 7 plus the quartet.)

**The Novel Stage Adventures of Sherlock Holmes:
The Valley of Fear**

Act 1

Scene 1 - The Birlstone Manor study, Sussex, 1895

(In this production, all set and most props other than several straight-backed Victorian-style chairs are pantomimed. House lights out. Music 1 in to set mood. Curtain up in Blackout. Music 1 out, followed immediately by the sound of a massive gunshot blast. Lights up, revealing the Body, dressed in pajamas and a dressing gown, lying on his back on the floor. A blood-soaked handkerchief covers his face. The Body's left arm is thrust out and exposed as high as the elbow. He wears two rings on that hand. Halfway up the forearm is a curious red design, a triangle inside a circle, standing out in vivid relief against the skin. A sawed-off double-barrelled shotgun lay across the Body's chest. A calling card reading V.V. 341 lay on the floor beside the Body. Two chairs placed face to face indicate the base of a window; one chair stands alone as if at a table; and a set of chairs - placed side by side - represent a sofa that hides the Body from the entrance to the room Up Center. Set on the table are a snubbed candle and an oil lamp. Watson enters using a cane. He ignores the Body and speaks to the Audience directly. Scotland Yard Inspector Alec MacDonald enters opposite and stares down at the Body.)

Watson: (Aside.) In sharing these short sketches based upon my singular companion's cases, it is only natural that I should be made an observer and eventually an actor in many a strange drama.

MacDonald: (Looking up and exclaiming in a Scottish accent.) Harumph! One might think this had all been fixed up for theatrical effect.

(MacDonald pulls a pencil and a notepad from his pockets, kneels by the Body and takes notes on what he observes.)

Watson: (Aside.) None more so than the one at present.

MacDonald: (To himself.) Lying across the victim's chest is a curious weapon...

Watson: (Aside, crossing the stage in front of the action.) Even after my marriage and my subsequent start in private practice, Holmes still came to me from time to time when he desired a companion in his investigation.

MacDonald: (To himself, continuing.) A shotgun with the barrel sawed off a foot in front of the triggers.

Watson: (Aside.) Left to my own devices, I would've remained indoors on such a damp evening, for though it did not prevent me from walking, my wounded leg ached wearily at every change of the weather.

(Watson exits. MacDonald looks under the handkerchief and then immediately thinks better of doing so - as well as of what he last ate. He lowers the fabric and stands as Holmes enters, followed by Watson.)

MacDonald: (To himself, continuing.) It is clear that it was fired at close range, and he received the whole charge in the face, blowing his head almost to pieces.

Holmes: Here at one o'clock in the morning? You are the early bird, Mr. Mac.

MacDonald: (Excitedly racing to greet him.) Hullo, Mr. Holmes!

(The following exchange occurs on the other side of the sofa, thus obstructing Holmes and Watson's view of the Body. Holmes and MacDonald shake hands.)

Holmes: I wish you luck with your worm, sir.

MacDonald: (With a knowing grin.) The early hours of a case are the precious ones, as no man knows better than you, Mr. Holmes. This, no doubt, is your biographer, Dr. Watson. When the time comes, we'll all hope for a place in your next book, sir.

(Watson and MacDonald shake hands.)

Holmes: Watson, this is Inspector MacDonald of Scotland Yard but don't hold that against the young fellow.

Watson: (To MacDonald.) Sir.

MacDonald: I say, Holmes, have you added clairvoyance to your skillset?

Holmes: Hardly that.

MacDonald: I was just about to send for you to come join me here - you and your friend - at Birlstone Manor.

(Holmes produces a letter and hands it to MacDonald.)

Holmes: Ah, yes! Here's our invitation.

MacDonald: **(Confused.)** What's this gibberish, Mr. Holmes?

Holmes: It is a cipher from our friend, Fred Porlock, that Watson and I have just had occasion to solve.

(Watson produces a page torn out of Whitaker's Almanac and shows it to MacDonald.)

Watson: See here, as torn from Whitaker's Almanac.

(Holmes and Watson trap MacDonald between them.)

Holmes: **(Reading the cipher.)** "P" Five hundred thirty-four...

Watson: **(Indicating the number on the page.)** This is *page* Five hundred thirty-four.

Holmes: **(Reading the cipher.)** "C" Two...

(Watson folds the page in half and hands it to MacDonald.)

Watson: And this, the second *column*...

Holmes: And the numbers in the code...

Watson: Correspond to words in the column.

Holmes: Porlock only wrote out the words...

