

The Star of Hind



A Post-Modern, Feminist Sherlock Holmes
Mystery

Set in the Squalor of Edwardian London.

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By

Old Grandad

Chapter I

Blood on the Cobblestones at the Red Fort

Many Years Before My Story Starts

In the Red Fort Palace in the Ancient City of Delhi: September 1857

By standing on a chair and peering forward through the sandalwood lattice, Ali could see the fires of the beautiful, ancient city drawing ever nearer to the palace. The evening sky was lit up by the lurid flames engulfing homes and buildings across the city. It was the fourth month of the siege and time was running out for the people of the palace. Ali was standing in the gallery, high above the street. Normally the city below would be teeming with life: all around the palace walls in peaceful times there were the lanes of the bazaar and the comings and goings of the Emperor's subjects with haughty camels, proud elephants, lumbering ox carts and humble donkeys. But that was in happier times - before the rebellion had swamped the heart of the great Mughal Empire.

Now the noise of the battle and the smoke of the canon fire reached into the heart of the old city and Ali could see in every face the fear of what tomorrow might bring. He felt it too. Many of the Emperor's servants had already escaped, slipping away through unguarded gates or through the underground passages that connected the palace to the old city. Once the palace was surrounded and the Emperor himself could not honourably escape, there had been a plan to take the Empress and the ladies of the harem to safety but a treacherous slave had betrayed the plan and the secret passage had had to be collapsed with gun powder. Everyone knew that within days - perhaps only hours- the palace and the Emperor and all the court would fall to the ferocious British troops gathered at the gates. Above the noise of the battle below the palace walls, Ali could hear the whirling of the Scottish bagpipes and the drunken shouting of the English soldiers who knew that victory

was close at hand. When the last of the Emperor's brave Indian soldiers were killed, the palace, the Emperor and all his treasures would be lost.

More than all this, it would be the end of the Empire itself. For centuries, an Emperor had ruled the people of India from this palace. With its high red sandstone walls, its noble towers, its hidden gardens and treasures, the Red Fort palace had been loved by the people of the old city. The present Emperor, Bahadur Shah Zafar, lived a holy and good life: he was an old and scholarly gentleman. His ambitious sons and his Grand Wazir, however, had encouraged rebellion and had brought the anger of the British down upon them all. Six months ago, it looked as if the hated British would be driven out of India; now it was certain that the Emperor himself would be forced to plead for his life from the violent soldiers who would kill his faithful servants, burn his beautiful home and steal everything of value.

Ali was the lowest of the servants in the great palace - a little boy who worked in the kitchens and who always seemed to get the dirtiest jobs to do. His boss was the palace cook - a grand person with a sleek red turban and a haughty manner who often gave his orders to Ali with a sharp blow or a threat. Ali was used to being bullied; he had never known the love of a mother or father before he came as a slave to work long days in the palace kitchen and sleep at night on a mat beside the stove. He was silent among the many grand people of the palace but he was not stupid - and he was not surprised when one of the first servants to desert the Emperor was the bullying cook who told everyone before he slipped away that he had had a letter from his grandmother in Kashmir who needed him urgently. Many others found similar excuses to desert the Emperor when he needed them most and soon Ali found himself promoted to serving at table. That is how little Ali, the lowest of the palace servants, found himself in the last days of the terrible siege waiting on the Emperor himself in the private apartments of the Red Fort palace.

The plate he carried on a big silver tray may have been made of gold, but the meal on it was simple and scanty. After months of siege, there was little enough for anyone to eat - even the Emperor. Ali bowed as he brought the food forward and he bowed again when he had placed the tray before the man he recognised as the Emperor himself. Ali knew that a good servant did not look into the face of his master, but as he bowed waiting to be dismissed, he was surprised to feel a gentle hand on his chin, lifting his face up to look into the Emperor's kind eyes.

"Well, little one," the Emperor said sadly, "have all my servants run away? And will you run too, when you can?"

Ali was too frightened to answer - none of his work in the kitchens had prepared him for a moment like this - but the Emperor held his chin and seemed to demand an answer. Then the Emperor smiled a sad, kind smile that encouraged Ali to smile back. Even at this time of crisis, the Emperor was dressed in beautiful silk robes. There was a chain of emeralds around his neck and in his turban there was an enormous pink pearl set with diamonds

into a splendid gold pin. But for all the splendour of the Emperor's clothes, one was drawn immediately to the sad and haunted eyes in his old, weathered face.

"Your Majesty," Ali whispered, "I think that I will have to wait until the British soldiers come. I have nowhere to go."

"Nor do I," chuckled the Emperor bitterly, "nor do I. And as we are both prisoners then, waiting for the same terrible, uncertain ending, perhaps you could keep an old man company while I eat my dinner. Tell me your name and about your life and where you come from. We don't have much time before the British soldiers break through into my palace but you're only a little boy so perhaps you don't have a very long story to tell. Sit here beside me - and share my dinner."

This was a desperate, sad time but in the midst of the noise and drama of the battle, old man and boy sat and shared the simple rice and vegetables. Ali had never eaten from a gold plate before and the Emperor was right: there was little enough to tell of his life but Ali did his very best. He began with his earliest memories of a poor village far from the splendours of the palace. He had been orphaned at such a young age that he couldn't remember his parents at all. His uncle had taken in the little boy and his bigger sister, Parvati, when his parents died but that uncle was poor too and had children of his own to care for. There simply wasn't enough work [and certainly not enough food] to be found in the one little farm his uncle worked for a grasping landlord. When Parvati was only ten years old, she had been given as a wife to the local money lender; at the same time, Ali had been sold to the cook at the palace. There was nothing much more to tell and Ali fell silent, before looking into the sad face of the old Emperor - and finding him in tears.

"Ali," said the Emperor sadly through his tears, "you are so young and your life has been so poor and hard - and yet here you are when so many others have fled to the British or run away." There was a long silence; Ali sensed that the Emperor was struggling to make a difficult decision. Finally, he smiled and took Ali's hand.

"Soon, the British soldiers will be here. I know them - and what they are capable of. They will burn and loot the palace; they will probably kill me. But they may spare the ladies of my harem; perhaps they will even spare my sons and my grandsons. Almost certainly they will spare a little boy like you who has no value to them. Do you know my sons? Do you know my grandson?"

"Yes, Your Majesty," Ali replied. "But why is that important at this moment?"

"I need you to do me a great service, the Emperor said quietly. "And I must trust you - for to be honest, all the men I thought I could trust have run away and broken my heart. Will you promise to serve me in this, Ali, even though what I will ask of you must put your life in danger?"

"Yes, Your Majesty, I will," said the boy. He spoke in a whisper because the Emperor himself spoke quietly; he seemed to fear anyone hearing them at this moment.

The Emperor sighed and drew back, trying to make his voice sound conversational and relaxed. "Ali," he said, "can you bring me the wooden box on the table over there?"

Ali hadn't noticed until now the beautiful wooden box on the low brass table; he went to fetch it and bowed again as he held it carefully out with both hands. The box was beautiful, made of fine cherrywood and carved all over in an elegant Kashmiri design of roses and oak leaves. Even among the splendours of the palace, Ali had never seen anything so beautiful. The Emperor noticed how the boy's eyes lit up as he held the marvellous object in his hands.

"Do you like it, little one?" asked the Emperor with a chuckle. Ali nodded, a little ashamed that he had allowed his feelings to show quite so obviously to the great man, his Master. "We'll then, in happier times- when all of this is over, you may keep it for yourself. And it has a secret. Look carefully."

The Emperor opened the box and Ali was a little disappointed to find that it was empty. Such a box, Ali thought, should contain a great treasure. The interior was divided into three sections; the left and right sections were empty, the cherrywood being left plain and unadorned. The middle third of the box, however, was closed over and the roses and oak leaf design was repeated in this lovely panel.

"And now, little one, rest your finger on the rose carved right in the bottom corner of the box- just here." Ali did as he was told and pushed gently and the carved panel covering the middle section of the box sprung open and Ali gasped.

"You may pick it up," said the Emperor sadly and Ali - with the most exquisite care - reached in and picked up a diamond as big as his fist. It wasn't easy: the box had obviously been designed to house the diamond for it fitted so snugly that it was only with the greatest care that Ali was able to prise it out of its setting and lift it up to the last of the evening light filtering through the carved sandalwood window.

It was astonishing. The stone had been cut in a perfect tear drop shape and light sparkled from every facet. It was heavy and cold and astonishingly beautiful. The Emperor held out his hand and Ali happily turned the stone over to him; he immediately felt a sense of relief. He hadn't realised until the stone was gone from his hand how sad it made him feel.

"Ah, little one," said the Emperor, "I can see that even you can feel the grim power of the most precious gem in the whole collection of the Crown Jewels. My ancestor- the first emperor to conquer India for the Prophet- took this jewel from a Hindu prince whom he slew in battle. The Hindu prince wore the stone on a chain around his neck and my

ancestor took both the jewel and the life of the man who wore it. It is known by many names but I call it the Star of Hind. Apart from my family, this is the most precious thing I own. It has the power to bring great happiness - and great sadness to its owner. Every one of my ancestors who has owned the Star of Hind has suffered grief but that, of course, is the fate of great kings. And I give it now into your safe keeping."

Here the Emperor returned the gem stone to its snug position in the wooden box and closed the lid. Secured like this, only someone who was very careful or part of the secret would think that the box held something precious.

"I charge you, Ali, with this great responsibility. Soon, the British will storm into the palace: they may kill me but I pray that they will spare my sons or my grandson. Take this great treasure and keep it safe. When the time is right, deliver the Star of Hind to the Crown Prince, Mirza Mughal. If by terrible chance my son does not survive until there is peace in the Empire again, please give it to my grandson. The British soldiers may ignore a little boy and you might escape with the great treasure."

Ali was deeply touched by the trust of the saintly old man and took his hand gently. He had not the slightest idea how he could ever keep this extraordinary promise but rather than make any excuse, Ali spoke from his heart. "Your Majesty, if it is possible to do what you ask, then I will gladly do it. You can trust me. I will obey you in this and in all things. At least, I will do my best."

"Then I cannot ask anything more of you," said the Emperor. "But perhaps you will need something precious to help you escape - to offer as a bribe or to secure a way through the enemy lines. Take this," said the Emperor.

He handed Ali a little leather purse: it was full of gold coins - much more money than Ali had ever seen in his life. "Put it in your pocket, little one. And put this into the Kashmiri box."

Here, the Emperor took off the splendid turban jewel he was wearing - the glorious pink pearl and diamond ornament set in gold. The Emperor placed the jewel on one side of the secret compartment. Then he took off the emerald chain around his neck and placed it on the other side of the box. The two beautiful jewels took up the whole box and the Emperor closed the box with a sad smile. "If you can escape and deliver the Star of Hind to my son, you may keep the emeralds and the pearl. That will be your reward - only be faithful to me in the matter of the great jewel. That is all I ask."

Ali was frightened of the great treasure being put into his hands but knew that he had made his promise and now he must do all that he could to save the precious jewel for the Emperor's son. If he could, of course, he intended to give the chain of emeralds and the turban jewel into the keeping of Mirza Mughal. Such treasures really belonged to the Emperor, of course, and not to a little slave boy.

"Now go with God, little one, and may He keeps you safe from the British - and from every temptation to abandon the charge I have given you. There will never be another Empire without the Star of Hind. The British know that- and they will be looking for it as soon as their cannons and bombs have done their work."

Ali bowed to the Emperor but on an impulse, he hugged the old man and cried with him. He had never known the gentle kindness of a father or grandfather and his parting from the only adult male who had ever shown him gentleness was heartbreaking and sincere.

Ali could not know it, but the next ten minutes as he walked from the Emperor's room to his place in the kitchens was the most dangerous moment of that day. If one of the Emperor's courtiers or guards had stopped him and demanded to know what he was carrying it is unlikely that he would have lived to see the evening. The little boy had been in the Emperor's chamber and now he was found with a purse of gold and two priceless treasures. He could be taken for a thief and killed on the spot by a nervous guard or palace official. But the word had spread through the palace that the end was very close- that there was no way the brave Indian soldiers could hold out against British cannon for one more night. Everyone was thinking only of how they would face the terror that must come in the next hour or so; no one was interested in just one more little servant.

Ali had to think quickly. He went to the tiny corner of the kitchen where he slept and found the dirty swag where he kept his bedroll. He slipped the box into the bedding, then spread it out and put in his only change of clothes and a rough pottery cup. Then he added the last dry chapattis that were left over from dinner and rolled the bedding up. He tied it with a leather belt and stood it on end in the corner. When the time came to flee, he would be ready.

He did not have long to wait. Only three hours later, there was a mighty clamour through the palace and Ali could hear people screaming and running. There was noise too of wood and glass being smashed and cries of agony and fear. Ali swung the precious swag onto his back and dashed up the stairs and into the great hall where the Emperor conducted his business in happier times. What he found there made his heart sick. The last of the Indian soldiers had retreated to the hall, their swords still drawn but many were wounded and bloody. The British had stormed through triumphantly and now held their rifles to their shoulders, ready to kill the last resisters. In the crowded room, however, it was just as likely that stray bullets would kill British officers as Indian soldiers. The standoff was only broken when the Emperor himself and his sons and grandson came calmly through the corridors at the rear and told the Indian guards to put down their swords. The battle was over and the pain was now all the Emperor's to bear.

What followed was too terrible to tell in any detail. The commanding British officer, Colonel Hodson, silenced his own soldiers and stepped forward. He struck the elderly man in the face and ordered two of his officers to take the Emperor away. With a dignified bow, his

face ashen, the Emperor turned to go. As he did so, he caught Ali's eye and nodded at him. Then he was gone. Other soldiers now seized the family of the Emperor and dragged them down the long marble staircase and beyond the courtyard, past the scenes where the defenders had stood so bravely against the British invaders. The courtyard carried all the signs of the recent battle: the bloodied bodies of the fallen palace guards were piled up where they had fallen. The air was thick with gun smoke; smashed carts and furniture which had served as a barricade had been set alight. The palace servants were forced to join the terrible procession and held to one side as the sons of the Imperial family were assembled against the great stone gate of the Red Fort.

Ranks of British soldiers were drawn up to keep away the crowd of frightened onlookers. Ali, as one of the smallest of the servants, was pushed towards the front of the crowd. He could see two of the sons of the Emperor standing against the gate with great dignity. One of these men, Mirza Mughal, was the prince to whom he must one day give the Star of Hind. Ali also recognised the Emperor's favourite grandson, Mirza Abu Bakr. They were quickly joined by other men - noblemen, Indian officers, courtiers of the Emperor and his most loyal servants- all of them manhandled into a tight group against the stone wall. At the direction of Colonel Hodson, soldiers now went through the prisoners stripping from them anything of value and frequently striking or abusing the helpless prisoners. They threw their looted treasures in a pile at the feet of their Colonel who waited impatiently while all this was done. Then boldly and with cold determination he ordered a squad of his riflemen to set up in front of the gate. When this was done, he shouted the order to fire.

Ali could not believe what was happening. Even during the siege, the court had continued its life and dignity; now members of the Imperial family whom Ali had served and loved were lined up like targets in a shooting gallery. Forgetting the danger in the heat of the moment, the servant screamed a warning to the men against the wall whose dignity and courage were overwhelming. His cry was joined by those of others around him - a terrible cry of agony amid grief- but it was drowned out by the deafening sounds of rifles. Volley after volley was fired. The shooting didn't finish until every one of the men- princes, wazirs, soldiers and chamberlains- was dead. Their lifeless bodies were piled against the stone wall; blood ran thickly over the cobblestones. The air was heavy with the smell of blood and the acrid fumes of the rifles. It was over in moments- the great Indian Empire that had served the nation for centuries was altogether gone in a rush of blood. Ali could not know it, but the commander of the British soldiers at the siege, General Nicholson, had promised the Emperor that he would spare his life when the citadel fell. Colonel Hodson was furious that he had to keep the General's promise but he was determined to take his revenge in the most terrible way that he could. Yes, he would have to spare the Emperor's life, but no promise had been made to the other men of the Imperial family and now they lay dead. Murdering all the Emperor's sons and grandsons was revenge indeed.

And now, with the Emperor's children and senior members of the court murdered, it was the turn of every other Indian servant in the palace. Colonel Hodson ordered his soldiers to work. Ali shrunk back in terror as the soldiers fixed bayonets to their rifles and then took to

slashing and pillaging. The soldiers spread out from the gate into every room of the palace. No one was spared. The only time the soldiers paused in their grisly work was to loot and steal. The sound of the guns had dominated the city for many days; now that sound was replaced by the screams and cries of hapless people being murdered by the angry British soldiers.

At the gate, the little boy knew that his life depended on his surviving the next few moments. Surrounded as he was by struggling men and women, Ali fell forward, putting his own body over the swag and its precious contents. His uniform as a palace servant was quickly stained with the blood of men, women and children who had been slaughtered by the soldiers. If only he remained perfectly still until the soldiers had passed on, however, he might escape. He could smell bodies, blood and fire and every now and then the pile of bodies covering him was pulled apart by another British soldier looking for something more to steal. He was lucky that each of them seemed to think that a little boy would have nothing of value worth taking.

The final attack had happened just on dark and Ali waited for an age - until there was silence all round him - before he was brave enough to make any kind of move. He carefully lifted his head. Broken furniture had been stacked and set alight. Casks of wine and whisky from the palace cellars had been broken out and the British soldiers were soon drunk; the alcohol helped to harden their hearts and drove them on to do the terrible things their officers had commanded of them. From time to time, drunken soldiers staggered back to the gate making it impossible for Ali to escape and it was not until the dark hour before dawn that the little boy ventured out into the streets of the bazaar that surrounded the burning palace.

Apart from escaping the scene of the tragedy where the Emperor's sons had been murdered, Ali had little idea of what he would do and where he would go. He was frightened and lonely and felt overwhelmingly responsible for the priceless jewels the Emperor had entrusted to his care. He clutched his ragged bedroll to his chest, feeling the sharp edges of the beautiful cherrywood box hidden within it. The purse of gold coins in his pocket felt like a great weight. Where could he go? He had lived in the palace ever since he had been sold by his uncle and he knew no one outside the palace walls. He could return to his uncle's farm, perhaps, but he had no way of knowing where to go and whether any road was safe at this terrible time. In the last hour of the night, he found a doorway in an alley and slunk down in it to hide and to try to think what he should do.

He was still there when dawn broke over the burning city; exhausted and dozing, Ali's dreams were troubled by the shouts of drunken soldiers and the cries of murdered princes. Then suddenly, his nightmares became real as he was shaken awake. He looked about in terror: standing above him were two Scottish soldiers, shaggy and fearsome in the green kilt and bright red jackets of the Black Watch regiment. Ali woke with a start and huddled back into the doorway in terror, the two soldiers laughing coarsely at his fear. The boy was too frightened to realise that the soldiers were little more than boys themselves, though

they wore the hot and heavy clothes of one of the most famous Scottish regiments in the Queen's service. One of the soldiers clutched a bottle that he passed to his companion. Both the men were interested in Ali's blood stained clothes; he was still dressed in the uniform of the palace. Perhaps, the men thought, the lad had carried off something in the chaos of the last, terrible attack? And he had clearly escaped the sentence of death passed on everyone who served the Emperor. At the very least, this boy would be worth shaking down and searching.

One of the soldiers roughly pulled Ali to his feet and held his hands together behind his back. The boy knew to keep calm and not provoke these men; perhaps they would leave him alone once they had found the purse of gold. He remembered the dignity and courage of the Emperor's sons as they met their death at the hands of Colonel Hodson's soldiers. He would have to match their courage now. From the corner of his eye, Ali saw the swag with its precious contents pushed out of the way against the doorway. If he could just remain cool, perhaps the soldiers would not even notice it.

All of that changed in a moment, however, as the second of the soldiers dropped the bottle he carried and tore at the boy's simple uniform. It didn't take him long to find the leather purse. With a shout of excitement, the soldier tipped the coins into his hands and howled with excitement. His companion shouted too and if Ali had been less worried about protecting the fabulous Star of Hind diamond this might have been the moment he could have twisted away and fled down the alley to safety. But he didn't dare leave the swag and even though the two soldiers were drunk and excited, they were still alert enough to hope that there might be more to find and steal.

One of the soldiers was short and blond and solid with his first whiskers growing on his chin. His face was not unkind but in his service through the Mutiny, he had seen terrible things done on both sides and his heart was calloused and hardened. He tore at Ali's uniform and used a strip of cotton to tie the little boy's hands behind his back. Then he carefully searched the little servant again but found nothing. While this was happening, his friend - a taller, thinner man with a shock of black hair- was searching about where Ali had been sleeping. Even fuddled by drink, it struck him as odd that a boy carrying a swag would not have used it to get comfortable in the rough stone doorway. He swept it up in his hands and shook it out, feeling immediately the presence of the box wrapped into the cotton bedding.

Ali cried out as the soldier found the box in its cotton hiding place. The boy lunged for the swag in a futile gesture because with his hands bound, there was nothing he could do but shout a threat. Both the soldiers laughed, the blond one following his guffaw, however, with a blow to the boy's head. And in a moment to Ali's horror the dark haired soldier had the cherrywood box in his hands and had pulled out the beautiful turban jewel and the rope of emeralds. With an oath, he swung the emeralds about his neck and planted the beautiful pearl ornament in his beret.

There was a lot of drunken swearing and laughing at this stage and Ali might again have escaped - even with his hands bound- but he couldn't leave without the Star of Hind. If he waited just a moment more, perhaps the soldiers might even forget him in the excitement of finding the precious jewels. Then Ali's hopes were almost realised - and in the most unexpected way. The dark haired soldier capered about in his finery, laughing and showing off. He sang boisterously, scooping up the bottle that had been discarded and raising it like a wine glass at a feast. His blond friend laughed with him at first, then paused, looked up and down the alley, then greedily at the jewels his friend had found. Ali, from his place on the pavement, saw the blond soldier's face cloud over and twist in anger.

Without warning, the soldier grabbed at the pearl from his friend's cap. He took the whole beret in his hands, smirking as the dark haired soldier reacted angrily. The blond tried to joke and cajole his friend but the atmosphere in a moment had shifted from good humoured mateship to ugly conflict. There were fierce words and threats now and then with a gasp, the dark haired soldier threw the bottle against the stone wall of the alley and tugged on his sword. He was fuddled by drink perhaps and overwhelmed by the temptation to possess the most beautiful treasure either man had ever seen; how else to explain the next terrible moments?

Ali saw the terror on the face of the young soldier the moment before the sword struck and he heard the sickening sound of the sharp blade slicing into skin and bone. For the second time that day, Ali watched in helpless fear as greed and anger drove out every other feeling. The young blond soldier fell to the pavement, groaning as he gurgled out the last of his short life. Ali saw the dark haired soldier recoil in shock, then snatch the beautiful pearl jewel from his friend's hand. With both treasures in his grasp, he reached again for the cherrywood box. Ali cried a warning but it was too late. The young soldier pushed his treasures - bought with the blood of his friend- back into the box.

And at that moment, it all changed. His friend was dead at his feet; the dark haired soldier still held the bloodied sword in his hand. Struck by the horror of what he had done, the young soldier held out the box, his heart breaking. He burst into tears and at that moment met the accusing eyes of the little Indian boy he had robbed and beaten. The soldier's only thought now was to silence the guilt and fear rising in him like a flood. He couldn't leave this child to tell others what he had seen. Hadn't Colonel Hodson told them anyway to kill every Indian wearing the livery of the palace? With a strangled cry of despair, the young soldier raised his sword and struck at the Indian boy again and again until he was still and dead. Ali's body fell beside that of the blond Scottish soldier; the two murdered boys looked so young and innocent in death. Crying bitterly, the young Scottish soldier dropped the sword and stuffed the cherrywood box into his coat. Without looking back, he ran as fast as he could from the alley out into the burning city.

Late that evening, Private Dougal Kerr reported to his commanding officer in the Black Watch regiment that his friend and comrade, Private Jamie McWhirter, was missing. He had gone into the city, Dougal explained, after his platoon had been sent off to loot in the shattered ruins of the palace. He had not returned for dinner - something must be terribly wrong. Dougal feared for the safety of his friend and the officer could tell from the young soldier's agitated manner that he was really concerned. Dougal's dark hair was matted; his red jacket was stained by fire and blood. His eyes were red from crying.

The Duty Officer, Captain Fife McFife, was not concerned. So many young soldiers had taken themselves off at the end of the siege to see what they could steal. "He'll turn up, Laddie - aye, with a sore head and an empty sporrán, to be sure!"

But Private Jamie McWhirter did not turn up. Late the next afternoon, Captain McFife took a small group of soldiers including Private Kerr to search in the ruins. In the doorway of an alley near the palace gate, they found the body of a young soldier dressed in the Black Watch tartan, his head broken open and his body already swelling in the heat. Beside the body were a bloodied sword and the body of a little Indian boy, dressed in the livery of the palace. There was nothing at all to indicate what had happened but it was clear that both soldier and slave had died at the hands of violent men. In the annals of the Regiment, Private Jamie McWhirter was listed as a casualty of the siege. The story that Captain McFife sent in a letter to Jamie McWhirter's old mother in Edinburgh was that her brave son had been attacked by a wicked Indian in the last hours of the siege. Jamie McWhirter, it was said, had taken a terrible wound from the Indian warrior but had managed to kill him anyway. Both had died of wounds. In recognition of Private McWhirter's bravery, the Queen was pleased to bestow on him a medal for valour in the field.

The Indians, of course, told another story - of a brave palace servant named Ali who had died defending the Emperor and his family from the wicked soldiers of the Scottish Black Watch Regiment. Ali was to be remembered by his countrymen as a hero of the siege - one of many brave young men who gave their life for their country. Years later, a plaque would mark the spot so that modern day Indian children might be inspired by brave Ali, the kitchen servant.

Private McWhirter's funeral was a sad affair. The handsome young soldier was loved by his mates who carried his coffin to the graveside. His best friend, Private Dougal Kerr, cried more bitterly than any of the others. He looked to his friends to be quite broken down with grief. "How much he must have loved his friend," was all that the solemn parson could think as he watched Private Kerr stand beside his friend's grave in that hot and faraway country where so many young Scots had died in the terrible rebellion.

Chapter 2: The Free Hospital

Forty Years Later:

Most of the young doctors at the London Royal Free Hospital hated to work the late shift that began at 10 pm and went right through the night until 8 am. There were few of the senior doctors in the wards at that time and sometimes the only doctor on duty was someone with only one or two years of experience. But Emily loved working this shift. For a start, she enjoyed the responsibility of being in charge. She loved being able to help people who came into the hospital in emergency. She knew that her quiet, calm manner helped an anxious parent whose child was sick. It also helped men and women who were facing surgery and who were frightened of what might happen. But more than anything, there were fewer comments on the night shift from patients about being treated by a woman doctor. Those comments simply made Emily's temper rise like a flood - and occasionally the comments came not from the patients but from nurses or senior male doctors who could be very critical of any woman doctor.

Emily had heard all these comments in the last few years. Of course there were not many women doctors in London in 1901 and so you could forgive a patient, perhaps, for mistaking a woman doctor for a nurse. Emily was less forgiving of her older male colleagues, however. Some older doctors thought that medicine was not a nice profession for a lady: there was too much blood, too many smells and too many difficult situations for a proper lady to manage. Emily had decided long ago that she wasn't a proper lady anyway. Of course, she always remembered the nice manners her grandmothers had taught her; they came in very handy when she had to listen to some silly older male doctor tell her something she already knew - and something he would never think to tell a young male doctor. But if a real lady couldn't work hard at a real job, if a real lady couldn't remain

cool when someone was injured and in pain and if a real lady couldn't imagine what gentlemen looked like without their trousers then Emily didn't want to be a lady. Once she had decided that, the rest wasn't so difficult.

Three things kept Dr Emily happy in her work. Firstly, and most importantly, she was very good at it. Silly older male doctors who saw her dealing with a patient who was in terrible pain quickly came to see her in a better light - and wonder if she wasn't as good as most of the young male doctors who worked beside Emily. Secondly, Emily was doing just what she had always wanted to do since she had watched her father at work in his surgery in Hong Kong. She knew how proud her father was of her- and that counted for a great deal. And finally, Emily had the unfailing support of her friends - the other young doctors who had trained with her. She was the only woman but they knew how hard she worked and how good she was and they loved to tell the senior doctors just how competent and clever young Dr Emily was. When the shift was finished, the boys always invited Emily to come to have a cup of tea with them while they talked about the day and shared their stories.

This story starts one cold, winter's night in her first year as a doctor after the long years of training. Emily was tired. She had worked ten days on the night shift and she badly needed the three days off that would begin when this shift was done. Better still, it was a Friday and when she went home the next morning, Katie would have the weekend to share with her. For days, she had seen little of her sister and Emily was looking forward to an endless pot of tea as the two girls talked through all the things that had been happening to them.

She started her shift as usual at the nurse's station where the ward sister finishing her own shift explained what had happened through the day. Emily knew all the nurses now and she was particularly fond of Sr Annie - a motherly Scottish woman who sometimes seemed severe but who was as gentle and as caring as any of the nurses in the hospital. Emily loved her in particular because her strong accent reminded her a little of her father's gentle Scottish speech. Emily and the Sister walked through the ward in the quiet of the late evening, with the nurse giving the details of each case as they went from bed to bed.

"Doctor, this last poor fellow has come in late this afternoon. He'd been picked up unconscious in the streets by a police officer and brought here. It took the sisters an age to clean him up. He was as black as the devil and as wicked with it, I think, given the language that came out of him. He's another Scot, you see, from Ayrshire, I'd say from his brogue. I did my best to calm him down but he wouldn't listen and he is so anxious and distracted and wanting to cry. His heart is poorly and he's very low. He was a horror to wash- I don't think he's seen a bar of soap in an age- but the sister persisted and he's now much more presentable."

Emily checked the soldier's heartbeat with her stethoscope. Sister Annie went on: "He was terrified that we were going to part him from his military pack; in the end, we had to put it right beside him so he could see it all the time. I'd say he was an old soldier of the Queen

but he wasn't able to give his name and when one of the Sisters tried to open his pack to see whether there was any way of knowing who he was he became terribly agitated. He's sleeping now. Doctor Edwards gave him a sleeping draught; he'll come round in an hour or so but I dare not give him any more because of his weak heart. There was nary a pulse when I checked him an hour ago. Doctor, he seemed so troubled in his mind and kept moaning a name as the drug took effect. He kept crying bitter tears and calling "Jamie". That's a Scottish name, aye, but I don't think that we normally call our own names when we're troubled. Perhaps you can find some time for him later. But I must tell you, Doctor, I don't expect him to be in that bed come morning. It seems a terrible sad way to die - a complete stranger among strangers, without even a name. At least he is now clean and in a real bed; I would guess that he's been sleeping rough for many nights."

Emily looked down at the sad face of the man in the bed. His grey hair was now clean but unkempt. Although the Sisters had probably done their best with his body the many months of dirt and grime had been hard to get off in one single wash. Emily examined the man as carefully as she could; she made a quick decision to come back to the old soldier later. He was comfortable and asleep. Right now, she had to finish the ward round so that Sr Annie could go off duty and have her own dinner.

The next few hours were very busy. Emily delivered a baby, (a bonnie little boy whose mother was the wife of a policeman); she had cleaned up a poor taxi driver whose horse had been startled by one of the new motor cars and thrown the man on the cobblestones. She had sewn up the broken head of a bullying navvy whose long suffering wife had finally hit him back with a rolling pin. There were many other patients that night. Poor people came to the hospital at all hours because it was one of the few places that treated patients for free. Emily knew that every one of these patients depended on her. She was the only doctor who would be able to help them. By 2 am, however, there was a pause in the busy night and the hospital was quiet. It was time for a cup of tea- and a chance to check on the old Scottish soldier.

When she came back to the ward, however, the bed was empty and the sheets had been changed. Emily knew that this could mean only one thing: the nurse in charge of the ward had moved the soldier into the little room at the end of the ward where men and women who are dying were taken to give them privacy and quiet for their last few hours. The rules of the hospital were simple: however poor and destitute a patient might be, every one of them deserved dignity and respect - especially in the moment before death. There was a candle burning on the little table beside the bed where the soldier was lying; his body looked wasted and slight against the white bed linen. Emily took her cup of tea and sat down beside him.

When she had finished her tea, she checked his pulse; it was so weak that it was barely present. The man's breath came in shallow pants. It would not be long now, she knew. Without thinking, Emily took the old man's hand and held it in her own. She had seen her father do this with old sailors who were coming to the end of their last voyage. It was a still,

silent night and the gentle light of the candle gave the room a tiny warmth. Emily watched; she was surprised when a moment later the man opened his eyes and looked around.

"Where am I? Am I dead? Are you an angel, Miss?" he asked. Despite his exhaustion, the old soldier seemed to be both agitated and confused. "But you can't be an angel, for that would mean that I had died and gone to Heaven. And that I can never do!"

"You're in a hospital. I'm a doctor," said Emily gently. "But yes, you are very sick. Can you tell me your name?"

"My name is Dougal Kerr, Miss, but you can't be a doctor. You're too young and pretty to be a doctor. You say I'm very sick. You must know that I'm not long for this world. You can tell me the truth."

"Yes, Mr Kerr. You're right. You were a soldier of the Queen, I think, from your pack. You must have been brave many times; tonight you must be brave one last time." Emily had learned this from her father too: that a dying man needs to know the truth and be spoken to honestly.

"You sound kind and good, Miss, whatever you are. I need to talk if I'm finishing the march. Will you stay with me and hear what troubles an old man's spirit? I have to tell someone what I have carried in my heart for over forty years."

"I'll stay, Sir. If you're happy enough to have me sit with you then I'm right here." She continued to hold his hand and search his face with her kind eyes. The old soldier was so troubled and distressed that Emily knew she couldn't plead a busy ward or other pressing things that might demand her attention. Again she remembered her father's words - that sometimes a patient didn't need medicine or surgery: what he needed was just a little time and kindness to heal a broken heart.

Struggling to draw each breath, the old soldier began his story. "I wasn't always a wicked man, Miss. I grew up on my father's croft in the west of Scotland with my wonderful mother and my little sister, Heather. It was a poor farm and we had little enough to eat but my old father and mother were such good, honest people. They made sure that I was never hungry - even if they were. I worked with my father in the fields; at night, my poor mother taught me to read a little from the Bible. When I was sixteen, I enlisted as a soldier and went with my regiment to India. 'Tis a terrible place so far away across the sea. It's hot and full of heathens. At first I was pleased to be away from the cold of Scotland and I sent my mother some of my wages every month. But do you know, I never saw my mother or father or sister again. They all died of fever in the first year I was in India. Perhaps it is for the best because they will never know what a wicked son they had!"

Emily was full of questions and wanted to interrupt but she knew that the soldier must finish his story. "Please go on, Mr Kerr? Was it something that you did in India that you want to tell me about?"

Dougal began to cry again and it was some time before he could make an answer. "Perhaps you have heard the stories of the Great Mutiny, Miss, when some of the Indian soldiers turned on their British Officers? It happened when I was just a lad, really, but I was there in India with my regiment when the fighting began. We had good officers in my regiment, you know, and our Indian soldiers stayed loyal but there was fighting all along the river valley in that year of blood. I saw terrible things. I saw the bodies of women and little English children slaughtered and thrown down a well by the rebels. And I've seen Indian men, women and children killed after the rebels had surrendered to us - some of them blown from the guns or bayoneted to death. 'Twas terrible to see- terrible!"

Here, the old soldier's body was wracked by coughing and tears together. "I must tell you, Miss, of what I did." Then there was a long silence as Dougal struggled to go on.

"Did you kill innocent people like that, Sir?" asked Emily, gently. "Is that what is breaking your heart?"

"I did, Miss, but I done worse." Dougal wept openly at this moment and his grip on Emily's hand tightened. "I stole something from a little Indian boy who was a servant in the palace of the great Emperor. I stole it- and then I killed my friend, Private Jamie Fife, and then the Indian boy himself. I killed them in the street with my sword. And all to possess a treasure that has brought me nothing but sleepless nights and agony of spirit. If only I could go back to that moment in the burning palace when my eyes were turned by lust for gold and treasure and I killed two innocent people - and one a friend and the other a little boy! Oh, God forgive me my wickedness."

Emily said nothing but only gently rubbed the old soldier's hand. "God will forgive you; I'm sure - as long as you pray for forgiveness. Have you prayed, Dougal, with all your heart?"

"Indeed I have, Miss, time and again. But my prayer has not been answered - it cannot be while I keep the treasure I stole. I will die in my sins, I know. But I have been in hell all these many years so perhaps I will have little enough to fear when the moment of death comes."

Emily wished that she had something comforting to say but she could think of nothing. She remembered her own mother's gentle kindness and her prayers with her and then something her mother had often said when her girls had made some mistake or other. "Sir," said Emily gently, "when I needed forgiveness, my own mother would tell me, 'God loves us, you know, not because we are good but because he is good'. However badly you fall, whatever you have done, if you pray in your heart for forgiveness, then God will forgive. I know he will."

Then in that dark, cold little room that was set aside for the dying, Emily held the old soldier's hand and said the simplest of prayers to a loving Father who would very soon be receiving the broken soul of the old soldier into his hands. The man continued to cry - but now the fear and bitterness had gone from his face and he was left exhausted but comforted. He slept for a little while; Emily couldn't help but think of all the things that needed to be done and she might have loosened her hand and slipped away but for the strong hold the old soldier maintained. Then his voice broke through her thoughts: "Miss, is my pack still close by?"

"It's right at hand, Sir," said Emily, reaching for it and hauling it up on to the bed. The old soldier took it and held it out to Emily.

"Your kindness has made such a difference to the way I feel. Because of you, I think I can go on now and face the end. Everything I have is in this pack. The box contains the treasure that I killed for. When I had sobered up the next day, I couldn't bear to even touch it, knowing what it had cost in blood. I haven't looked at it for many years, though I have carried it like a cross through times and trouble and hurt. It's yours when I'm gone, Miss. I have no one else in the world and you are wise and gentle and will know what to do with such a burden, I'm sure."

Emily was reluctant to receive the pack into her hands but the old soldier was insistent. She took it from him and moved the pack out of the way behind the little bedside cupboard where the candle was burning low. "Does anyone else know that you have this treasure?" Emily asked. Perhaps there was, after all, someone to whom he could give the thing - someone more deserving, perhaps.