Watson: Unavailable to him in the column.

MacDonald: **(To each of them.)** What? What?

Watson: It's child's play, Inspector.

Holmes: Here, see? **(Reading the cipher.)** Thirteen...

Watson: **(Indicating circled word.)** There...

Holmes: **(Reading the cipher.)** One hundred seven...

Watson: **(Indicating circled word.)** Is...

Holmes: **(Reading the cipher.)** Thirty-six...

Watson: **(Indicating circled word.)** Danger...

Holmes: **(Reading the cipher.)** Eighty-four...

Watson: **(Indicating circled word.)** Come...

Holmes: **(Reading the cipher.)** Fifty-seven...

Watson: **(Indicating circled word.)** Very...

Holmes: **(Reading the cipher.)** one hundred twenty-one one.

Watson: **(Indicating circled word.)** Soon.

Holmes: } **(Reading the cipher together.)**

Watson: } Douglas...

MacDonald: Douglas?

Holmes: **(Reading the cipher.)** Two hundred ninety-three...

Watson: **(Indicating circled word.)** At...

Holmes: } **(Reading the cipher together.)**

Watson: } Birlstone...

MacDonald: Birlstone? **(Breaking free of them.)** Man, this is witchcraft!

(MacDonald returns the papers to Holmes and Watson.)

MacDonald: **(Amazed.)** How did this Fred Porlock get those names?

Holmes: I take it something is amiss with Mr. Douglas here at Birlstone?

(MacDonald looks from one to the other in dazed astonishment and then points out the Body.)

MacDonald: Just this!

(Holmes and Watson pocket their papers as they spy the Body behind the sofa.)

Holmes: **(With quiet interested composure.)** Remarkable.

MacDonald: You don't seem surprised.

Holmes: Why should I be? I receive a warning from Porlock that danger threatens a certain person at a certain destination. Then, within two hours' travel, I learn that this danger has actually materialized and that the person is dead. I am interested but, as you observe, hardly surprised.

MacDonald: Who then is Porlock?

Holmes: Porlock, Mr. Mac, is important, not for himself, but for the great man with whom he is in touch. You have heard me speak of Professor Moriarty?

Watson: (To MacDonald.) The famous scientific criminal, as famous among crooks as...

Holmes: (Deprecatingly.) My blushes, Watson!

Watson: I was about to say, as he is unknown to the public.

Holmes: (Laughing.) A touch! A distinct touch! You are developing an unexpected vein of humor, Watson, against which I must learn to guard myself.

MacDonald: Hang it all, Mr. Holmes! Where's the mystery if there is a man in London who prophesied the crime before ever it occurred? We have only to question that man, and the rest will follow.

Holmes: No doubt, Mr. Mac, were he still alive.

MacDonald: Porlock is dead?

(Holmes produces a second letter and passes it to MacDonald.)

Holmes: Ah, pardon me. This later missive came in the second post of the day.

MacDonald: (Reading.) Dear Mr. Holmes, he says. I will go no further in this matter. It is too dangerous - he suspects me. I read suspicion in his eyes. Yours, Fred Porlock.

(MacDonald passes the letter back to Holmes.)

MacDonald: The other being, I presume, Professor Moriarty.

Holmes: No less! When any of that party talk about *He*, you know whom they mean. (Shaking his head.) I don't hold out much hope for our friend, Porlock. Moriarty rules with a rod of iron over his people and has only one punishment. (Pocketing the letter.) Death.

MacDonald: (Smiling feebly.) I won't conceal from you, Mr. Holmes, that we down at the Yard think that you have a wee bit of a bee in your bonnet over this professor. I made some inquiries myself about him, and he seems to be a very respectable, learned, and talented sort of man.

Holmes: I'm glad you've got so far as to recognize the talent.

MacDonald: Man, you can't but recognize it! After I heard your view, I made it my business to have a little chat with him. He'd have made a grand minister with his solemn-like way of talking. Why, when he put his hand on my shoulder as we were parting, it was like a father's blessing before you go out into the cold, cruel world.

Holmes: (Chuckling and rubbing his hands.) Great! Great! Tell me, Friend MacDonald, this pleasing and touching interview was, I suppose, in the professor's study?

MacDonald: That's so.

Holmes: A fine room, is it not?

MacDonald: Very handsome indeed, Mr. Holmes.

Holmes: You sat in front of his writing table?

MacDonald: Just so.

Holmes: Did you happen to observe a painting over the professor's head?