"There was a rum sort of chap- a foreigner - whom I met in a pub some months ago who bought me drinks when he learned that I had been a soldier of the Queen in India. He asked me some questions that made my hair stand on end, he did- as if he knew about the treasure. I never said nothing but the drink made me mighty uncomfortable and I fear he guessed that I knew more than I was telling. I never saw him again, though. Just thinking about that, Miss, you couldn't find an old soldier a tot of rum, perhaps, to warm a cold night?"

Emily smiled and squeezed the old man's hand. Now that he had told his story and said his prayers, there was even a twinkle in his tired blue eyes.

"It's quite against the regulations and if Matron finds out, I will be in trouble- even if I am the doctor on the ward. Just wait a moment," Emily said. As she left the room, the old soldier sat up and smiled in the golden light of the candle but then hunched over in a cough that seemed to tear through his frail body. Emily went back to him and held him by the shoulders; she felt him shudder and struggle to clear his throat and chest. Then he

heaved and was still, collapsed into her arms. Emily quickly checked his pulse and breathing - but he was gone.

Emily eased the frail old body down on the bed and straightened his limbs. In death, the old soldier looked calm and gentle - so different from the anxious and frightened man who had been admitted to the hospital only a few hours ago. Emily thought proudly that she would tell her father about this old man in her next letter - and let him know that she had tried to do just what he had taught her about how to care for dying people. It had been a sad evening; before she went to find the nurse on duty, Emily wiped her own tears and offered a prayer of her own. Dawn was still some hours away on this winter morning and she needed a cup of tea to get her through to the end of the shift. She thought nothing more of the old soldier's pack and went off to do some of the many other jobs that would be waiting for her.

It wasn't until she was putting on her coat to leave the hospital at 8 am that she thought to look into the room where the old soldier had died. The bed was empty; the candle had burned down; the old soldier had gone. She picked up the candle and blew it out. It was only as she returned the candle to the bedside table that she noticed the pack squeezed in behind it. The orderly who had come to clear the room and take away the body had missed it.

Emily almost missed it too. Made of heavy black canvas, the kit bag was shaped like a sausage; soldiers in the field carried all they needed in their kit bag. By day, the bag made a handy seat for a tired soldier resting on the march; at night, it was a pillow where every soldier's things were kept close and safe. A long strap allowed the bag to be slung comfortably over the shoulder. Emily picked it up by the strap and the old soldier's words came back to her. He had wanted her to have it. She felt a little uncomfortable taking it away but the old man had pressed it into her hands just before he died. He had told her that he had no family. Emily knew what this would mean when it came time to bury him in a day or two: that unless someone claimed the body, it would be sent to the hospital morgue where doctors in training would learn from it. Emily was not sentimental: after all, it was how she herself had learned to be a doctor. But before she left that morning, she registered herself with the hospital as the old man's next of kin. She would make sure that old Dougal Kerr would have a Christian burial and at least one person would mourn at his funeral in the part of the cemetery reserved for the poorest people of the vast city.

When she stepped out into the street that morning, a light rain was falling. It was cold and bleak and Emily looked forlornly down the street that led to home and quiet and the tea pot with Katie. It would have been a dismal walk in any circumstances but Emily was encumbered by the old soldier's pack and on an impulse, she hailed a hansom cab that clattered up beside her. When she was safe inside, relishing the warm, dry comfort of the cab, the pack pressed against her knee. Emily wasn't quite sure what to do with it. It really wasn't hers, she supposed, but it had been given to her by the dying soldier who had no one else, he said, to leave it with. The soldier had mentioned a great treasure; well, Emily

thought, most people who own great treasures don't die alone and unloved in the Free Hospital. It was probably, she thought, a sick old man's fear and fancy. She would sort it out once she were home with Kate.

When the girls had first come to London five years ago, they had rented a little flat in Bloomsbury; it was while they were living in this flat that they met the famous detective, Sherlock Holmes, and his assistant, Dr John Watson. Through their student years, the flat had been their home and while they still missed their parents and the happy warmth of their real home in Hong Kong, they had grown to love London too. Neither of the girls was ever resigned to the horrible weather, but once they made friends, even the grey skies and dismal rain didn't seem to matter so much.

Katie had finished her studies two years ago and was now a teacher at the Durwood Street School in Whitechapel in the East End of London. The school was in one of the poorest parts of the city and few teachers wanted to work with the boys and girls of the families who lived there. Katie loved it. It was a little like Emily's willingness to do the night shift at the Free Hospital: Katie loved the energy and the honesty of the poor children and they quickly came to love their teacher in return. Katie taught them their lessons and encouraged them to do well. She made sure that each of her children had lunch to eat and she never made anyone feel ashamed or sorry because they were poor. Just as Emily had learned to be a good doctor watching her father, Katie had learned to be a good teacher by watching the way her mother dealt with the little Chinese children who were often poor and hungry- but whom Mother always treated with respect. Far away in Hong Kong, the girls' parents were so proud of what they were doing. It was very hard work indeed for both the girls. That's why their house was so important to them; when you worked hard all day, it was lovely to come home to something warm and familiar and welcoming.

Now they both had jobs, they could afford something a little bigger than the flat where the girls had had to share a bedroom. (Sharing a room is difficult even for two sisters who love each other- as Katie and Emily did.) Of course they didn't have enough money in the beginning to buy a house but just when they needed the money most, a dear aunt who lived in Scotland died suddenly and left her small fortune to the girls. The house they bought was just perfect for them. It had three bedrooms - one for each of the girls and one they could set up as a study. Here Katie could mark her students' homework and Emily could read her medical journals and write up her case notes. There was a big kitchen where they loved to eat on most nights, a front sitting room where visitors could be entertained, a formal dining room for special occasions, rooms to spare in the attic and a big garden. Katie loved the house because it was warm and snug, even on the coldest days. Emily loved it because she could walk to work on a fine day - unusual in London, certainly, but such a pleasure on the day our story starts when winter had not quite arrived and the thin autumn sunshine made the city appear at its best. Their inheritance paid for the house and there was even a little left over.

The bank in London where they saved their money had made some difficulties about two girls buying a house: the girls had not yet turned twenty-one and while the Manager of the Bank- a very large man with a lot of whiskers - acknowledged that Katie, at least, would soon be twenty-one, he insisted on writing to Father so that a Man would be seen to approve the purchase of their house. Emily was very indignant. The manager reminded her much too much of some bossy male doctors she had encountered in her work but she bit her tongue and allowed the manager to write to Father as he wanted to. In the end, involving Father proved quite a blessing because he sent not just his permission (he and mother thought that having a home of their own was an excellent idea) but something much more practical. You can imagine how excited the girls were to learn that they were soon to be joined at the house in Curzon St, Pimlico, by Yi Mu - Father's Chinese housekeeper from Monteith. The girls had known and loved Yi Mu since they came to Hong Kong and couldn't imagine how Father and Mother could spare such a wise and clever servant. Of course they would be excited to have her at their London home but it would be difficult to find a salary to pay her. The girls returned a very cautious response: if Yi Mu was coming to London she could certainly stay with them for a while. Perhaps when they were a little more experienced and a little better paid they could find the money to pay someone as clever and as good as Yi Mu.

The answer to all these problems came in the happy person of Yi Mu's only son, Junjie. They had known Junjie too, of course, as they were growing up. Now he was twenty years old and for the last five years he had worked as Father's assistant at the Jardine Matheson surgery. Father always said that Junjie was the brightest boy he had ever had to train. Kind, gentle and very clever, Junjie was well on to the way to become an outstanding doctor; all he needed now was the formal qualification that could only come at the kind of hospital where Emily had worked and trained. There was nowhere that he could become an English doctor in Hong Kong. The cost of coming to London, however, was much more than he or his hard working mother could bear. Father was trying to think of any way that he could help Junjie when the Bank Manager's letter arrived seeking Father's approval for the purchase of the house.

He wrote a second letter to the girls: could both Yi Mu and Junjie come to stay with the girls in their new house? Yi Mu would work as the housekeeper for the girls; in return, Yi Mu and Junjie could live with the girls in Pimlico so Junjie could study. Father himself had persuaded Jardine Matheson to pay for Junjie's tuition as a student at the Free Hospital. The girls were delighted to help. Three months later, they waited at the London docks as the P&O steamer arrived. They were so excited to have Yi Mu and Junjie with them.

The girls had used what little of the inheritance that they had left to add another bathroom to the house and to make sure that the attic rooms were warm and comfortable. Suddenly, the girls had living with them the kind, motherly and gentle woman who reminded them of home. Of course they also had someone to wash and clean for them - and cook the most wonderful meals in the splendid Cantonese style that they loved. It took all Yi Mu's

ingenuity to turn English groceries into Chinese food but the good lady scoured the city to find what she needed. The house smelled wonderful when the girls came home from work now. The scent of fragrant curries, delicious stir fries, baked goods and sticky rice treats met them as soon as they opened the door. There were the odd problems that Yi Mu's enthusiasm could bring; Emily was astonished to find one evening that Yi Mu had built a little pen in the back garden and had somehow acquired a pig and some chickens. These would have gone very nicely into barbecued char sui - one of Emily's favourite foods - so it was a double agony to explain to Yi Mu that one couldn't keep farm animals in the middle of London. There had been some tears but Yi Mu reluctantly accepted Emily's explanation that London people had long ago forgotten how to make nice food and there was nothing that visitors could really do about it. Despite these little problems, Yi Mu was a treasure. No matter what the hour of the day, she always had the big kettle on the stove ready for a cup of Oolong tea and often at night the four friends would sit at the kitchen table over a plate of Yi Mu's dumplings and talk together in Chinese about the family and friends they had left behind in Hong Kong.

The girls already knew Junjie, of course, but they had known him as a shy, tongue-tired teenager who always seemed to be reading and studying on the step outside his mother's kitchen. Both the girls were surprised to find a handsome young man in a well brushed Western suit on the dock with Yi Mu; their gangly, adolescent friend had grown into a serious young doctor. Junjie was short (as were so many of the people of South China) but he had an intense, intelligent face with sharp eyes that smiled readily. The girls loved him from the moment he arrived because he brought an immediate connection to their father at home in Hong Kong. So often a word or phrase he used was exactly what their father would have said. Junjie had loved their father as his teacher and his friend - and ultimately as the person who had opened the door for him to a future as a doctor.

Together, Yi Mu and Junjie enriched the life of Curzon St in a way that the girls could never have imagined. Katie and Emily believed, of course, that they could do anything in their jobs that a man could do; all the same, a man around the house turned out to be useful on lots of occasions. Junjie was wonderfully clever at fixing things that broke. Being a scientist at heart, he was fascinated by the new electric lights which had been installed in the house, and he was always able to repair fuses and restore the power. The girls loved his reliable, good humoured response to anything that went wrong. Both the girls loved Yi Mu's housekeeping skills. Now they didn't have to spend their weekends or free time cooking and cleaning for themselves. Yi Mu worked hard, but she had the pleasure of seeing her son achieve his dreams of becoming a doctor. Junjie often found himself walking to work with Emily and sharing in the excitement of learning in the best hospital in the whole of England. These were happy times for everyone.

Chapter 3: An Old Soldier's Kit Bag

The very first thing that Emily smelled as she came through the door at Curzon Street was the unmistakable fragrance of Yi Mu's famous rice congee porridge. Emily was tired and dripping with wet but the smells from the kitchen promised warmth and comfort and happy sunshine. Katie was there already, just finishing off a bowl of the wonderful sticky porridge; she looked up and gave Emily the most engaging smile. She was obviously pleased to see her sister. Yi Mu appeared at just the right moment with a bowl of congee for Emily, a big tea pot and two of the fine porcelain tea cups that Mother had sent back to them from Hong Kong. For the next half hour, the girls talked through all the things that had happened to them at work since their last chance to catch up.

Katie had a lot to share. Her classroom had been so busy and demanding but what she most wanted to share with Emily were stories about "her boys and girls" as she called them. Katie was always astonished that although the poor families of the East End where she worked had so little, they were courageous and tough and loving to one another. She told Emily about Lilly- a girl in her class who had to care for her little brother and sister because her mother was so sick. And then there was Maud who worked so hard at her lessons and who wanted, she told Katie shyly one day, to become a teacher too. Katie knew that she shouldn't have favourites, of course, but Katie had grown to love Maud especially. As she watched Maud at her lessons, Katie often found herself thinking how she might be able to help the little girl make her dreams come true. The other pupil she mentioned most often was Wally - whom Katie declared must be the naughtiest boy in her class. He was cheeky, noisy, messy and always looked as if he badly needed a good scrub and a lick of the hairbrush. His dark eyes showed a sadness that sometimes made Katie ache inside. He was a tough young man but Katie admired his sunny courage even more when she learned in the playground one cold October day how little Wally had to eat. He was a proud little boy, however, and when Katie tried to give him her lunch that day he wouldn't accept even a bite.

Katie talked about Wally with Yi Mu that night and together, they hatched a little plan. Yi Mu would make up two school lunches wrapped identically in a white linen napkin. Before the children arrived in the morning, Katie would put one of the lunches in Wally's desk- and

make no comment about it at all. In the busyness of the first day when she tried this, she forgot all about her gift; to her absolute delight, she found the napkin in her own desk that afternoon as she was tidying up to go home. Wally winked at her during roll marking the next morning and from that moment, Wally was every bit as much Katie's best student as Maud. He was still cheeky and noisy, of course, but fed up on apples and oranges - and Yi Mu's delicious chicken sandwiches and hard boiled eggs- Wally grew taller and stronger. He was gentler and smiled more often now and his eyes shone with love for the kind young woman who was his teacher.

Boys like Wally and girls like Maud had better lives because of the kindness they met in the kind teacher and the bright young doctor of Curzon Street. Each of the girls, in choosing a career among the poor of the city, came to know the deep divisions of the great city of London. It was a place of great wealth – and terrible poverty. Where the girls lived in Pimlico was smart and clean and safe but Katie and Emily worked everyday among the poorest people of the city. Emily saw children at the hospital who had diseases brought on by drinking polluted water. She saw young women with bodies wasted by abuse and ill treatment. Katie saw poor boys and girls at school but she knew that there were other children who never had the chance to go to school. Both the girls felt that they were doing something important – that they were making a difference to the lives of poor people.

Emily loved to hear Katie's stories and she sometimes found that she could do something to help. One Saturday when both the girls were free, they made the journey by tube (the wonderful underground railway that served the city of London) and found Lilly's home in the poor, crowded street where children ran out to meet them, surprised to find their teacher from school on their doorstep. Emily had brought her medical bag; she examined Lilly's sick mother and was able to prescribe some medicine to make her more comfortable. The next day, Emily was able to talk to the Medical Superintendent at the hospital and to have Lilly's mother admitted for treatment. Katie never felt prouder than the day that Lilly and her mother came to visit them in Curzon St to thank both the girls for what they had done.

When Katie had finished her stories and the teapot had been cleared away, it was Emily's turn to open her heart. She told Katie the whole story of the old soldier and his heartbroken confession. Some doctors, I suppose, would not have thought very much about it: the old Scotsman was no one very special - just one of the many old men who died broken and alone in a hospital for the poorest people of the city. Emily certainly didn't think like this, however: every one of her patients was a person who needed respect. Of course this was one reason that she was such a good doctor.

"A great treasure?" said Katie sadly. "Poor old soul! He must have seen many terrible things in his long life as a soldier. He carried the horrible guilt of the murders all his life. All the same I doubt that he has anything much of value in his pack. Have you looked through

it, Emily? It might actually give you more of a clue on who he was and where he came from. You might be able to find some family somewhere to whom you can give the kit."

"I doubt it," Emily said sadly as she swung the kit bag up on to the table. "Most of his talk was about how he had killed his friend and the Indian boy. The talk about the treasure may just have been the fever of the pneumonia that killed him in the end. Let's look anyway." And with that, she slipped the buckles on the kit bag and eased it open.

I was just as Emily had thought. The only things the canvas kit contained were an old plaid shawl, a dirty scarlet jacket, some socks that needed both washing and darning, a mess kit made of tin and a shaving kit - the kind that soldiers use in the field. A leather purse held six copper pennies. With all this, however, there was a little oilskin parcel that was tied up with a leather string. Katie gently worked the stubborn knot with her fingers and finally was able to fold out the little parcel, the oilskin still stiff and cold to the touch. Emily sighed when she held up a photograph of a young soldier wearing the kilt of the Black Watch regiment. Standing proudly beside him was a pretty young woman looking proudly at the camera. The two young people looked so alike that Emily guessed immediately that they must be brother and sister. Written in fading ink on the back of the photograph were the words: "With Heather in Edinburgh, April 1855 before going out to India". Then in different coloured ink, the sad words were added: "Heather Kerr, died of fever, 11 March 1856".

Emily put the picture down sadly. The kit bag had contained all that the old soldier had owned at his death and there was nothing like a treasure there - although the photograph must have been a much loved comfort to the old man. "He told me," said Emily, "that he was all alone in the world - that his parents and his sister had died at the same time while he was away in India."

Emily picked up the canvas kit bag to return it to the floor but her attention was caught by the weight of the bag. It was empty and yet it still had weight - certainly it felt heavier than one might expect an empty canvas bag to be. And when Emily placed it back on the table, it made a solid kind of sound. Katie registered it too - and ran her hand across the bottom of the bag.

"There's something here, Emily - check it carefully."

And there was. Emily fingers felt along the ridge of the base of the bag and sure enough, there was a kind of false bottom to the bag. The canvas inside the bag was not the same skin as that on the outside; now that Emily looked carefully, she could see the clever way the job had been done. It took Emily a moment to find the seam but once she had it, she went to work carefully with a sharp little knife she retrieved from her medical kit. As the stitching gave way, Emily was able to reveal what had been hidden behind the heavy canvas.

There in the cavity of the kit bag was more woollen plaid wrapped carefully around something solid about the size of a shoe box. And when the plaid was lifted out on to the tale and unfolded, there was the most beautiful cherrywood box, carefully worked with Kashmiri roses and oak leaves. Katie gasped - and immediately wanted to touch and caress the box. It was elegant and so finely worked that both girls knew at once that this must once have been owned by kings or emperors. Even if the box were empty, it would still be a great treasure.

But it wasn't empty and it was obvious from the weight of the box that it must contain something solid. This was a very solemn moment; neither girl wanted to be the first to force the lid of the box. The dining room was quiet and still; the girls could hear Yi Mu in the kitchen, washing up the plates and singing quietly to herself. It was so ordinary but the familiar sounds of home couldn't calm the excitement both the girls were feeling. The old soldier had told a terrible story and mentioned a great treasure. Well, most people would have dismissed that kind of talk. In the real world, great treasures didn't come along most Saturday mornings. But the girls had had plenty of experience with great treasures; they had learned to respect such stories in Hong Kong - and had seen more remarkable things in their adventures than most girls ever would.

Emily finally took the lead, holding the box to the table with one hand and gently searching through the fine carving for any kind of catch or lock. There was no key or clasp: instead, the lid fitted so beautifully to the body of the box that it took only gentle pressure to ease it open.

"We'll I never!" said Emily with a gasp. And indeed, the contents of the box were breathtaking. The first thing that met their eyes was a leather drawstring purse, bulging with coins. The purse was laid across the whole of the interior of the box, covering up two deep sections separated by another panel of carved cherry wood. Katie picked up the bag but immediately put it aside for under the purse was something even more extraordinary. Remember that the day was overcast and showery- dismal as only a London autumn day can be. What was in the box, however, caught the eye and filled that dull room with a flash of fiery light. This was something, the girls knew, which came straight from somewhere warm and dazzling.