MacDonald: I don't miss much, Mr. Holmes. Maybe I learned that from you. Yes, I saw the picture...

Holmes: A young woman with her head on her hands, peeping at you sideways.

MacDonald: You've seen it, then?

Watson: So, you've visited him too?

Holmes: I have been three times in his rooms, waiting for him under different pretexts and leaving before he came. Once...

MacDonald: Yes?

Holmes: Well, I can hardly tell about the once to an official detective. It was on the last occasion that I took the liberty of running over his papers - with the most unexpected results.

Watson: Ah! You found something compromising?

Holmes: Absolutely nothing.

(MacDonald snickers.)

Holmes: (To himself.) That was what amazed me.

MacDonald: (Glancing appealingly at Watson.) So, he's been there three times, he's found nothing, *and* he's never actually met the man!

Watson: (Laughing.) No, he never has.

Holmes: (Correcting.) Never *had*.

Watson: Sorry, what?

(Music 2 in. Lights change, and the Body, MacDonald, and Watson fade into the darkness as Holmes' story unfolds. Action is continuous.)

Scene 2 - 221B Baker Street, London

(Watson and MacDonald position two chairs downstage of the sofa on either side of a table set for a chess game and exit as Holmes speaks. The chairs forming the study's sofa remain and hide the Body from view during the scene. The apartment entrance is next to a liquor cabinet and across from a fireplace. Atop the fireplace mantelpiece, among other paraphernalia, is a penknife. Moriarty enters, wearing a top hat and carrying a cane.)

Moriarty: **(Peering from the doorway at Holmes with great curiosity through puckered eyes.)** You have less frontal development than I should have expected.

Holmes: My nerves are fairly proof, but I must confess to a start when I saw the very man who had been so much in my thoughts standing there on the threshold of 221B.

Moriarty: **(Smiling and blinking.)** It is a dangerous habit to finger loaded firearms in the pocket of one's coat. **(Entering the apartment and closing the door behind him.)** You evidently don't know me.

Holmes: On the contrary. **(Drawing the weapon from his pocket, uncocking it, and laying it upon the table.)** I think it is fairly evident that I do.

(Moriarty watches Holmes put the weapon down and notices the chessboard set up on the table. Music 2 out.)

Moriarty: Ah, a Staunton chess set. Fancy a game?

Holmes: Pray, take a chair. I can spare you five minutes if you have anything to say.

Moriarty: **(Placing his hat upon the sofa and sitting at the table.)** All that I have to say has already crossed your mind.

Holmes: **(Sitting and making his first move.)** Then possibly, my answer has crossed yours.

Moriarty: **(Pointing to the piece Holmes is moving.)** You stand fast?

Holmes: **(Removing his fingers from the piece in question.)** Absolutely.

(Moriarty clasps his hand into his pocket, and Holmes raises the pistol from the table, cocks it, and aims it at Moriarty. Moriarty merely draws out a memorandum book in which he has scribbled some dates. Holmes holds the weapon aimed at his guest all the same.)

Moriarty: **(Making a move.)** I first took note of you nearly ten years ago during the Mormon affair...

Holmes: **(Making a move.)** Ah, so it was you who assisted Drebber and Stangerson in their flight from the assassin, Jefferson Hope.

Moriarty: **(Making a counter move.)** By the middle of 1888, you had crossed my path on numerous occasions...

Holmes: **(Making a counter move and taking a piece.)** Including the unsuccessful recovery of the Agra treasure?

(As Moriarty speaks, the two make several moves in rapid succession.)

Moriarty: This year alone, on the 23rd of January, you incommoded me; by the middle of March, I was seriously inconvenienced by you; at the end of June, I was absolutely hampered in my plans; and now, as the year comes to a close, you frustrated me over the French gold.

Holmes: The Red-Headed League? Wherever did you *dig up* that name?

Moriarty: I find myself placed in such a position through your continual persecution that I am in positive danger of losing my liberty.

Holmes: Tut, tut.

Moriarty: The situation is becoming an impossible one.

Holmes: Have you any suggestion to make? **(Making a move.)** Check.

Moriarty: **(His face swaying about.)** You must drop it, Mr. Holmes. **(Making a counter move.)** You really must, you know.

Holmes: And should I decline?

Moriarty: Tut, tut. I am quite sure that a man of your intelligence will see that there can be but one outcome to this affair. **(Unaffectedly.)** It would be a grief to me to be forced to take any extreme measure. **(Making a move.)** Check.

(Holmes laughs as he makes a counter move.)

Moriarty: (Making a counter move.) You laugh, sir, but I assure you that it really would.

Holmes: Danger is part of my trade.

Moriarty: That is not danger. It is inevitable destruction. You stand in the way not merely of an individual but of a mighty organization, the full extent of which you, with all your cleverness, have been unable to realize. (Making an aggressive move.) Check.

(Holmes, surprised by Moriarty's move, uncharacteristically hesitates to make his next move.)

Moriarty: (Finally.) You must stand clear, Mr. Holmes, or be trodden underfoot.

Holmes: (Rising and going to the door.) I am afraid that in the pleasure of this conversation, I am neglecting business of importance which awaits me elsewhere.

(Holmes opens the door and extends Moriarty his hat to encourage his departure.)

Moriarty: (Tearing a blank page from his memorandum book and scribbling upon it.) Let us adjourn the game then for now.

Holmes: Assuming that we may pick up right where we've left off.

(Moriarty rises, folds the note in half to obscure its contents, and hands it to Holmes as he accepts his hat.)

Moriarty: Naturally. When that need arises, here is my next move.

Holmes: (Placing his weapon upon the mantle and picking up his penknife.) Excellent. Allow me to secure it until we may resume our game.

(Holmes stabs the note to the top of the mantelpiece.)

Moriarty: (Stepping out the door, shaking his head, sadly.) Well, well, it seems a pity, but I have done what I could. (Turning with one last thought, peering and blinking from the hallway.) If you *are* clever enough to bring destruction upon me, rest assured that I shall do as much to you.

(Moriarty turns to leave again.)

Holmes: You have paid me several compliments, Mr. Moriarty. Let me pay you one in return. If I were assured of the former eventuality, I would, in the interests of the public, cheerfully accept the latter.

Moriarty: (Snarling.) I can promise you the one, Mr. Holmes... (Puts hat on head.) But not the other.

(Moriarty slams out of the room. Lights change. Music 3 in. Action is continuous.)

Scene 3 - The Birlstone Manor study, Sussex

(Watson and MacDonald enter and arrange chairs for the scene as Holmes speaks.)

Holmes: (Haunted by the experience.) And so, turning his rounded back upon me, he left peering and blinking out of the room. That was my singular interview with Professor Moriarty. I confess that it left an unpleasant effect upon my mind.

(Music 3 out. Watson and MacDonald step back into the light. His practical Scotch intelligence brings MacDonald back with a snap to the matter in hand.)

MacDonald: Aye, you've got us side-tracked with your interesting anecdotes, Mr. Holmes. What really counts is that there is some connection between the professor and the crime –

Watson: That we get from the warning received through the man Porlock.

MacDonald: Can we, for our present practical needs, get any further than that?

Holmes: (Shaking his head.) The temptation to form premature theories upon insufficient data is the bane of our profession. I can see only two things for certain at present - a great brain in London and a dead man in Sussex.

MacDonald: Then, with your permission, Mr. Moriarty can keep, anyhow, while we confine our speculation to the situation at hand.

Holmes: (Quoting Shakespeare.) Lead on Macduff, and damn'd be him that first cries, hold, enough.

MacDonald: (Not recognizing the quote but sensing a joke has been made at his expense.) Hum?

Holmes: Shakespeare.

MacDonald: Oh. Right, then. I never cared much for the theatre.

(Holmes and Watson exchange a look. MacDonald refers to his notepad as needed.)

MacDonald: Some bits will come home to you, Mr. Holmes, or I am much mistaken. And you also, Dr. Watson, before we finish.

Watson: What do we know about the victim?

(Music 4 in. Lights change as Ivy Douglas and Birdy Edwards - disguised as Cecil Barker - enter other stage areas and pantomime the described actions.)

MacDonald: Mr. John Douglas... born in Ireland but immigrated to America. He and his young wife took up residency a month ago following their wedding. Reclusive to a fault, Mr. Douglas seldom visited London or even the local village.

Holmes: **(Sitting.)** Who was first upon the scene?

MacDonald: A house guest, Mr. Cecil Barker of Hampstead. Evidently, he had first known Douglas in America and worked with him mining gold in California. I relied upon him for all these facts.

(Holmes starts to interrupt but is cut off.)

MacDonald: I checked them.

(Pleased, Holmes nods.)

MacDonald: And added a few of my own.

(Holmes eagerly leans forward, resting his elbows upon his knees and pressing his fingertips against each other.)

Holmes: Oh? What were *they*?