Katie gasped as she picked up the rope of emeralds, each one of them the size of a walnut and faceted to shine with wonderful brilliance. If Katie had been a little younger, she would have wanted to put one of the emeralds in her mouth; instead, she draped the exquisite necklace around her sister's neck.

"And look at this!" said Katie. She picked up the turban jewel, weighing it in her hand and marvelling at the enormous lustrous pink pearl and the diamonds set in gold that surrounded it. "Emily, either of these jewels could count as a great treasure - and we have two of them!"

It was only when both the girls had caressed the jewels that they turned to the leather purse. Emily opened the purse and spilled the contents on to the table. Neither of the girls had ever before seen the splendid gold mohurs - the coins of the Imperial court of India - but there were about two hundred of the coins now strewn across the tablecloth. Both of them knew at once that there was a fortune here - much more, for example, than they had inherited from their aunt. It was extraordinary.

And at just this moment, another, different feeling descended on the girls. They had been dazzled by the beauty of the jewels and for one giddy moment, both of them had thought what the treasure must be worth and what it would be to own such things. But Katie also knew from her life in Hong Kong - and her work among the poor children of the East End - that real joy and happiness were to be found in something more substantial than gold and treasure. And Emily couldn't tear from her mind the sorrowing face of the old soldier who had carried the guilt of his terrible crimes with him for so many years. Both of the girls felt a little ashamed of themselves for being swept away so easily by the beauty of the precious things.

"So it's true then, Katie," Emily said sadly, as she lifted away the rope of emeralds and returned them to the cherrywood box. "Dougal Kerr spoke of terrible things he had done as a young man. He murdered for these treasures - first a little Indian boy and then his best friend. They look so beautiful but they are stained with tears and blood. And now I have to decide what to do with them." She collected the coins and rearranged the treasures just as they had found them wishing that she could have been spared the temptation that now loomed in front of her. When she had closed the box, Emily wrapped the plaid around it, as if she wanted the treasures and all the temptations they represented to be beyond her reach or her imagination. Katie took her hand and gently squeezed it in encouragement. Just as she did this, Yi Mu was at the door with the offer of another pot of tea and a fresh round of toast. There never was a more welcome distraction and while the good housekeeper brought in the tea trolley again, Emily repacked the kit bag. Katie poured for them both and spread marmalade jam on the excellent toast. By the time that Emily came back downstairs from depositing the kit bag safely under her bed, both the girls knew what they would have to do: major challenges like this needed fresh air. It was time for a walk - even if it were raining and grim outside.

"If only Father or Mother were here," Katie said yet again as they wandered through the gardens of Russell Square. It was quite a walk from Pimlico but the rain had eased and the last of the summer roses drooped beautifully beside the path. The girls had made this walk many times since the last winter and had loved the way the gardens changed through the seasons. They had stopped twice for a cup of tea in the hope that something hot and stimulating might make the puzzle confronting them more easy to solve. Tea can do many things, of course, but on this occasion the girls remained perplexed.

"Do I even own the jewels?" Emily asked again. "Mr Kerr gave them to me but were they even his to give away if he stole them? Father would know, I'm sure - and Mother would know just what to do." Yet again Katie agreed with all this but Mother and Father were ten thousand miles away and even if the girls wrote that very day they couldn't expect a reply for three months. Katie was pleased to help her sister but she gently stressed to her that this was really her decision to make alone. The girls turned it over together and considered it from every angle before finally deciding two things: firstly, that they would say nothing to anyone at all - not even to anyone at the hospital. Both of the girls might have made an exception for Junjie who had become a close friend since coming to London. He had many times shown his wisdom and common sense. Emily knew how highly he was regarded at the hospital but Junjie had gone off to do a month's special study in Edinburgh Hospital and wouldn't be back for another two weeks. No: just at the moment, this would have to be their secret.

And secondly, they decided that they would not make any decision until they had had a chance to have an even deeper think about it all. There was no urgency. After all, Dougal Kerr had carried the treasure in his kit bag for forty years. It could sit under Emily's bed quietly for a week or so. All the same, it might be worth mentioning to Yi Mu that she needn't dust under the beds for a while. Katie made another decision that morning without telling Emily. She would not ask to see the treasure again. She realised what a power it exerted in the heart when it was held in the hand. Emily might have to make the final call on this on her own; it would be better for both of them if only Emily had to manage the temptations the treasures brought.

The weekend went by quietly. After mass the next morning, the girls took Yi Mu out for lunch at a Chinese restaurant the girls had found in So Ho. It was meant as a treat: Yi Mu was very grateful for their kindness - even if the Hainan Chicken on offer was a poor imitation of her own receipt. Both the girls realised this, of course: it was a problem you were bound to encounter when you had the best Cantonese cook in London as your housekeeper. Yi Mu was kind enough to praise the dumplings, however, so everyone saved face. The gracious, motherly lady and her two young employers shared a taxi cab back to Curzon St in the late afternoon. Strictly speaking, it was Yi Mu's day off so Katie made the tea. The three friends chatted over a big pot of Oolong tea while they tucked into Katie's famous scrambled eggs on toast. In these very ordinary little things, the girls managed to put the mystery of the treasure in the kit bag to rest - at least for the moment.

The next week, Emily was on the early morning shift beginning at 8 am. On Tuesday afternoon, she slipped away from her duties at the Free Hospital to attend the funeral of the old soldier. The afternoon was cold and grim and the service itself was just as she expected it to be. The familiar prayers were read by an elderly priest who had never met Dougal Kerr. He kept forgetting his name through the service and once the coffin was lowered into the ground and the priest had collected his fee, he disappeared in the

direction of the nearest coffee shop for some warmth. Emily had brought some flowers that she left on the coffin then she too was also gone from the graveyard.

The busyness of her job quickly forced any thoughts of the old soldier out of her head. It was only when she returned to her room at night and saw the dark shape of the kit bag under her bed that the fear and hope of the burden it contained rose to trouble her. All of this changed, however, late on Friday afternoon when Sr Annie came looking for her on the ward. To Emily's great joy, she came with a cup of steaming tea in her hands which she handed to Emily with a smile.

"Drink, this, Dr Emily, but I'm afraid I have to give you a problem to solve with the cup of tea," she said.

Emily took the cup gratefully and smiled. She had found that the old nurse was often very sharp and acute in her judgements of people. She could pretty much solve any problem that came her way so Emily was intrigued.

Sr Annie continued: "This is ever so rum. Do you not remember an old Scottish soldier whom you cared for at his death about a week ago? I think you went to his funeral on Tuesday. Well there's a lass downstairs who says that she is the old man's sister. She gave her name as Heather Kerr and she particularly asked about any possessions the old man might have had with him when he died. Well, it's none of my business, Doctor Emily, but she seems a wee slip of a lass to be the old man's sister. And try as I might, I can't place her accent to anywhere in Scotland I know. I told her that the doctor who had the care of the old man was in the hospital and on duty and might be able to spare a moment to come down and see her. She was very affected by this piece of news and asked me most politely if I could let you know that Miss Heather Kerr was hoping to pay her respects to the kind doctor who saw her beloved Dougal in his last sad moments. Something here doesn't make a great deal of sense to me but you being the doctor perhaps it will to you."

Sr Annie treated Emily to the broadest grin at this sally; during the hard months when Emily was trying to prove herself to the male doctors, Sr Annie was a wonderful support and encouragement. Emily smiled back and went to wash her hands; Annie walked with her.

"I didn't tell her, Doctor, that you were a lady. You may want to be a little cautious with this particular dame yourself - although what she could hope to get from the poor old man is more than I can know. She's in the Porter's Lodge downstairs."

Emily was intrigued. It had been a hard day; as she washed her hands, she realised that she had managed to miss not just morning tea but lunch as well. As soon as the tea was gone, she slipped down the steps, thinking only to take off her white coat so that she looked much more like a young woman secretary than a doctor. The girl who rose to meet

her was only about twenty-five years old with a furtive, sly look that was quickly overcome by a sigh of theatrical grief.

"Ah, Miss! The good sister promised me that I could see the doctor who cared for my late, much loved brother, Dougal Kerr. Can you please tell him that Miss Heather Kerr - the old man's only living relative- wants to thank him from her heart for being with him at the end? She is keen to take possession of any property the old man might have left behind - particularly a large black kit bag of the kind that soldiers carry. 'Twill be of no value, I'll be bound, but if I can but have that bag 'twill soothe my breaking heart at least." Here the young woman burst into tears and cried bitterly before blowing her nose in her tartan handkerchief.

Sr Annie was right: the Scottish accent sounded very strange to Emily and she was puzzled by the young woman claiming to be someone who must- from the photograph Emily had found in the oilskin packet- be only a year or two younger than Dougal Kerr himself. And by the inscription on the letter and Dougal Kerr's own words, Heather Kerr had died of fever in 1856. Emily was on her guard - and once again grateful for Sr Annie's salty wisdom.

"I was with your brother at the end, Miss Kerr," Emily said with gentle concern. "I understood that he had no family who could care for him."

"We'll, I've been abroad, Miss, and have only just come back to England. The Sister promised me that I could see the doctor."

"Before we get on to that," Emily said sweetly, "perhaps you could help me. This is, as you know, the Royal Free Hospital. We treat everyone here, regardless of whether they can pay for their treatment or not. The doctor treated Mr Kerr because we thought that he had nothing - but here he had a sister - a loving sister - who has come to see us. Can I assume, Miss Kerr, that you would be able to pay the bill for your brother's treatment? If you can wait but a moment, I'll find the forms that you can fill in and sign."

Emily had managed to put her hand on the one thing that Miss Kerr would most certainly NOT want to do. The lady claiming to be Heather Kerr quickly began to make her excuses and she became quite uncomfortable and agitated when a policeman arrived at the ward just at that moment. Dr Emily knew the policeman, of course: he was the father of the sweet little baby boy whom Emily had delivered the same night that Dougal Kerr had died. He had come to take his wife and baby home but the Scottish woman suddenly found herself very frightened. Emily said simply, "Ah, Miss Kerr, perhaps we should talk to this good policeman about all this. I think he may have your brother's kitbag."

The woman looked slyly all about before bolting for the door and hurtling down the steps as quickly as she could go. She pushed everyone out of the way and let out a terrible snarl

as she fled; Emily was suddenly shocked by the sinister, violent way the meeting had concluded. It struck her like a blow and it took all her resourcefulness to smile at the policeman and reassure him that the woman who had fled was probably upset about something- and not to worry.

But Emily herself worried and like Sr Annie, she was concerned that none of this made very much sense. Unlike Sr Annie, however, Emily knew about the Star of Hind, and in the light of that glittering gem, the woman's behaviour looked sinister and alarming. Someone was looking for the kit bag and they were prepared to use all sorts of lies and tricks to get it. This person had talked their way into the hospital and while they might have been able to trick Emily for a moment, they would come back with more plausible stories or money to bribe staff who might identify Emily as the doctor who had treated Dougal Kerr - and who had carried the old kit bag away. By the time Emily had finished her story, Katie looked frightened and troubled.

"Emily, perhaps you'll think I'm being foolish, but I don't like the sound of this at all. This is much too like the adventure we had with the Princess of Wales's emeralds: treasure and murder and thieves at work. But this time, we are the likely victims - not the detectives on the case. You know we are modern girls who can do everything for ourselves - as you did when you foiled and exposed the wicked woman who turned up at the hospital pretending to be Heather Kerr. All the same, I would feel a whole lot safer if we were to seek some guidance from Mr Sherlock Holmes. What do you think?"

Emily was very happy to go along with Katie's suggestion for two very good reasons. Yes, there may be danger and Sherlock Holmes had lots of experience in treating with villains. He was, after all, the world's most famous detective. But more than this, Emily remembered all the fun they had with Sherlock Holmes and Dr John Watson in their last adventure. Winter was coming on and the weather was truly dreadful. There was nothing like an adventure to stir the blood and excite the heart. It was right on their doorstep - or rather, right under Emily's bed.

"Perhaps we could send Sherlock Holmes a letter, explaining all of this," said Katie. "He's often busy, I suppose, but perhaps he could fit us in sometime on the weekend."

"If the horrible snarl I drew from the counterfeit Heather Kerr is anything to go by," said Emily, "I would think that the kit bag would be out from under my bed one way or another by morning tea tomorrow. Come on, Katie. Get your coat; I'll collect the kit bag. We're going to Baker St tonight!"

Chapter 4: Dr Watson's Discovery

The girls set off for Baker St in a taxi, travelling at the rattling pace of the cab horse through the gloomy, showery streets of London. Emily, almost by instinct, had put the kit bag under her heavy travelling coat so that anyone loitering in the street outside would not be able to see it and wonder what a slim young woman would be doing with an old soldier's kit bag that was almost the same size as she was.

Now that they were in the cab, both of the girls wondered whether they hadn't been a little dramatic. Surely this could have waited until tomorrow. They didn't even know whether Sherlock Holmes and Dr Watson would be at home - or whether they were very busy with some highly important and confidential case and wouldn't want to be disturbed. All of those worries were put to bed as soon as the door was opened by Mrs Hudson, the housekeeper at 221 B, The Albany. She put out her hands and hugged the girls warmly, waving away any attempt to explain why they had come without letting her know in advance.

"Oh, my dears," she said with a sigh, "I am so glad you have come. Mr Holmes seems to have arrested every criminal in London and he hasn't had a case to work on for two whole weeks! Now he is bored and terribly cranky and very rude to Dr Watson who is doing all that he can to please and entertain him without any success. He's spending hours playing his violin- it's simply dreadful! And the weather is so dismal and grim - it quite gets on your nerves! Have you had your dinner? I can't give you anything half as fancy as your famous Chinese housekeeper but I have a nice Shepherd's Pie I am about to serve to the gentlemen if you were able to stay."

All the time that Mrs Hudson was speaking she was helping the girls to take off their damp travelling coats and hats to usher them into the parlour. Mr Holmes had been playing a most mournful tune on his violin but he had heard the door bell and was hallooing to Mrs Hudson, wanting to know who might be at the door at this hour of night.

"Mr Holmes," Mrs Hudson warned sternly, "do remember your manners; we have ladies present. Here's Miss Katie and Dr Emily come to call and I've pressed them to stay and have dinner with you so you don't have to hurry them away."

The expression on the face of the famous detective changed in a moment, his grumpy scowl giving way to a cheeky grin. "What, don't tell me that you've finally tired of char siu and Hainan chicken and you've come to eat some real British dinner? Whatever the reason for your visit, you are most welcome. Watson is bored to sobs and driving me crazy with his blessed fidgeting!" Dr Watson himself had come in by this time and he was shaking his head and grinning his pleasure at seeing his old friends again. They sat down at the dining room table to eat Brown Windsor Soup, the promised Shepherd's Pie and a delicious rhubarb crumble with custard. Several times, the girls tried to introduce the purpose of their visit to the conversation but without success. Sherlock Holmes was much too excited about his latest case: *The Mystery of the Counterfeit Shaman*. At least that was the name given by Dr Watson in his story written for the *Pall Mall Gazette*. The girls listened very politely - this was not hard of course, because it really was a very interesting story. Dr Watson finally opened up by saying, "But girls, what would bring you out on a night like this to call upon two old men like us?"

"Watson," Holmes scoffed into his custard, "don't be so obtuse. The girls left a military kit bag in the hall and as Katie isn't likely to have her schoolboys carrying books to school in something like that, I presume that this is Dr Emily's mystery. Some issue with an old soldier at the hospital, I'll be bound, and serious enough to worry two very sensible girls into coming out on a wet night without an invitation. You must be worried. Am I right?"

"You most certainly are, Mr Holmes," said Emily. "And if I can fetch the kit bag, there is something I need to show both you and Dr Watson. There is also a story I need to share - if you have finished your story about the shaman."

"To be sure I have: you now have my undivided attention. Just put the kit bag there, Emily, if you will," said Mr Holmes. "I think we might defer to you, Dr Watson, since you are an old military man yourself."

Mrs Hudson had cleared away the last of the dinner things and poured tea for everyone. She smiled encouragingly at the girls and then left for the kitchen, carefully closing the door behind her. Now it was time for Emily to tell her story. Mr Holmes gently rearranged the tea things on the table to give them plenty of room, then pushed the bag across the table to his friend who carefully unpacked the contents. Laid out on the table, the contents of the kit bag looked rather sad and pathetic. The battered mess kit, the old red coat and woollen plaid looked tired and shabby on the table. "Not much to show for a lifetime in the service of the Queen," said Dr Watson sadly. "Scottish regiment, I'd say - and from the look of the mess kit, I'd say he's done plenty of service in the East. This isn't the kit of an officer and a gentleman, of course. I would say it belonged to an old soldier down on his luck." Then Watson brightened: "Hello, what's this then?"

Dr Watson had detected the extra weight in the canvas bag and his fingers quickly found the flap in the base of the kit bag and lifted it away. Carefully removing the length of woollen plaid, Watson unwrapped the rough parcel carefully.

“Well I never,” said Dr Watson with a gasp of appreciation for the beautiful thing that slipped from the tartan wrappings. “Roses and oak leaves in the design: this is Kashmiri work, I’m sure – and not by your village artisan, either. You can buy bad copies of this sort of work in bazaars all over India but this is Mughal work – the real thing. And old, too. The Imperial workshops in Srinagar didn’t survive the collapse of the Mughal court in 1857. I think that this was probably old when that crisis overtook the Imperial factories.”

There was a deep silence in the room as the doctor held the beautiful cherrywood box carefully, admiring it from every side. Then with great patience, Dr Watson eased off the lid and opened the box.

There was a little gasp from Holmes and Watson when the contents of the box came into view. Even Katie and Emily – who knew what the box contained – were moved by the beauty of the treasure. “Well that stands to reason,” said Holmes, carefully taking the box from Watson. “One wouldn’t expect such a precious box to contain more of the shaving kit, would one? Let’s take it slowly. I’ve a feeling that there’s a deep sort of story attached to this box – and probably not a happy one, given the way in which it has come into your hands, Dr Emily.”

Holmes picked up the leather purse that was on top of the other treasures. It took a great effort not to react to the jewels that were suddenly exposed but Holmes gently opened the purse and spilled the gold coins out on to the table. “Do you recognise them, Watson?” Holmes asked.

“Oh yes,” came the confident reply. “These are gold mohurs – the beautiful coins of the Indian Imperial court. They are rare indeed. You see, the last Emperor, Bahadur Shah Zafar, was a captive in his own palace at the end of his reign. He threw in his hand with the mutineers in 1857 and most of his treasury gold was used to try to bribe other Indian princes to support him in the crisis. Few of the coins survived his defeat: in fact, most of his treasure was lost in the sack of the city. The Emperor’s servants stole plenty of things at the end and, I’m ashamed to say, lots of young British soldiers helped themselves to any treasures they could find when the end came.”

“I’m sure you’re right, Dr Watson,” said Emily. “The old Scottish soldier who gave this to me told me a terrible story of murder and pillage. He told me that on the day after the siege was raised, he had killed first a friend and then a little Indian servant for this treasure.”

Watson now picked up the turban jewel. “The pearl is extraordinary,” he said. It’s as big as a pigeon’s egg – and worth a king’s ransom, I would think. And there must be fifteen emeralds here in this chain – each one worth a fortune. The soldier was telling you the

truth, Emily, I'm sure. The only place that such precious things could come from would be the Emperor's treasury itself. And you say that the soldier gave these to you before he died?"