(Holmes sits, absorbed by MacDonald's report.)

MacDonald: It was after midnight when Cecil Barker, much excited, had rushed to the police station and reported that a terrible tragedy had occurred at the Birlstone. **(Pointing to the Body.)** His host, John Douglas, had been murdered. I hurried back to the house with him and arrived at the scene of the crime about half-past midnight. On reaching the Manor, the victim's wife, Ivy Douglas, greeted us, wringing her hands in fright. By contrast, Cecil Barker seemed to be master of his emotions and beckoned for me to follow him here into the study, which was the room nearest the entrance.

Holmes: Arrests?

MacDonald: Not as yet, as the case presents some very perplexing and extraordinary features.

(Holmes and Watson kneel to inspect the Body.)

Holmes: Nothing has been touched up to now?

MacDonald: I'll answer for that. You see it all exactly as I found it.

(Holmes lifts the handkerchief from the Body's head.)

Watson: **(In a hushed voice, staring in horror at the dreadful head.)** When was the weapon fired?

(As MacDonald speaks, Edwards bursts into the study and leans over the sofa to peer down at the Body. He then prevents Douglas from entering, sends her away, and races off in the opposite direction.)

MacDonald: Let me see. **(Sitting at the table and flipping through notepad pages.)** Ah! Mr. Barker reported it was just half-past eleven when he heard the shot from upstairs and rushed down into the room and found his friend John Douglas lying as you see him.

Watson: Did he see no one else in the room?

MacDonald: No. He heard Mrs. Douglas coming down the hall and rushed out to prevent her from seeing this dreadful sight. Once he turned her away, he raced for help.

(Music 4 out. Lights change as Edwards and Douglas exit.)

Holmes: When we arrived, Watson and I entered by a drawbridge over a moat surrounding the Manor.

MacDonald: **(Nodding.)** The only approach to the house is over that drawbridge. It is raised every evening and lowered every morning, converting Birlstone into an island during the night.

Holmes: If the drawbridge was up, then how could any murderer have got away?

MacDonald: That was my first idea. But come and see!

(MacDonald draws aside a curtain. Holmes leans through the window and dips his hand into the moat.)

MacDonald: **(Continuing.)** This window was discovered open. And look! The moat lay around the whole house so close that the ground floor windows are within a foot of the surface of the water.

Watson: You mean that someone waded across the moat?

MacDonald: Exactly what Mr. Barker suggested!

Holmes: **(Smiling.)** You don't say? **(Turning to the window.)** The window seems rather narrow for a man to pass.

MacDonald: Well, we don't need your deductions, Mr. Holmes, to tell us that. But you or I or... **(MacDonald looks at Watson, then turns to Holmes again.)**

MacDonald: Well, we could squeeze through all right.

Holmes: **(Looking out the window.)** The moat looks to be about forty feet in breadth.

Watson: How deep is it?

MacDonald: About two feet at each side and three in the middle.

Holmes: **(Grabbing the curtain.)** What o'clock were these curtains drawn?

MacDonald: **(Checking notes.)** When the lamps were lit... shortly after five.

Holmes: **(Pulling the curtains aside.)** Someone with muddy boots has been hiding here, sure enough. At what o'clock was the drawbridge raised?

MacDonald: At nearly six o'clock.

Holmes: Then it comes to this. **(Letting go of the curtains.)** If anyone came from outside, they must have got in across the bridge between the time the curtains were drawn and when the drawbridge was raised and then been in hiding until Mr. Douglas came into the room.

MacDonald: That is so! Mrs. Douglas reported that it was her husband's custom to go round the house every night before he turned in. That brought him in here. The man was waiting and shot him, then got away through the window leaving behind his gun.

Watson: But if Mr. Barker were in the room within minutes of the crime, the assassin must have then been in the water at that very moment.

MacDonald: I have no doubt of it. **(Pulling the curtains closed.)** But the curtain was closed, as you can see, and so it never occurred to him to look as he was distracted by Mrs. Douglas in the hall.

Holmes: What else do we know of Mrs. Douglas?

MacDonald: She confirmed that the shot followed shortly after her husband got a new candle from the bedside table drawer around midnight and went downstairs for his nightly rounds.

(Holmes turns to the table. Watson kneels by the Body.)

Holmes: **(Pointing at the candle on the table.)** This snubbed candle here?

MacDonald: Yes.

Holmes: **(Pointing at the lamp.)** And the table lamp next to it?

MacDonald: Lit by Mr. Barker upon entering the room.

Holmes: Remarkable.

Watson: What's this mark on his forearm?

(Holmes and MacDonald come to look.)

MacDonald: Ah, yes. I was coming to that.

Watson: **(Aside.)** About halfway up the forearm is a curious red design. A triangle inside a circle, standing out in vivid relief upon the skin.

MacDonald: I never saw anything like it.

Holmes: It's not tattooed.

Watson: No. **(Leaping to his feet.)** Holmes! This man has been branded!

Holmes: Hum, it must have caused great pain when it was inflicted.

Watson: **(To MacDonald.)** Could this have any connection with the crime, do you think?

MacDonald: I don't profess to know the meaning of it, but Mr. Barker said that he had seen the mark on Douglas many times over the years whenever the man rolled up his sleeves.

Watson: Whatever the reason or meaning of it, it is undoubtedly a burn.

Holmes: Remarkable.

MacDonald: **(Sighing.)** Aye, it's a rum thing, alright.

Holmes: Truly remarkable.

MacDonald: Everything about this case is rum.

Watson: **(Astonished.)** How curious.

MacDonald: Well, what is it now?

Watson: **(Pointing at the Body's outstretched hand.)** They've taken his wedding ring.

MacDonald: What?

Watson: Douglas is married, you said?

MacDonald: Yes, man. His wife is in the other room!

Watson: Where then is his ring? See here. There's a ring with a rough nugget on it on the little finger and a twisted snake ring on the third but no wedding band on the fourth.

Holmes: Bravo, Watson!

MacDonald: **(Picking up the card which lay beside the Body.)** And then there's this card?

Holmes: **(Reading.)** V.V. three, four, one?

Watson: Can you make anything of the inscription, Holmes?

Holmes: No, nothing. What do you think, Mr. Mac?

MacDonald: It gives me the impression of a secret society of some sort, the same with this brand upon the forearm.

Watson: That's my idea, too!

Holmes: Well, without getting too far ahead of things, let us adopt that as a working hypothesis and then see how far our difficulties disappear. **(Demonstrating.)** An agent from such a society makes his way into the house, waits for Mr. Douglas, blows his head nearly off with this weapon, and escapes by wading the moat, after leaving a card beside the dead man, which will - when mentioned in the papers - tell other members of the society that vengeance has been done.

MacDonald: That all hangs together. But why this gun, of all weapons?

Holmes: Watson?

Watson: Well, they were buckshot cartridges, and the triggers are wired together so that, if you pulled on either one, both barrels would discharge.

MacDonald: Whoever fixed that up had made up his mind that he was going to take no chances of missing his man.

Watson: The sawed-off gun is not more than two foot long - one could carry it easily under one's coat. There is no complete maker's name, but the printed letters P-E-N are on the fluting between the barrels. The rest of the name has been cut off by a saw.

Holmes: **(Without looking.)** A big P with a flourish above it, E and N smaller?

Watson: Exactly.

Holmes: Pennsylvania Small Arms Company.

Watson: There is some evidence *then* that whoever killed John Douglas was an American.

MacDonald: **(Shaking his head.)** Man, we are surely traveling over fast, I fear. Is it suicide, or is it murder - that's our first question, gentlemen, is it not?

Holmes: **(Judiciously.)** Well, state your case, Mr. Mac.

(Holmes sits intently observant during the following, his forehead wrinkled with speculation.)

MacDonald: **(Demonstrating with some difficulty.)** If it were suicide, then we have to believe that this man, Douglas, took off his wedding ring and concealed it; then went outside in his dressing gown and trampled mud behind the curtain in order to give the idea someone had waited for him, opened the window...

Watson: **(Laughing.)** We can surely dismiss all that.

MacDonald: **(Acquiescing.)** Suicide then is out of the question, and a murder has been done.

Watson: In which case, we have to determine whether it was done by someone outside or inside the house.

Holmes: **(Invitingly.)** Well, let's hear the argument.

Watson: **(Nervously clearing his throat.)** Well, there are considerable difficulties both ways... and yet one or the other it must be. We will suppose first that some person or persons inside the house did the crime. They got this man down here at a time when everything was still and then did the deed...

MacDonald: With the queerest and noisiest weapon in the world?

Watson: That does not seem a very likely start, does it?

Holmes: No, it does not.

MacDonald: **(Demonstrating, again.)** Well, then, we are driven back to the theory that it was done by someone from outside.

Watson: If so, the murderer got into the house between five and six. That is to say, between dusk and the time when the bridge was raised.