And here Emily did what she had been aching to do since they sat down: tell her story simply and directly. Sherlock Holmes listened intently as she spoke, occasionally asking her to repeat parts of the story. "We don't even know if the jewels really belong to me now," said Emily at last. "They were stolen, after all."

"Well," said Watson sadly, "the Emperor Bahadur Shah Zafar won't want them, I'm afraid. The British took him as a prisoner to Rangoon and he died in great misery there. As you say, all his sons and grandsons were murdered after the Emperor surrendered. It was a wicked piece of work and shameful, I know, but feelings ran terribly hot in India during the fighting and perhaps we shouldn't judge at this distance."

"Dougal Kerr didn't feel that way," said Katie gently. "He judged himself harshly. He was obviously burdened by what he had done: he could have sold just one of the gold pieces at any time and made himself comfortable. If he had sold everything here, he would have been a very rich man. Instead, he carried all his life what he couldn't bear to either spend or give away."

"There's another part of the story, too," said Emily. "It's actually the reason we came to see you tonight rather than wait until tomorrow. A woman came to the hospital today, claiming to be the old soldier's sister. She was a young woman – and I know from what the soldier said that all his family had gone. She was very keen to take possession of anything that Dougal Kerr had left behind. It was only luck – and the presence of a friendly police officer whose son I had recently delivered - that she took fright. Mr Kerr mentioned to me that he'd had a conversation with a strange sort of foreigner in a pub not long before he was admitted to hospital. All of this seems to fit together somehow. I can't work it out but it doesn't feel right to me."

"We're only nibbling at the mystery," said Holmes. He looked much grimmer than either of the girls expected that he might and his hand went back to the gold mohurs, the turban jewel and the rope of emeralds. He examined them all carefully, and then picked up the cherrywood box. This time his scrutiny was altogether more careful.

"Watson, we have here a murder that needs to be resolved – although there's no doubt about who is the murderer. It's an act of passion, certainly – a momentary act of greed, with consequences that a young man carries all his life." Sherlock Holmes was speaking quietly, intently, and the girls and Dr Watson followed both his careful words and his hands as they examined the box carefully. But there's nothing at all impulsive about the box and what it contains. Consider the box itself. The three treasures it contains fit neatly enough but would you suppose that the box were made to carry such things? In the Imperial palace, I would have thought that jewels like this would have their own boxes and mountings."

“You’ve got me there, Holmes,” said Dr Watson with a chuckle. “In all my days as a soldier I’ve never seen...”

Dr Watson never did finish his sentence because Holmes’s fingers, carefully exploring the carving of the box, had accidentally touched the Kashmiri rose in the bottom corner. The tiny spring built into the box moved the panel in the centre and the glorious diamond, the Star of Hind, was revealed for everyone to see. Holmes levered it gently from its setting and put it down on the table.

The room was in absolute silence. No one spoke for a long moment, each person lost in the thoughts that the diamond brought.

Finally Sherlock Holmes spoke. “Now, do you know what this is, Dr Watson?”

“Indeed I do,” said Dr Watson. “Unless I’m much mistaken, this is the Star of Hind. Fellows say it is the largest diamond in the world; before the Mutiny, it was the most precious stone in the Imperial Mughal treasury. Old soldiers in India used to talk about this stone and wonder where it had got to. It was the stuff of legend before it went missing but after the Mutiny, there were stories about it everywhere.” Dr Watson reached out and lifted the exquisite jewel to the light. The brilliance of it filled the whole room.

“Some people said that it had been smuggled out of the Red Fort before the Emperor was taken prisoner. The British soldiers who captured Bahadur Shah Zafar made every effort, of course, to force the Emperor to tell them where the stone was but the old man kept his silence. He had seen these same men kill his sons and grandsons; there was nothing they could offer him now to secure his cooperation. Some people believed that the Star was gone forever – that when the Emperor knew at the end that the battle was lost, the stone was shattered into tiny pieces and thrown down a well. When no one could find the Star of Hind in the ruins of the Red Fort after the siege, it seemed likely that the stone had somehow been destroyed. Yet legends persisted. I spoke to a British colonel in Afghanistan who swore he’d seen the stone in the possession of an old Hindu holy man on a pilgrimage in the Himalayas. Another man – a carpet seller in Peshawar – told me that he had handled the jewel himself and sold it to a Russian nobleman who was buying it for the Empress of Russia.”

“And you can see that it was true every time!” laughed Holmes bitterly. “Instead, it seems to have been owned briefly by a little boy and then a Scottish soldier – both of whom paid for it with their lives. Oh, and for fifty years it was in the dusty kit bag of another soldier whose broken heart gave him endless days of misery. Now, my dears,” said Holmes turning to Katie and Emily, “the riches – and the problems- are all yours.” He pushed the box, the jewels and the Star of Hind towards Emily as he said these last words.

“Well that helps a little,” said Emily quietly. “At one time I tried to believe that I owned the box itself- and even the gold and the other jewels, perhaps. But I most certainly don’t own this.” Emily pushed the diamond away from her – although her heart felt deeply what it

might be to own something as beautiful. Katie took her hand; it was exactly how Katie felt too but Katie was very careful to leave Emily to make this decision on her own.

“You’re a wise young woman,” said Holmes. “And I must ask you to do something for me that I can’t explain at this moment. I have an errand to run right now and I am going to leave you with seconds of Mrs Hudson’s excellent rhubarb crumble. Can you give Watson and me an hour out while you wait here for us?” As he said this, Holmes was already on his feet, heading for the door with Dr Watson very reluctantly following him. It was, you remember, a cold and wet night and Dr Watson, if the truth were told, had designs on Mrs Hudson’s rhubarb crumble himself. The girls were a little surprised by Mr Holmes’s departure but from the first time they had met him years before they had grown to accept his unusual and eccentric behaviour.

And Holmes did two things that the girls felt immediately without being told. For a start, Holmes didn’t tell them to put the precious things away out of sight. He trusted their own common sense on this. There was no reason for Mrs Hudson to know anything about the contents of the old soldier’s bag. She was quite used to Mr Holmes’s odd ways but this was clearly something very private and special; this great secret was clearly going to be just for them. Secondly, he wanted to respond immediately to what the girls had brought him that night. He didn’t give the girls a little lecture about how urgent any of this was. He didn’t alarm them with instructions on what they needed to do. But both the girls felt the seriousness of the moment and Emily was particularly pleased that she had pressed the matter with Katie and brought the box to Mr Holmes that night.

The grandfather clock in the hall was chiming nine o’clock when the two gentlemen left. It didn’t take long to despatch another serve of rhubarb crumble and the girls had finished the night in the kitchen with Mrs Hudson, washing up, setting up for breakfast and finally sitting up late over a very large pot of tea. Emily talked to Mrs Hudson about life at the Royal Free Hospital. Katie talked about her school and the boys and girls she had grown to love. The girls loved Mrs Hudson who told them stories about her girlhood in Scotland. She was infinitely patient with Mr Holmes; all the same, everyone felt rather restless and anxious when the hour he said he would be gone stretched into two. Indeed, Holmes and Watson did not return until 11.30 – and both of them looked ashen and severe when they found the girls in the kitchen on their return.

Mrs Hudson was immediately alert to the change of mood and excused herself, tactfully suggesting that Mr Holmes take the girls back to the comfort of the sitting room. Rather than sitting, Holmes and Watson stood with the girls on the red Turkey rug in front of the coal fire that had almost burned itself out; clearly their errand had brought bad news or a grim result. The girls had a thousand questions to ask but were sensible enough to wait for the two men to begin. It was Dr Watson who spoke first. “Ladies, Mr Holmes already had an inkling of what might be happening out there in the darkness of the London underworld. We’ve been at Scotland Yard tonight checking his fears with the police.”

Mr Holmes took up the story. “One thing I do at Scotland Yard every week is review the unsolved crimes that are listed with the Metropolitan Police. It’s important to try to see pattern here, you see. I consider the city; I look for something to connect the myriad tragedies of a place like London. And what do I find over the last six weeks? An old soldier is found beaten to death in an alley. Perhaps he has met with a desperate thief who takes what little he can from a poor man. Then another old soldier is found floating in the Thames; perhaps he is the victim of an unfortunate accident. Another old soldier is found with his throat cut in a boarding house in the docks area. The man who shared the room with him is dead too and the room is ransacked. The count goes on: seven victims in the last six weeks. They are all old and poor and broken down. No one cares much about any one of them – and no one cares much about them as a group. Now, I ask myself, what connects these seven people who don’t know one another and who all die in a violent or suspicious way? The answer is hard to find – too hard for a busy police officer in one station who might not even know what is happening in another part of the city. But with a little effort, it becomes clear. All of these men are old soldiers and all of them served in India – and all of them were at the siege in Delhi where the cherrywood box in the kitbag makes its first appearance. Someone is looking for the treasure, Emily, and the person who killed the seven old soldiers won’t hesitate to kill you and Katie as well if they think that by doing so they will lay their hands on the Star of Hind.”

The room was very quiet then Katie spoke up, “But why would all of this begin now. The jewel was lost fifty years ago.”

“Yes but remember the story that Dougal Kerr told Emily about the stranger in the pub who bought him drinks and tried to wheedle a story out of him? All the murders date from that time, I think. You are young women – and good women, too, I think, so you may find it hard to imagine the evil that lurks in the hearts of men and women. You have already had some dealings with the greatest criminal of them all, however.”

“Professor James Moriarty,” said Emily. “Do you think it was Professor Moriarty who met Dougal Kerr in the pub.?”

“Most unlikely, I would think,” said Mr Holmes. “But we will never know. The villain presides over a deep web of confederates who are in his pay or who act for him out of fear. Few of them would ever meet Moriarty himself, of course but on his orders, all of them are on the lookout for anything that might give them an advantage. Anyone who knows anything about gemstones will know the story of the Star of Hind; it’s always on the radar of criminals to probe for a connection. As the last old soldiers who were at the siege die out, the chances of finding someone who has firsthand knowledge of the secret becomes less and less probable. For the cost of a few drinks, some creature of Moriarty finds an old soldier with a secret – and thinks that it’s worth taking the scrap of news to the boss. And so the word goes out: find the old soldier and find the jewel.”

“Mr Holmes” said Emily quietly, “I don’t think that Dougal Kerr even knew the jewel was in the box he carried all these years. He knew about the gold and the turban jewel and

emeralds, of course, but he never suggested that I should look for more secrets in the box. I think he would have told me to look more carefully if he had known”

“I think you’re right, Emily,” said Holmes. “He probably didn’t know that he had the Star with him – but he certainly felt the grim power of the jewel every day of his adult life. The gem has brought grief to everyone who has ever owned and handled it; because of its nature, it worked its awful power on the heart of Dougal Kerr as well. But here is where he was fortunate in a way. Dougal Kerr was a good man who did a terrible thing and never forgot how wicked he had been for just one moment in his young life. He wasn’t greedy or ambitious and the fact that he never handled the gem directly made the power of the stone less awful. He felt the shadow of the jewel on his heart as a burden he could never escape. It made him sad but it did not make him wicked. Of course, in the hands of a master criminal like Professor Moriarty, there is no guessing just how cruel and terrible the power of the jewel could become.”

“What can we do then?” asked Emily. “I don’t want to keep it; I didn’t go looking for it and I would be happy enough without it.”

“You’re a sensible girl, Emily, and that’s a fact,” said Dr Watson. “Your attitude does you great credit – and if it were as simple as just giving the stone away I suppose we could solve the problem easily enough. You have shared this with Holmes and me, certainly, but we mustn’t forget that Dougal Kerr gave you the box- and everything it contained. This is something you will have to decide for yourself. Perhaps we can take a little while before we react.” said Dr Watson with a chuckle. “Holmes and I will call over to Curzon Street tomorrow morning after breakfast and we’ll think the whole thing through then. Most things look a little brighter by the light of day. We may be making too much fuss, but I think it mightn’t be a bad idea for us to escort you home this evening. If Professor Moriarty is interested in this – and I fear he is- he may already be joining the dots and connecting them to you. The woman who called herself Miss Kerr at the hospital, for example, needs to be uppermost in our minds.”

Their journey home was quite a different trip across the city from the one that brought the girls out. It was only a few hours ago, of course, but it seemed a world away now. It was a tight fit in the cab with Holmes and Watson, the girls and the kit bag all squeezed in together. They travelled in silence, with Katie and Emily looking anxiously on to the cold, rainy streets of the great city as they drove down the streets to their home in Curzon Street. As Mr Holmes had told his story, both the girls felt the sinister power of the great city that had so many secrets; now, as they neared their own familiar street, it all seemed so normal and ordinary. Katie was just beginning to feel a little embarrassed that their anxiety had brought Homes and Watson out on such a terrible night. When the cab drew up, all the lights of the house were on and it looked very ordinary and safe. Now was the time to say goodbye. To Emily’s surprise, however, the gentlemen got down from the cabin of the cab with them. Emily searched in her handbag for the key to the front door and held out her hand to the famous detective. “I’m sure we’ll be fine from here, Mr Holmes. Thank you, Dr Watson. We’ll see you tomorrow at 10 am.”

But Holmes and Watson were already heading towards the front door of the girls' home and Katie and Emily fell in behind them. In the doorway, Holmes paused, then looked fearful as he touched the door and it swung open. It was neither locked nor closed properly. And the sight that met their eyes drew a gasp from everyone.

The whole house had been trashed and overturned. Drawers had been pulled out, the desk had been rifled and the pictures had been torn from the wall. It was like this in every room. Katie's briefcase full of exercise books that she needed to mark that weekend had been emptied on to the floor. Emily's medical bag had been tipped out as well. The kitchen was a shambles with the pantry turned out on to the black and white tiles. And in the bathroom, sitting in the bathtub with her hands tied behind her back and a dirty towel stuffed in her mouth to keep her silent, was the miserable figure of their beloved friend, Yi Mu.

Chapter 5

What Wally Saw in Durwood Street

As soon as Dr Watson had been able to untie Yi Mu and rescue her from the bathtub prison, Emily and Katie hugged their friend and felt the most terrible guilt surging through them. Both the girls knew at once that whoever had done this had actually been looking for them; when they were not there to attack, the intruders had turned on the only person to hand - Yi Mu. There were some tears at this moment but all three women were also feeling a powerful rage at what these bullies had done.

The story came out slowly because even though Yi Mu's English had improved since she came to live at Curzon St, she was certainly not a fluent speaker. In her distress, her English language skills had deserted her and most of the story had to be told in Cantonese and then translated for Dr Watson and Mr Holmes. The story was simple enough in any language. Yi Mu had answered the door about half an hour after the girls had gone. A young woman asked for Dr Emily, claiming that she was from the Royal Free Hospital; Dr Emily, it seems, was urgently needed. Two young men loitered on the pavement behind her. Yi Mu had immediately been suspicious and pretended to have no English at all. She tried to flummox the woman on the doorstep by responding loudly in Cantonese. As she was trying to shut the door, the two men sprang forward and knocked Yi Mu down.

"They kept asking me for the black bag you had brought home from the hospital," said Yi Mu angrily. "I knew that this must be the one you had under your bed upstairs where I wasn't supposed to dust. I had seen you take it out with you tonight and what with your caution and their fierce threats I knew it must be special. I continued to howl in Cantonese – to shout as loudly as I could and to shout for the police. They said the most awful things about me thinking that I couldn't understand anything. These remarks only made me angrier. One of the men – the younger of the two – hit me in the face and pushed the towel into my mouth. They tied me into the bathtub and went to work on the house. I don't know what they may have stolen but I didn't tell them a thing! One expected bandits in China, of course, but not in a respectable part of London! It wounds me deeply to think of dirty

criminals in my nice clean kitchen! How I wish that Junjie had been here instead of in Edinburgh! He would have protected his old mother from those thugs!”

There were more tears at this point but Katie and Emily were so proud of Yi Mu – and so angry with the bullies who had beaten her – that they hugged her gently and did their best to tell her how good she had been. They finally slipped from Cantonese back to English when Yi Mu put her arms around the girls and said simply that late though it was, she wanted to put the house back to order before she could think of anything else. Dr Watson suggested a cup of tea and for the next hour, there was a strange reversal of roles as Holmes and Watson tended the tea pot and Katie, Emily and Yi Mu worked to put the home to rights.

They quickly realised that the damage was less serious than they had at first thought. True, many things had been wrenched out of drawers or thrown down on to the floor but the attic rooms where Yi Mu and Junjie lived were barely touched at all. There was little enough broken and apart from the housekeeping money kept in the tea caddy in the kitchen, there appeared to be nothing stolen. The girls soon had the house looking like its old self. Dr Watson was probably close to the mark when he said that because the kit bag was a large item it wouldn't take long to establish that it was nowhere to be found. The great mess the intruders left behind, however, might confuse any policeman who might be called into thinking that this was just an ordinary robbery.

When all was done, everyone was exhausted. It was 2 am and while Emily was used to keeping all sorts of odd hours [and Mr Holmes did some of his best work in the early hours of the morning] the spark of excitement had worn itself out and everyone felt the need for rest. Holmes and Watson, however, had quietly decided that they could not leave the girls and Yi Mu alone here; they were keen to stay on and act like proper English gentlemen, protecting the ladies in their hour of need.

It was the only time in that long night in which the friends came close to arguing. Emily in particular had met this kind of well intentioned stuff too often at the Royal Free Hospital not to prickle now. The girls, she declared, were perfectly capable of taking care of themselves. The intruders had come and gone without any success. Now that they were expecting trouble, the ladies together would be more than a match for any rogues who tried to return. Yi Mu felt exactly the same way and after a quick trip to the kitchen she returned with three very large, dangerous looking knives. In broken English she told Mr Holmes that she rather hoped that the scoundrels would dare to return. She lifted her meat cleaver menacingly.

Holmes knew when he was beaten – but there was the very practical matter of the kit bag itself. When the three crooks had come earlier, the bag was not to be found; now it was left on the dining room table. Holmes was happy to leave the girls to defend themselves for the rest of the night; he doubted that the villains would be back that night anyway. But knowing now what treasure the kit bag contained, he was most unwilling to leave it undefended. Katie saw this too and it was her suggestion that Dr Watson and Mr Holmes

take the cherrywood box with them and leave the bag behind. They would all meet at Curzon St the next morning for a late breakfast. It seemed a sensible proposal and when the gentlemen left to find a cab to return to Baker St, Katie, Emily and Yi Mu took only a few minutes to check the locks on every door and window before heading off to bed.

Yi Mu was up early that morning, determined to have a very superior breakfast ready for the gentlemen who had rescued her. Katie and Emily came down at 9.30 to find congee porridge, Shanghai style pot stickers, steamed chicken feet and a big batch of the most scrumptious dumplings steaming on the stove. The gentlemen were prompt, Sherlock Holmes looking energetic and lively and Dr Watson much more weary and grim. He was, you see, an English gentlemen to his bones and while Holmes had been prepared to leave the girls to protect themselves, Dr Watson was inflexible. He had sent Holmes back to Baker St in the cab while he had stood in Curzon St - at a respectable distance from the front door, to be sure, but close enough to raise the alarm if the intruders returned. Dr Watson wisely thought that he might not tell the girls [particularly Emily] what he done.

Over breakfast, the four friends talked the whole matter through. They decided some things quickly: they would tell Yi Mu, for example, exactly why the bandits had come to Curzon Street. Emily thought that her ignorance of the contents of the bag might have been some protection to her if things turned nasty again but both the girls were painfully aware of the danger into which they had put their dear friend. Given that she had already been tied up and beaten by the thugs who acted for Professor Moriarty it seemed foolish not to include her in their counsels. They would also tell Junjie the whole story when he returned from Edinburgh on Monday. Both the girls knew that his good sense might be very important if there were further troubles.

The difficult matter of how to manage the Star of Hind took a little more time to resolve – and the problem this time was not with the girls but with Mr Holmes. The cherrywood box had been placed on the dining room table in front of them. It was a silent reminder of the great responsibility they all now shared. Despite his exhaustion, Dr Watson took the lead. He stated what was obvious to all of them: that this was a serious matter and they would be wise to involve the police at Scotland Yard. He went further than this: given that the Star of Hind was at the heart of the mystery, they should also include Mr Mycroft Holmes in the small group of people who knew the mystery. Sherlock Holmes prickled immediately. He did not love his older brother; in fact, the two brothers – each of them brilliant and clever in his own way – had been bitter rivals since they were boys. Holmes declared that he'd be damned if he gave Mycroft the satisfaction of sharing in the adventure. Dr Watson had heard all of this many times and knew how much it would grieve his friend, Sherlock, to include his older brother in the action. He quietly reminded Sherlock that he should mind his language in front of the girls – and that if Professor Moriarty triumphed and claimed the stone while it was in the hands of the girls, then Mycroft would never forgive him.

Sherlock snorted and was sullen and grumpy in the embarrassed silence at the table before he finally gave in. What Dr Watson said was too true to deny. Sherlock's only caution was to insist that if they were to tell Mycroft about the Star of Hind, there was no

need to involve the police as well. Sherlock suggested darkly that Professor Moriarty was known to have agents even within the Metropolitan Police. The less they knew at this stage, the better. There was nothing for it then but to find Mycroft as soon as possible and take all the protection which that wise and powerful man could give them.

Now this was exciting for both the girls. They loved each other as only sisters can and neither of them could imagine a family where the boys were rivals and not friends. The girls had met Mr Mycroft Holmes before and if they hadn't heard from Mr Sherlock Holmes what a terrible fellow his brother was they might never have guessed it for themselves. Mr Mycroft Holmes had been perfectly charming to the girls in the great matter of the Princess of Wales' emeralds. Of course he was terribly important, working quietly at the highest levels of the government on the most secret business of the state and forever teasing Sherlock on how clever he was. Sherlock Holmes grudgingly admitted that Mycroft would be well placed to protect the Star until they could decide what to do with it. "Mark my words, Miss Katie," was all he would say at the end. "By the time that Mycroft is finished with it, the story will be that he alone singlehandedly found the Star of Hind and you girls – and the old soldier- won't even rate a mention." The girls and Dr Watson had to be content with that grudging concession. Before Holmes could change his mind, therefore, Dr Watson hurried them all to get ready to go. "If Mr Mycroft Holmes isn't doing anything top secret at the moment – such as rescuing the Emperor of China or saving the Suez Canal - he'll be having morning tea at the Diogenes Club in Pall Mall. We'll meet him there."

A note was sent to the Diogenes Club by taxi cab and a reply quickly received: *Mr Mycroft Holmes would be delighted to receive Miss Bland and Dr Emily Bland – and Mr Sherlock Holmes could come too if he wanted to. Would the ladies please oblige by using the Tradesmen's Entrance at the rear? Mr Mycroft Holmes would meet them in the Butler's Pantry.* Emily thought she knew what this meant: that the Club was closed to ladies. No doubt the most crustaceous members of the senior medical team at the Royal Free Hospital were members of the Diogenes Club! They would certainly feel at home there. Her grumpy reaction to this little display of male pride was almost as stinging as that of Sherlock Holmes himself: *Mr Sherlock Holmes could come too if he wanted to!* Hmmmmp! Katie and Dr Watson did what they could to soothe ruffled feathers and shepherded them all to the waiting taxi. Reluctant to let anyone else share in the burden of its care, Emily scooped up the cherrywood box and put it into her handbag. The weather had changed for the better and in the street, a thin kind of November sunshine struggled to give some colour to the trees that had lost most of their autumn leaves in the recent storm

The girls had visited the Diogenes Club in Pall Mall once before to meet the exalted Mr Mycroft Holmes so they were a little less daunted this time by the elegance and heavy grandeur of the place. Members and gentlemen guests entered the club up the broad marble steps facing Pall Mall in the heart of that great city; our friends, however, found the little door for tradesmen and others down a flight of steps to the right where an iron railing fronted the road. Dr Watson rang the bell. A cheerful porter in a splendid uniform greeted them by name and led them down a flagged passageway; they were obviously expected.

The Butler's Pantry was certainly more modest than the grand timber panelled rooms upstairs but the four friends were only there for a moment before a severe looking gentleman in a formal black uniform with white gloves led them up a back staircase and into one of the meeting rooms at the back of the club. Emily was a little comforted by this; they were going to the main body of the club after all – even if they had gone there in a roundabout way. The room to which they were shown was very elegantly furnished. Turkish rugs covered the floor; a crystal chandelier lit the room on the dull November day; the dark, old paintings on the wall were of members of the Club who had long ago died. And at a table in front of a delicious morning tea was Mr Mycroft Holmes. He rose and greeted the girls with a courtly bow as if they were old friends. Mycroft shook hands with Dr Watson and grunted at his brother, Sherlock.

“It's splendid to see Miss Bland and Dr Emily again. Welcome, my dears. I'll pour for us, shall I?” Even as he spoke, Mycroft Holmes was setting out the morning tea; in a minute, he was looking expectantly at Sherlock, waiting for him to explain the purpose of their visit. His whole manner seemed to say, “I'm very busy and important. I'm not going to have my time wasted.” Instead he said simply, “I'm at your service, young ladies.”

Emily had been thinking about this moment as the cab had brought them through the city streets and wisely told her story in a concise, unhurried way. Mycroft listened intently but his manner was cool and detached – right up to the moment when Emily took the cherrywood box from her handbag and deftly opened the lid. She assembled the contents of the box in front of her before finding the secret compartment and lifting forth the Star of Hind. Mycroft let out a low whistle and Sherlock could not resist a facetious comment. “I thought you might be interested, Brother. Dr Emily has managed the impossible. I've never seen you stuck for words before today.”

Mycroft looked vexed but said nothing except “With your permission, Doctor?” He reached out and weighed the exquisite jewel in his hand, feeling not simply its weight but its power. His face was troubled and clouded.

“Is it what I think it is?” Mycroft asked at last as he reluctantly let go of the stone and returned it to Emily.

“I believe it is,” said Sherlock airily. “Stunning, isn't it. Over the centuries, kings and emperors have died for this stone; armies have taken to the field to possess it; friend has murdered friend. Dr Emily is now the owner of the stone although she has signalled to me her desire to pass the jewel to a proper place – certainly somewhere where it will be safe. And have no doubt: there is real and present danger for both these young women. I believe that our old friend, Professor James Moriarty is already looking for the Star – and he strongly suspects that the girls have it. That's why I have brought Dr Emily to you. We need your protection and you need to talk with Dr Emily about what she might do with the jewel. It's her decision to make – without pressure from anyone.”

“With all due respect, Sherlock, I can see that Emily is the possessor of the stone. It may not be, however, hers to keep. The Star of Hind was a jewel in the possession of the last Mughal Emperor of India. Her Majesty the Queen is now the Emperess of India. The last Emperor’s treasury – along with the whole of his Empire – became the possession of the Crown after the Mutiny. One could easily make a case that the jewel actually belongs to the Queen.”

Katie and Emily had already considered this possibility – and were already agreed that they would be very happy to see the jewel in the possession of the Queen. They were about to say this when Sherlock Holmes spoke over them; “That’s as may be, my brother. I can assure you that the girls did not come to you for protection only to have the jewel taken from them by you and your lawyers. Let’s leave that whole matter open, shall we? In the meantime, can I suggest that we all share in your excellent morning tea before we do another thing?”

Mycroft was just a little shamed that he had forgotten his role as the host- and quite bitter that his brother had called him to account. With a sigh, he passed around a plate of the most delicious cakes which they all enjoyed. They drank their tea and Mycroft was attentive, filling up cups once they were drained. All this time, the Star of Hind lay on the table before them. Katie was very busy remembering her very best table manners; all the same, she couldn’t help but notice the way Mycroft’s eyes and fingers turned time and again to the stone. One could easily believe that there was very dark magic in the stone and that the power of the ancient curse still lived in the jewel.

Finally, Mycroft put down his tea cup and leaned forward. “Whatever happens to the Star in the long term, ladies, I can assure you that it will be safe with me. The safe here in the Diogenes Club already contains many treasures – and quite a few secrets too. I might suggest that you leave the turban jewel, the emeralds and the gold coins as well. We’ll fix you up later with these –as soon as Professor Moriarty is off the scene. Until then, Sherlock, I can assign two of my most trusted agents to guard the girls at Curzon St.”

“Two good agents would be much appreciated – although I have my own ideas on that score. That’s not what worries me –and you know it. What’s to prevent you from taking the jewels now and finding all sorts of good reasons of state why they can never be returned to Dr Emily?” said Sherlock Holmes. “I know you, Brother – and I know that if I had a great treasure, I wouldn’t trust it with you for a moment.”

“I wouldn’t trust you either,” said Mycroft airily. “And while we all know that this matter demands the greatest secrecy, there are two more people who may be able to reassure you, Sherlock, of my honourable intentions. The Prime Minister, Sir Arthur Balfour, and the Queen’s Private Secretary, Sir Arthur Bigge, just happen to be members of the Club and are in the Smoking Room upstairs. Shall I go to get them now? They will witness my promise to keep all of this safe for you until you can decide what to do. And both of these fellows, I think, need to know that the Star of Hind has been located after being lost for forty years.”

A moment later, two very distinguished looking gentlemen were being ushered into the room and Katie and Emily found themselves curtsying to two of the greatest men in the kingdom. Sherlock was obviously grumpy that his brother could parade men like these to impress the girls – and doubly annoyed that Emily was called on to tell the whole story again. But the Prime Minister was so charming and Sir Arthur so kind in his inquiries about the girls’ parents at home in Hong Kong that it was only Sherlock Holmes who looked peeved or grumpy. The Prime Minister himself promised to keep all the treasure safe for Emily and solemnly shook hands with her and Katie to seal the commitment. Then the great ones were gone and Mr Mycroft Holmes was standing to bid them farewell. The girls left, Emily looking back at the beautiful treasures on the table with a stab in her heart.

In the taxi back to Curzon St, Sherlock Holmes grumbled about what Mycroft had offered. “He wanted to make his promise to you, Emily, in front of two distinguished men! Well, Watson and I are quite distinguished enough, I would think, if there’s any chance of his breaking his word. And two good agents to protect you girls? I can imagine two lumpy fellows sitting in your kitchen for days on end, smoking and eating their way through Yi Mu’s excellent char siu!”

It turned out, unfortunately, that Sherlock Holmes was almost right on the matter of the protection offered to the girls. Two young detectives, Davyd and Ross, arrived at Curzon St later that morning. They tried very hard to look serious and determined but they were really no older than the girls themselves and yes, they seemed to be always hungry. When they had their first taste of the excellent food that Yi Mu prepared they knew that they had fallen on their feet and spread their swags in the kitchen near the teapot.

Everyone was tired after their extraordinary night so after lunch, the whole house settled down for a “lie off” – as the girls called an afternoon rest in the lively slang of the Hong Kong colony. Katie had brought home lots of marking to do so it wasn’t until after mass the next day that the girls had any time together to talk. It was a rare sunny day in late autumn and both the girls wanted to be outdoors so Davyd followed them at a safe distance to walk to Hyde Park while Ross remained to watch the house. Yi Mu very sensibly decided that he could do all this while he helped her chop vegetables for dinner. And at dinner that night –which they all ate in the kitchen together – the girls and Yi Mu had the chance to learn a little about these two young men who were now in their home.

The next day was Monday and Katie was going back to work at Durwood Street School. The need to have lessons ready for the day forced most other things out of her mind; it was only as she was rushing to get out the next morning that she remembered the excitement of Friday night and the warnings from Mr Holmes that the villains would certainly strike again. Emily, she thought, would be on her own all day but with Davyd and Scott at hand, she would be safe.

Katie caught the train in the early morning gloom to Whitechapel and then walked through the drizzle to the school. The streets were busy as only a London morning can be; once or twice she had the odd feeling that she was being watched. Every time she turned around,

however, there was nothing but the usual morning press of people about her. She brushed the thought aside as just a consequence of the raw feelings brought on by the weekend break-in to her home. It was easy to settle at work. From the moment she arrived at school she was always busy without a moment to think of anything other than her lessons and her students.

At the end of the day as the class was leaving and she was packing up, Wally came confidently up to her desk and waited politely for her to notice him. Katie was pleased to see his cheerful face and he held out to her the white linen napkin that had contained the lunch that Yu Mi had packed. He smiled his thanks.

“You’ll never guess what my Old Grandad has managed to find for me,” said Wally as Katie packed her briefcase with more exercise books to take home to mark. “He’s got me an old bicycle. And with that, I’m looking for a job after school as a delivery boy.”

Katie was pleased. The longer Wally remained at school, the greater his chances of going on to do some more study. His family, she knew, was very poor: they would be grateful for any money that Wally’s part time job could bring.

“I have a sort of part time job already,” Wally said slyly with a grin. “It’s a bit interesting but very uncertain work. I’m not supposed to talk about it with anyone, you know – not even with you, Miss. Well, especially with someone like you.” The boy suddenly became a little tongue tired and Katie sensibly changed the subject to the bike itself – its colour, speed and previous history. Katie guessed that some of the families in the school lived uncomfortably close to the law at times and she didn’t want to make Wally embarrassed about his family. The boy brightened up quickly at his teacher’s sensitivity and he was happy to talk about the old bike as if it were the newest and most admired bicycle in the whole great city.

Katie listened to Wally talk with a mixture of hope and fear. He was bright and lively, certainly, but only about one in a hundred of the boys and girls from Durwood St School would go on to high school and Wally – even though he was one of the brightest boys in the class - was unlikely to have the chance to do that. Katie had already determined that Maud would have the chance to train as a teacher and she was determined that Wally would have his chance to succeed as well. She wasn’t sure how she could manage this but she was going to do her very best. Teacher and student chatted happily for a moment together and Katie readily agreed to wait on the footpath of Durwood Street until Wally could bring his bicycle up to show her.

With her battered briefcase in one hand and her practical umbrella in the other, Katie stood on the pavement for a moment waiting for Wally to wheel his bike out of the yard. She hoped he would be quick so she could catch the 4.20 train back to Curzon St. It was getting dark and the rain began to drizzle again. Katie put down her briefcase and reached for her umbrella. She didn’t notice a dark van – an unusual sight in Whitechapel where there were few motorcars- come quietly up beside her. Katie turned a moment too late to

do anything more than gasp when two figures leapt from the back of the van. She struggled but the thugs were quick and determined. In a moment, Katie was slung into the back of the van; her briefcase was abandoned on the pavement. Wally, wheeling his bike, had only the briefest glimpse of his much loved teacher as she disappeared into the back of the van. It took off quickly. People in the street looked up, puzzled by the quickness of it all.

Katie often wondered afterwards what would have happened to her if Wally had done the most logical thing at that moment: if he had shouted for help and called for a policeman to come to his help. Instead, Wally swept Katie's briefcase into the basket on the front of his bike and began to pedal for all his worth in pursuit of the black van. It was, he thought, the least he could do for the teacher he loved.

Chapter 6:

In Darkest England

Whenever Emily had to tell the story of that terrible night afterwards, the only part of the story that worried her was what happened after Katie had been snatched in the street. Of course she was very grateful to Wally for riding after the van: goodness knows what would have happened if he hadn't been so brave but – well – it was just a little too like the heroic boy riding to protect the damsel in distress for it all to sit well with Emily. It helped, of course, that inside the van Katie was struggling like a tiger. She swung her umbrella and managed to get in quite a few good kicks before she was subdued completely and stuffed

into a foul smelling canvas sack. The umbrella was thrown angrily out of the back of the van; Wally scooped it up as he sped by.

The van lumbered through the streets of suburbs Wally knew well. From Whitechapel, it followed the road down into Stepney and then the docklands – a maze of streets and yards and canals. Wally had walked this area with his dad and his uncle on a number of occasions when they were looking for work. His father had half a mind, he had said, to take the boy from school and set him to work on the docks. It wouldn't hurt to show him what happened in the real world. To Wally's relief, no one to whom they spoke that morning wanted to employ a fairly scrawny lad – no matter how cheap he would be - and his dad and uncle had gone into a mean pub to spend the rest of the morning. Wally had left them there and walked back to Whitechapel, determined to study harder at school. He knew how hard his dad and uncle worked but he hoped that he could find something less heart breaking and uncertain than navvying on the docks.

As he rode, he recognised places along the way: the pubs his father favoured, the rag picker who accepted used clothing for a few copper coins, a butcher who would occasionally allow Wally to buy a few sausages or chops on credit until payday. This was his own territory and while many boys might have felt frightened by the grim streets with their horrible smells and dark corners, Wally wasn't the least bit frightened. He was cautious, however, of the van. The people of Whitechapel were poor but tough and they looked after their own. The men in the van were not local criminals– most of whom Wally knew well enough. And they were dangerous. Whoever had snatched his pretty young teacher- a respectable middle class woman- wouldn't think twice about seizing a local schoolboy on his bike. The thing puzzling the boy more than anything was why anyone would do this. The men in the van weren't thieves. If they had been intent of snatching Miss Bland's handbag they could have done that easily enough on Durwood St. No, all of this was much more sinister than a simple robbery. Wally was fearful for his teacher but very determined that he would give her every assistance he could.

Finally the van came to rest at one of the meaner and shabbier docks in this very mean and shabby part off the city. There was no street lighting and Wally struggled to see what was happening; the good thing was that in the darkness, he could push his bike up close to where the van had stopped. There was a mist now instead of rain and the whole area of the docklands felt shrouded and silent.

Chapter 6 continued

All Wally could do at this terrible moment was watch and wait. Most London boys caught in such a moment would have felt frightened. The night was grim and showery; the dock area was gloomy and what light there was from the solitary street lamp showed little more than shadow and darkness. Wally had seen violent men seize his teacher in the street outside his school and bundle her into a sack. He'd then seen three dark figures manhandle the struggling sack out of the van onto the dock and then up the gangplank on to the dark

deck of a shabby little freighter. Most London boys standing and watching as Wally did for the next three hours would have been cold and bored and wanting their dinner. Wally was certainly cold and he was hungry but he was actually having the most exciting night of his life.

He had, after all, chased the van on his bike through the mean streets of the East End from Whitechapel to the squalor of the Isle of Dogs. As far as he knew, he had done this without being detected. He knew that if his teacher were going to survive or be rescued, it was because of what he might do to help her in the next few hours.

For just a moment, Wally was tempted to ride to the nearest police station and report what he had seen. This would have been the most sensible (and least dangerous) thing to do but Wally quickly dismissed the idea out of hand. He knew many of the police who worked this rough area of the city and if he had been able to find the right constable or sergeant at that moment then he might have been taken seriously and listened to. Certainly if word of Miss Bland's abduction in the street had circulated to the police stations of the East End then every police officer at the front desk of every station might have listened to him. But he knew that this was unlikely and that if he had run dramatically into a police station in the area claiming to know where a young woman was being held prisoner on a dark ship that most of the police would have sent him away as a trouble maker.

There were, of course, other people who would be keen to hear his news - his mysterious employer, for example- but he simply couldn't leave his hiding spot in the shadow of the wharves and ride away. He had only a vague idea where Miss Bland had been taken, for example. Few of the streets and lanes of the docks were named and it was too dark and gloomy to read the name of the ship from where he was hiding. Given the maze of shallow canals and docks that formed the Isle of Dogs, Wally would have some difficulty in describing to anyone exactly where the ship were berthed. And besides, all of this was much too like a real adventure for Wally to hand it over to anyone else. Better, he thought, to try to sort this one out himself. He had the supreme optimism of an eleven year old boy who was inspired at that moment by love for his teacher and love of adventure. Wally thought if he could sneak from the shadows on to the dock itself, he might be able to see the name of the ship and even where Miss Bland was being held prisoner. And if he were very lucky, he might even rescue his teacher himself! It was just the kind of lark that most boys as brave and as determined as Wally would relish.

Just as he was thinking these brave thoughts and even as he was looking to park his bicycle in a safe place before he crept forward, there was movement on the dock and two dark figures came down to the yard where the van was parked. The figures were talking but not loudly enough for Wally to hear anything of what they said - or even to be sure that they spoke in English. One thing he did establish from the voices of the dark figures, however, was that they were not men but women. Then he knew that he should have realised this much earlier: he recalled the feline grace of the figures and the athletic - almost graceful - way they moved in the darkness. They may have been women but they

were trained fighters. Wally realised with a stab that they would be doubly dangerous to confront.

He watched as the doors of the van were opened and the engine engaged, the whole dock being suddenly lit up by the lights from the van. The fog was still thick and light rain was falling but for just a moment Wally had a much better view of the dock. His eyes first

caught the name written on the van: the *Chungking Chinese Laundry*. Then he caught the name of the ship in the headlights: large white letters on the black hull proclaimed the *ms Chiko Roll*. Underneath the name, the home port was given as Shanghai. Wally's heart stirred; he remembered that an old sailor in the docks had once told him that that far away Chinese city was the wickedest city in all the East. Then the van was gone and the fog and darkness returned.

Well, Wally's thought, this would mean that there were now two fewer crooks guarding his teacher. It was a good time to move. Leaving his bike against the darkness of a wall in an alley, he slid like an oily shadow from his hiding place and up the dock to the grey outline of the *Chiko Roll*. To Wally's relief, the gangway was down. He silently crossed the bridge like a cat and worked his way along the deck to the one light showing at a grimy, square porthole window. What he saw there made his blood run cold.

Wally found himself looking into a kind of office with a stove and kettle in one corner and a desk pushed against the wall. The room was poorly lit with a kerosene lamp on the desk casting a golden light but leaving the edges of the room in shadow. On the desk were soiled tea cups, a leather belt and an ugly looking canvas sack and a rag with horrible dark stains that might easily, Wally thought, have been blood. Miss Bland was tied up in a chair, her grey felt hat pushed back and her usually kind and gentle face contorted with anger. Across her face were livid red marks as if she had been beaten. Wally felt his anger rising just imagining what had been happening here. There were three others in the room - and this was what really astonished the boy crouched at the window looking in.

For the captors who stood guard over his teacher were three young Chinese women, all of them slim and dressed in black cotton pyjamas. They wore their hair short and were, as Wally acknowledged, quite pretty despite the cruelty of their features. When Wally struggled to describe them for the police afterwards, however, he said that in their manner and attitude, they were almost like soldiers. Now that he was actually looking in on the scene, some of his confidence drained away. How was an eleven year old boy going to fight and beat three such dangerous women? As determined and brave as he was, nothing came immediately to mind. Wally could hear the shouting of the three women as they threatened Katie in strongly accented English: the voices were high pitched, shrill and bitter. Then he heard a man's voice in a language Wally did not recognise; he was, however, quieter and more terrifying than the threatening words of the women. As if on the man's instruction, one of the Chinese girls picked up the belt from the desk and struck

Katie with it. He heard Katie's cry of pain. Then as Wally watched in horror, a short, slim man with grey hair and a trim beard moved out of the shadows to stand behind Katie and gently stroke her neck and hair. As he did this, he spoke words that Wally could not hear. Somehow the man's gentle words were more awful and more frightening than the beating had been. It was all Wally could do to hold back at that moment; everything in him wanted to smash through and rescue Katie but he knew that if he tried to do that that now he would simply end up tied into another chair.

With his heart breaking and struggling to find something to put an end to the horrible torture he was watching, Wally felt around on the deck, then inched himself along the side of the superstructure built above the hold of the ship. There was nothing he could use, although his hand finally came to rest on the handle to a door that would, he guessed, lead down to the office. The door opened at his touch and he entered a badly lit corridor with four doors leading off it: the farthest one, he guessed, must open on to the office he had been watching through the porthole window. Wally slid forward and tried the first door on his right. It opened to reveal a squalid galley. There was little enough here of interest but Wally did find a large meat cleaver, a Chinese language newspaper and a box of matches that might be handy. The second door revealed four six bunk beds, the sheets sour and disordered. Wally passed quickly on to the third room - more like a box room or closet than a furnished room or cabin - and this was far more interesting.

There was no window at all in the room and it was very dark. Wally struck a match to check what was here; it took him a moment to take it all in. Metal lockers lined one whole wall, their contents sometimes spilling out on to the floor. There was a clutter of metal buckets, mops and booms, with lengths of rope and chain in one corner. Some broken chairs were stacked together to another side. What really took Wally's attention, however, was a large wooden box with Chinese characters stencilled in bright red letters and the words in English below: *Pudong Fireworks Company. Danger: No Smoking!* Wally very carefully lit another match and lifted the lid of the box to find the most amazing collection of fireworks. There were bungers of all shapes and sizes, rockets, Roman Candles, sparklers and Catherine Wheels. With a stab of joy, Wally realised that the box of crackers might be an answer to prayer.

He had a plan made in a minute. It was desperate and it demanded the greatest pluck but it just might work. Wally quickly filled three of the metal buckets with fireworks and silently slid back out on to the deck. He put one of the buckets right outside the window of the office where he had watched Katie being beaten by the Chinese bullies. Another was closer to the prow of the ship; the other was placed well astern. He took a fourth, empty bucket with him and stationed himself near the doorway.

Working as quietly and as quickly as he could - and fearing all the time that the women who had left in the van might return and find him before he could strike - Wally rolled sheets of the newspaper into a kind of wick or spill and positioned one in each of the

buckets of fireworks. Wally knew that as long as one of the fireworks in each bucket exploded, the rest would soon follow. The noise and confusion that followed would give him the opportunity to rescue Katie. The spills he rolled were of different lengths; Wally hoped that the buckets of fireworks would explode one after the other and not all at once. Even as he set this up, Wally knew that this was a reckless plan and deep down he really was frightened. Then, just when he felt very alone in the gloomy fog on the deck of that dingy ship, he heard the crack of the leather belt and his teacher's cry again as she was struck another time. It was all he needed. He struck the match, lit the first fuse, then the others and picked up the last of the metal buckets and threw it with all his energy at the door.

It made a terrific banging noise and Wally followed it by shouting and yelling as loudly as he could, his voice tearing the silence of the foggy night. Right on cue, the Chinese women erupted from the cabin on to the darkness of the deck, Wally continuing to yell with all his might. Then the first of the buckets of fireworks went off with a thunder as loud as a bomb: the whole harbour was bathed in a shower of sparks of beautiful colours. The deck was lit up and the three women were frenzied as they tried to decide whether they should come forward to fight or run to find shelter. Just at this moment, the second of the buckets exploded. It was the one outside the window of the office and the impact inside the ship must have been very dramatic. The first exploding bucket had already set ropes and canvas on the deck on fire and the second explosion added enormously to the confusion.

Once the second bucket was gone, however, Wally knew that his time was short indeed. Picking up the bucket he had kept, he swung it and smashed the window of the office, hurling himself after it as lightly as a cat. He was in, holding the meat cleaver and the metal bucket and searching for the final - and most dangerous opponent - the man with the neat beard. The room was gloomy but Wally could see no one and he quickly turned his attention to Katie herself. She had been as surprised as the Chinese girls when the fireworks began to go off but when she recognised Wally her heart just burst with joy. The meat cleaver made short work of the ropes binding her into the chair and pausing only to pull her grey felt hat down on her head, Katie was up and ready to go. "Wally," she said with a gasp, "you couldn't have come a moment later."

Despite the urgency of the moment, Wally allowed himself a grin, "Well, I came as soon as I could, Miss Bland, and something tells me we should be out of here as soon as we can go. Come on!"

I was not going to be as easy as that, however. The three Chinese women were distracted by the fire and explosions on the deck, certainly, but there were still three of them and they were practised and dangerous fighters. Wally went to the door to make sure they could make their escape when Katie's cry brought him back to the immediate danger in the room. "Wally!" she shouted, "Look out!"

From out of the shadows in the room stepped the bearded man, his face flushed and angry and a dangerous looking pistol in his hand. "You meddling, stupid boy!" he sneered in a cultivated, educated voice of great malice. "Before we finish tonight, you're going to pay for your folly but before then, you're going to be very helpful, I can assure you. This foolish woman has been reluctant to tell me anything I want to know. I wonder if she will be quite so silent when I turn my belt and razor on one of her pupils? Seeing you in pain might be just the thing to loosen her tongue." The man raised the pistol and pushed it towards Wally's head. In the glow of the fire from the deck, the man's face looked triumphant and determined. Wally's courage seemed to desert him for just a moment and he looked desperately around to find something that he could use to defend himself and his teacher.

Later that night as Katie told her story to Emily this was the only moment her voice faltered and she sounded as if she doubted that they would somehow be able to escape. Even tied into the chair being abused by the Chinese bullies, Katie was sure that something would happen that would allow her to escape: as long as she was alert and determined there was still hope of rescue. Wally's eruption into the room promised just that but with the pistol aimed at Wally's head and the threat of torture made to the little boy she loved, Katie feared now that this adventure would end in terror and sadness. And at this awful moment, the third of the buckets of fireworks exploded with a resounding din and a flash of light which sparked through the cabin where they were standing. The bearded man's face showed his own fear and he looked for a tiny moment towards the window: it was all Katie needed. The metal bucket that Wally had used to smash in the window was at her feet and she swooped to grab it and swing it with all her might. Wally had also been waiting for a moment like this and kicked the man as hard as he could. The bucket caught him in the head just as Wally struck and the pistol fell from his hand. Wally had the pistol in a moment and waved it triumphantly in the air with a grin. Katie was frightened that if they waited a moment, they would lose their chance to escape; she grabbed Wally's hand and they headed as quickly as they could out on to the deck of the ship.

The scene that greeted them showed that danger was still very real - although now the greatest threat might have been from the fire around them rather than from the Chinese ladies in black pyjamas. It wasn't clear how they could get off the ship on to the dock: fire seemed to snake right across the deck between them and the gangway. The good thing was that the explosions and the fires had brought many people on to the docks. Katie could see the dark uniforms of policemen on the docks trying to control the crowds and clear a path for the fire fighters who were noisily arriving on their truck. If only they could get off the ship, Katie thought, they had a chance of escape into the confusion on the dock.

Katie still carried the metal bucket in her hand and Wally held the pistol. They had some protection then when through the flames on the deck came the three Chinese women: snarling, leaping and threatening to bring down the teacher and her little pupil just when

they thought they might escape. The women were enraged and desperate enough to do anything to recapture their prisoner.

It was Wally who saved the moment. The women rushing towards them stopped awkwardly when he raised the pistol and without really thinking of the consequences, Wally fired into the air. People gathered on the dock screamed and ran for cover when this happened and in the added confusion, Katie seized her chance. She threw the bucket straight at the Chinese women and grabbing Wally's hand, pulled him towards the stern of the ship. Then they were over the rail, then struggling in the foggy air before hitting the cold, oily water of the harbour and sliding beneath it.

Wally was really terrified for the first time that night. He was a city boy, brought up in the slums of the East End, and while he was brave and determined and intelligent, he had never learned to swim. Katie, of course, was a strong swimmer and knowing how important it was to stay calm, she gently guided the boy through the next few terrible minutes. The water was icy and in her long woollen dress, Katie was wearing more clothes than she was used to when she swam in the warm waters of Repulse Bay in Hong Kong as a girl. Katie slipped on to her back, using one hand to hold the frightened Wally to her chest and the other to stroke towards the side of the dock. The fire on the *Chiko Roll* lit up the harbour and showed the location of a rusting ladder fixed to the side of the dock some metres from where everyone was distracted by the fire. Just as Katie and Wally emerged wet and dripping from the water, the Fire Brigade went into noisy action. No one noticed the two of them as they slipped behind the crowd and down the dock. To his great relief, Wally found that his bicycle was still safe, tucked into the shadows of the alley. And Katie was grandly delighted - but not so very surprised - when she found her battered old briefcase and her umbrella in the basket on the front of Wally's bike. One of the things that had given her the most concern that night - even when she was being threatened by the bearded man and beaten by Chinese bullies - was that she had lost her students' exercise books with the homework they had completed and which Katie needed to correct.

Of all the things that happened that night - fireworks, gunshots and harbour swim included - nothing was as exciting for Katie as riding across the city of London on Wally's bicycle. They were both cold and very wet and while they shivered and felt their muscles cramping with the cold, their hearts were singing. Katie sat on the bar, her long woollen dress draped over the side and her grey felt hat pulled down while Wally worked very hard to ride at speed away from the immediate danger of the Isle of Dogs and back towards Whitechapel. Even though it was now late, the streets were still busy and the sight of a young woman in a wet woollen dress being dinked through the streets drew plenty of attention from the people they passed - and would have done so even if Wally hadn't rung his bell energetically at every corner. In the poor parts of the city - the first miles of their journey - people cheered them lustily. A policeman on his beat looked as if he might step out and stop them but Katie took off her hat and waved at him cheerfully. In the mean streets of Whitechapel and Spitalfields, men and women milling around pubs and on street corners laughed and waved. Once they reached the West End, however, the respectable

folk on the streets heading home from the opera and the theatre in their evening dress looked anxious and scandalised. Katie loved this part of the journey best of all. She wanted to shout to the elegantly dressed ladies and gentlemen they passed that she and the little boy with her had escaped from a terrible international criminal and his Chinese henchmen: that they had set a ship on fire as they made their escape and that they had swum in the greasy waters of the London docks and lived to tell the tale. Despite her smile, Katie's face ached and she shivered with the cold but she would not have traded her place on the bar of the bicycle for anything at that wonderful moment.

Once they had cleared the docks, Katie thought that perhaps they should stop at a police station: she needed to make sure that the police knew about the dangerous criminals on the *ms Chiko Roll*. But Wally would have none of it. He knew exactly where he wanted to go and Katie was happy to trust him to pedal them both to safety. In the middle of that cold journey she would have loved to stop at Curzon St and could imagine a lovely hot bath and a big pot of Yi Mu's Oolong tea: instead, Wally pedalled relentlessly on to Marylebone in Westminster. It was only when they had pulled up in Baker Street that Katie realised where Wally had brought them. She was astonished that her little pupil knew the address - and even more surprised when Mr Holmes opened the door and greeted a cold, wet and grinning Wally's with the words, "We'll, if it isn't my Number One Agent in the East End. Do come in: I was wondering when you would get here this evening!"

Katie knew as soon as they reached Baker St that they would be safe; you can imagine how relieved she was as she came through the doorway of 221B - still dripping with wet - to find Emily and Yi Mu there ahead of her. The two sisters fell into each other's arms. Very quickly, Emily's part of the story was told. Inspector Lestrade had called Sherlock Holmes as soon as he heard about Katie's abduction and Holmes and Watson went immediately to Curzon St to make sure that Emily had not been taken as well- despite the presence of two of Mycroft's agents. Inspector Lestrade left a policeman to watch the home in Curzon St but Holmes persuaded the Inspector that the most sensible thing to do was to bring both Emily and Yi Mu back to the safety of Baker St. They would wait there for whatever the night would bring. And Emily never doubted for a moment that Katie would be a match for whatever Professor Moriarty could bring to trouble her.

If Emily and Yi Mu were relieved by Katie's arrival, then Katie was equally comforted to find them there, safe and well. One of the most terrifying threats made by the bearded man as she was tied into the chair was that he had already captured Emily and Yi Mu and that they were being held - and tortured- in another cabin of the *Chiko Roll*. Mr Holmes wanted to hear Emily's story immediately but he had not figured on Yi Mu's determination to care for her girls. Yi Mu showed not the least deference to Mr Holmes agitated questions; instead, she hustled Katie off to the bathroom and Emily and Yi Mu heard everything first while Katie sat in a deep, hot bubble bath. Mr Holmes had to be content with Wally's long and comprehensive report while he stood shivering and dripping with wet on the hearth

rug. He was, Holmes, thought the best boy to have in such a situation. Mrs Hudson had offered to go in a cab to Curzon St and bring back some warm clothes for Katie; without being told, the good lady made a note to try to find something for Wally's to fit into as well. After all, he was just as cold and wet as Katie.

Emily cried when she saw the livid weals on Katie's face where the Chinese bullies had beaten her, trying to force her to tell what she knew about the Star of Hind. For Emily, this was personal: she had brought this great treasure - and the great danger with it - into their home but Katie was the one who had suffered directly. There were marks on Katie's neck and shoulders too but Katie was so relieved to be out of danger and so angry with the bullies that the pain she suffered was put aside. And Katie was proud. Despite all the threats and the beating she had suffered, Katie had not told her captors anything. In the worst moments - when the bearded man insisted that he had Emily and Yi Mu captive in another cabin and that they were being beaten too- Katie concentrated all her thoughts on her mother and father at home at Monteith in Hong Kong. If she could remain silent through all this, then they would be so proud of her.

It might have been another thing, she knew, if the Chinese women had captured Wally. It was one thing to be brave when you were in pain; after all, that wasn't very different from a trip to the dentist. But watching someone like Wally being hurt when she only had to speak to stop his pain- Katie knew that that would be much more terrible. She tried to explain this to Emily and Yi Mu as the warm water and lovely smelling soap washed away the suffocating smell of the cabin on the *Chiko Roll* and the terrible, oily water of the harbour.

Then it was Wally's turn in the bath tub and the lovely hot soak was simply delicious— so different from the tin tub on the living room floor on Friday nights which had been his only experience of a bath until this moment. Wally would have happily spent half an hour under the bubbles but Mr Holmes was very anxious to have both Wally and Katie together and he winkled him out and into a fluffy white towel. Mrs Hudson had not only found a suitable woollen dress at home for Katie but she had done a splendid job in finding some of Junjie's warm things for Wally to wear.

Katie told the whole story again in the living room with Wally, Mr Holmes, Dr Watson, Yi Mu and Inspector Lestange of Scotland Yard assembled to hear her. Inspector Lestrade allowed her to finish before pressing her for details but he was most impressed by both her courage and her recall of details. As Katie told her story, Mrs Hudson presided over the tea trolley, quietly filling cups so that soon everyone was feeling more relaxed. And Katie's story was remarkable.

When she came out of the school that afternoon, she had really only been thinking about getting out of the dismal weather and home to Curzon St and Yi Mu's wonderful congee porridge. She hardly noticed the laundry van pulling up beside her as she waited for Wally to show off his bike and when three dark figures suddenly seized her and pulled the foul canvas sack over her head she was taken completely by surprise. She had kicked and

fought to no avail, first in the van itself and then as she was carried out and dumped, finally, on the floor of the cabin of the *Chiko Roll*. When the sack was pulled off her, she had no idea where she was. But in the sack she had already formed a plan to try to help her survive.

Of course she would be as alert and as fearless as she could be but she knew from the start that she would need more than raw courage to see her through. She would need to be smart. Because Katie had never been any good at telling untruths, she decided as soon as the questions began that rather than tell lies she would say nothing at all. Her standard reply to every question was a simple, "I don't know anything at all about that." It was a response which made the bearded man and the Chinese women more and more angry.

Katie remembered, however, Emily's good advice from her wrangles with some of the crusty old men who were the senior doctors at the Free Hospital: sometimes it doesn't pay to let everyone know how clever you are. And here Katie was at a great advantage. The bearded man and the women spoke among themselves in the strongly accented Cantonese Chinese that Katie had learned as a girl in Hong Kong and which she still spoke at home in Curzon Street with Yi Mu and Emily. Of course the women imagined that Katie was ignorant and stupid and that it was completely safe to talk in front of her - and of course, Katie did nothing to make them think any differently. The Chinese ladies were dead unlucky: they had managed to abduct one of the few young women in the Whitechapel streets who was fluent in Cantonese. Just by remaining silent and listening intently, Katie quickly learned that the bearded man knew that Emily had received the Star of Hind from Dougal Kerr, the old Scottish soldier. They spoke among themselves about what had happened at the hospital with an insight that terrified Katie because some of the details, she thought, could only have come from Emily herself. Perhaps they really did have her captive somewhere else on the ship; even in her pain, however, Katie realised that if Emily had told them what had happened at the hospital that she must also have told them about giving the jewel to Mr Mycroft Holmes - and they did not seem to know this. Katie remained as tight lipped as she could, pretending to know nothing and even suggesting that the Chinese villains had abducted the wrong girl in the streets.

Through all the terror, Katie never stopped hoping that help would come. The bearded man and the Chinese women became increasingly desperate - and Katie was terrified that they now spoke openly among themselves of putting Katie back into the sack and hanging her over the side of the *Chiko Roll* in the cold waters of the harbour to see if that would loosen her tongue. When Wally arrived with his bucket and fireworks, Katie's heart sang with joy and she was able to give Mr Holmes and the police a description of what happened on the boat that did full credit to Wally's courage and bravery. She was also delighted that all pretence that she was stupid and ignorant could now be put aside. She had had enough of playing dumb that night. Katie had the names and descriptions of all the Chinese girls to give to Inspector Lestrade; she was much less confident about the bearded man, however. In fact, he had kept well out of Katie's sight and Wally was able to

give a much better description of him than Katie could. She did volunteer with a shudder, however, that his touch on her neck and hair was much more terrible than the belting she had received from the women. He was, she said, like a reptile. Katie would rather encounter the worst kind of snake than feel that touch again.

Wally told his story then. When it was concluded, Emily couldn't help but demand, "But how do you know Mr Holmes? And how did you know to come here?"

Mr Holmes gave a sly grin and Inspector Lestrade chuckled, "We'll, Dr Emily, I'd like to be able to say that my constables throughout London are the best and most acute sources of intelligence that the police force could have but Mr Holmes has his own little team of informers working in places my constables could never go. As I understand it, young Wally has been the brightest eyes and ears that Mr Holmes has in the East End - or in the whole of London for that matter. Nothing much happens anywhere from Whitechapel to Spitalfields without Wally knowing about it - and sharing the story with Mr Holmes. I'm not supposed to know or approve, of course, but Mr Holmes kindly feeds me information that I need to know. It was Mr Holmes - using information from Wally and people like him- who realised that old soldiers who had served at the siege of Delhi seemed to be turning up dead in unusual numbers. With that to follow up, we've been conducting inquiries that have taken us to some rum places, like the *ms Chiko Roll*, for example. We've had our eye on that particular ship for some time now."

"Wally," said Katie with a sigh, "I didn't know what to think when you told me that you had a part time job that you couldn't talk about. I'm ashamed to say that I thought that you might have even been involved in something not quite legal."

Wally grinned, "We'll, the Guv'nor here has had me looking about in some pretty rum places but I haven't done anything much illegal yet - although I suppose that letting off fireworks and burning down ships at anchor in the Isle of Dogs isn't strictly kosher."

Despite the hurried way in which guests had been delivered to her doorstep, Mrs Hudson managed to turn out a very nice but very late dinner. There was a large beef and mushroom pie put on the table with lots of mashed potatoes and peas followed by a scrumptious baked custard. The company sat and listened once again to Katie tell the story of their exciting escape from the *Chiko Roll* and the wild, cold, exhilarating ride across London that followed. In the middle of their dinner, the two agents assigned by Mr Mycroft Holmes to guard the girls turned up a Baker Street, summoned by Inspector Lestrade. They had failed conspicuously to protect Katie; all their plans, of course, had figured on intruders breaking into Curzon St or coming to the door in some sort of disguise. No one had imagined anything so bold as an attack on a public street. Mr Holmes snorted and couldn't resist stating the obvious: that his agents (Here he looked at Wally.) were infinitely more effective than the ones employed by his brother Mycroft. Sherlock said this again when Mr Mycroft Holmes himself arrived half an hour later. Mr Mycroft Holmes dismissed all this airily. He was able to report that the police now had in their custody the

five Chinese ladies who had performed the abduction; they had been arrested at the *Chunking Chinese Laundry* in Cheapside. While the girls had a bad local reputation for being saucy and rude to the police, they had no real criminal record. They confessed their crime and insisted that they had been hired by a gentleman whose name they didn't know to take part in a little escapade that would earn them plenty more money than they would ever see scrubbing knickers and sheets at the laundry. Sherlock Holmes accepted his brother's story with a snort and he said nothing more although Emily noticed that Mr Sherlock Holmes served his brother a pathetically small scoop of custard pudding when everyone else - especially Wally - had enjoyed seconds.

There was quiet across the table when the meal was finished. Finally, Mr Sherlock Holmes raised the question that was troubling both Katie and Emily like a sore tooth. "An unnamed bearded man who recruits women to do his thuggery for him. And who would that man be?" Sherlock Holmes wondered aloud, the bitterness showing clearly in his voice. "I'll bet your constables didn't arrest anyone like that at the *Chiko Roll*, Lestrade."

"We'll," the Chief Inspector replied cautiously, "the fire which Wally started more or less burnt out the *ms Chiko Roll*. There may be a body still to find in the ashes."

"I hardly think so," said Mr Mycroft Holmes. "That gentleman will be miles away from here by now - back to the Continent, perhaps, to one of the many aliases he maintains."

"And thanks to my Wally," said Mr Sherlock Holmes, "we have the best description ever of Professor James Moriarty. I don't think that that scoundrel will trouble us again for a little while."

No one hoped more for this to be true than Katie. She touched her neck where those reptilian hands had stroked her earlier in the night and shuddered. Emily's knew exactly what she must be feeling and gently took her sister's hand.

Chapter 7

The Star of Hind

Katie woke up in her own bed exhausted the next day. The marks of the strap on her face had faded just a little and she was stiff from being tied into the chair and from sitting in the freezing cold on the cross bar of Wally's bike as she was dinked all the way across London. Nothing, however, could keep her from washing and dressing for school. As she did this, she angrily realised that all the adventures the night before meant that she still hadn't marked the students' exercise books in her old brief case. She was exhausted but not for a moment did she think of having the day off. She was a teacher and the boys and girls at Durwood Street School needed her. It was Emily's last day off before she would be back at the Royal Free Hospital on the night shift as usual but she was up at the same time as Katie and made the journey to the school with her. After Katie had introduced her sister to the Headmaster, she told him the whole story - and swore him to secrecy about what she and Wally had endured. By then, the bell was ringing for the start of the school day and it was time to go to her class.

When she came to the door of her classroom, Katie gasped. All the boys and girls were standing on their desks cheering. Someone had written on the blackboard **OUR TEACHER, OUR HERO!** And **WE LOVE WALLY!** Emily cheered just as loudly as any of the students and lifted Wally and Katie's arms in the air as if they were boxers at a prize fight. Her job that day - quite apart from writing a very long letter to Mother and Father in Hong Kong about their adventures- was dealing with all the journalists and photographers who wanted a piece of Katie and Wally for their newspapers. The children themselves knew a little of the story. After all, some of them had been on the street when the van had stopped and their teacher had been bundled into a canvas sack. None of them, however, said anything of this to the newspaper men who crowded around their school that day. Without being told to, they banded together to protect their own. It was something that the people of the East End were very used to doing.

Emily made quite sure that the really interesting parts of the story had been left out by the time the journalists had put their stories together. There was no mention of lost jewels, old soldiers or international criminal masterminds. The story that went to the papers was that a wicked gang of Chinese washerwoman had been drinking and smoking in a pub in Spitalfields. They had decided to kidnap a young woman in the streets and hold her until a ransom of ten pounds had been paid. Just by chance, they had seized a teacher from the Durwood Street School, Miss Katie Bland. One of the boys in the teacher's class had chased after the thieves and bravely rescued Miss Bland. A quite separate story appeared in the newspapers about a fire on a ship moored at the Isle of Dogs. The story asserted that a foolish Chinese sailor had been smoking in a room where fireworks had been stored and he had set off the explosions that wrecked the boat. None of the journalists seemed to be able to connect the dots and realise that the fire on the *ms Chiko Roll* was related to the abduction of the teacher. As Emily lamented again in her letter to her parents, the worst thing about working for Mr Sherlock Holmes is that you simply can't tell the whole story afterwards. The truth has to go untold because all of it was muddled in with state secrets and confidential international matters.

The next day that Katie and Emily were both off work, they went again with Mr Holmes and Dr Watson to meet Mr Mycroft Holmes at the Diogenes Club - this time for a proper lunch. The girls were delighted that Wally was included in the invitation; this last kindness did mollify Emily just a little when they were again obliged to enter the club rooms by the Tradesmen's Entrance. You can imagine how astonished they were to find themselves climbing the sombre oak staircase at the heart of the noble Georgian mansion before being ushered into a grand private dining room. Nine places had been set at a heavy, mahogany table with yellow roses and elegant silver and crystal. Seeing all this, I think that Wally was more alarmed than he had been on the *ms Chiko Roll*. Before Kate could ask who the other places had been set for, however, they were joined by the Prime Minister (Sir Arthur Balfour) and the Queen's Private Secretary (Sir Arthur Bigge). Dr Watson, Mycroft and Sherlock Holmes greeted these two great men affably, then everyone came to attention and bowed as another man ended the room. It was, the girls suddenly realised, His Royal Highness, the Prince of Wales.

The girls knew that the King's eldest son always took the title of the Prince of Wales. They had met the present Prince of Wales on their last adventure with Sherlock Holmes and remembered him as an ample, cheerful and gracious man who was confident and elegant. He was, Katie thought, a very dignified man but he immediately relaxed once he met Emily's shrewd smile, Katie's kind eyes and Wally's wonderful cheeky grin. He insisted that the whole story be told again, beginning with Emily's encounter with the old Scottish soldier, their finding the cherrywood box, the discovery of the Star of Hind and all the adventures aboard the *ms Chiko Roll*. By the time the story was finished, the party had eaten their way through mushroom soup, grilled salmon and a crême caramel with clotted cream. Tea was being poured.

Katie was terrifically proud of the way Emily spoke about her work at the Royal Free Hospital - and the respectful, manly way Wally recounted his part in the drama. (Katie interrupted Wally's story at one point to make sure that the Prince understood how brave Wally had really been - despite the modest way he told the Prince what had happened at the dock in the Isle of Dogs.) For her part, Emily's chest swelled when Katie spoke about standing up to the bullies when they wanted her to reveal what had happened to the jewels and then the cool way she had calmed Wally when he was so frightened in the cold, dark water off the docks. When it was all finished, Mycroft rang a bell and gave quiet directions to the servant who came; a moment later, the cherrywood box was placed in front of the Prince and Emily carefully opened it to reveal all the treasures it contained. The Star of Hind was unpacked last of all and Emily handed it directly to the Prince.

"Your Royal Highness," she said simply, "when I learned from Dr Watson that many people had suffered and died while possessing this jewel, I had no idea that my sister might be one of them. I do not know if this is mine to give away and I hesitate to give something so beautiful but dark into your hands. But I can think of no one else to whom I would rather give this than to your mother, Her Majesty the Queen. Will you accept it for her? She is the Emperess of India now and this jewel probably belongs with the Crown."

The Prince had been deeply moved by the whole story and if the girls and Wally had been quietly proud of one another's courage then the Prince felt that he could be proud of them all in exactly the same way. He reached out and gently shook hands with the girls - and saved a manly, naval kind of shake for Wally. "My mother's kingdom is in good hands if it can count on the courage and pluck of young ones like you!" he said frankly. "And Dr Emily, I will gladly accept the Star from your hands on behalf of my mother. Mr Mycroft Holmes has already spoken directly to Her Majesty on this matter. I understand that he has assured you that the great jewel was indeed yours to dispose of; well, you have shown wisdom and generosity beyond your years in giving it to the Crown. I know that all of this must remain secret - something I hate when you deserve to be acknowledged by the whole kingdom for your goodness. I promise you that I will never forget what you have done. And that's not just my promise but the promise of the Queen herself. She would be here today himself but she is very busy, I'm afraid, on important matters of state in Balmoral Castle in Scotland." Katie couldn't be sure but she was almost certain that she saw young Wally wink at the Prince at this moment - and receive a wink in return.

"May I, Your Royal Highness?" asked Emily. The prince nodded and Emily took up the Star of Hind in her hand one last time before returning it to the table. She felt as she did so a tremendous sense of relief.

Over the next few years, there were other consequences of that exciting adventure. Emily kept the gold mohurs, the turban pearl and the rope of emeralds but she had a special purpose for each of these treasures. The gold coins she set aside for Wally. Because of their rarity, they brought a fortune when they went to auction and Emily put the money

aside so that Wally could go on to a famous school in London and then go on to study at the newly formed London School of Economics. When he graduated with distinction, Wally went quietly to work for Mr Mycroft Holmes as one of the very first agents of the nation's intelligence agency. He served his country gallantly in peace and war and retired as the Director of MI6 with the title Sir Walter Beavers, Baronet. Sponsored by Mr Mycroft Holmes, Wally became a member of the Diogenes Club in his own right and would tell his fellow members over port and cigars after dinner thrilling tales of his work in the secret service of the nation. He always insisted, however, that the greatest service he had ever performed for his country was as an eleven year old boy when he rescued his teacher from the hands of the world's wickedest criminal.

The Star of Hind quietly disappeared from sight. Although it now belonged to the Queen, it was never formally incorporated into the Crown Jewels. In fact, few people even knew of its existence. The king was a sensible, Christian man but he could never forget the misery the jewel seemed to bring on everyone who had ever owned it. As much as possible, he would keep the jewel at arm's length. One wet spring Sunday afternoon some months after their adventure, Mr Mycroft Holmes collected the girls and Wally and took them to the Tower of London where a very grand Gentleman Keeper escorted them into the deep vault where the treasures of the Crown Jewels were kept safe. There, beside the fabulous crowns and sceptres that Katie and Emily had read about as girls in Hong Kong, the Star of Hind was placed on a red velvet cushion. In the gloom of the vault, the Star of Hind seemed to flash brighter and more beautifully than all the other jewels put together. It is probably there still although its malevolent power seemed to have been diminished by the generosity and courage of the girls and young Wally who had given it away to the Crown. Like all evil things, its power to injure was tempered by transparent goodness.

Katie and Emily kept the other jewels for two years - although they were locked safe and secure in the vaults at the Diogenes Club and not left lying about on the dressing table at Curzon St. The jewels might have remained there much longer but Emily became incensed every time she wanted to see them and had to go through the Tradesmen's Entrance at the Club because ladies couldn't use the front door. It was Katie who had the best idea on what to do with them. When Junjie finished his training at the Royal Free Hospital and went back with Yi Mu to Hong Kong (where he soon became famous as a great doctor working with the poorest people of the city), their kind father made sure that he found another housekeeper for them - and another very bright Chinese boy who needed a place to stay in the big city.

The girls were very happy to help but, Katie wondered, what about other bright boys (and girls! insisted Emily) who needed to come from Hong Kong to train as doctors? What was really needed was a home or hostel so that their parents could send their bright sons and daughters to somewhere in London where they could be safe. This set both the girls thinking. It took everything from the sale of the turban jewel and the emeralds to buy a big, elegant house not far from them in Curzon St which they named Monteith College. There was enough room in the house for ten students to study at any one time and it gave both

the girls the greatest satisfaction to meet new students at the docks, see them settled into their studies - and eventually leave as doctors to go home. The Prince of Wales (who had become King Edward VII by this time) was delighted to become the Patron of the College. He and the Queen gave generously to support the work of the College and they always came to share a formal dinner with the students to celebrate their graduation. Katie and Emily loved these opportunities to meet with the King and Queen who always stayed on for a last cup of coffee with the girls so they could talk informally about how things were going with them. The King had promised them that he would never forget what they had done for the Crown and he was true to his word. Monteith College prospered and over time many poor people in Hong Kong and Singapore were treated by doctors who lived at Monteith while they trained in London.

All of this was a long way into the future when Emily went back to work the day after the story broke in the newspapers. For a week or so, the girls were famous, even if the story in the newspapers was only a tiny part of the truth of the adventure. Junjie had returned from Edinburgh that week and was bitterly disappointed to have missed all the fun. No one, he declared, would have broken into their home in Curzon St and tied up his mother if he had been at home to protect them all. Emily grinned: he was beginning to sound just a little like some of the pompous senior doctors at the hospital already.

Emily wondered if her part in the adventure would be the subject of gossip at the Royal Free Hospital but a little to her disappointment, nothing whatever was said. This wasn't so surprising because the newspaper stories had focussed more on Katie's abduction in the street by the desperate gang of Chinese girls. Sr Annie did tell her, however, that everyone was talking about the strange disappearance of one of the senior doctors. Emily was immediately interested: the man Annie named was one of the crustiest of the old fashioned doctors who noisily opposed allowing women to train at the hospital.

"Do you know, Dr Emily," said the old Scottish nurse, "It was all rather queer." Annie had been called in quietly to treat the man, she said, while Dr Emily was on her days off. "He had the strangest set of injuries, Doctor, that ever I saw. I declare it looked as if someone had hit him in the head with a metal bucket! The grand man was very short with me when I said this and told me to get on with my work of dressing the wounds because he was anxious to catch the boat train to Vienna at noon. He hasn't been back since and no one seems to know where he's got to." Emily listened to all of this with a niggling sense of wonder. She said nothing to Sr Annie, but made sure that she shared her feelings with Mr Mycroft Holmes and Mr Sherlock Holmes when they called on the girls at Curzon St that evening. Mycroft Holmes wanted more details but Sherlock was not as surprised as Emily expected him to be. He made a special point of saying to his brother in a patronising way that in these great matters they should be cautious about jumping to conclusions. "At any one moment in a big city like London," he said, "one might expect that any number of bearded men would have injuries consistent with their being hit in the head with a metal bucket." All of this was delivered with a straight face but Katie was certain that she could catch the twinkle in his eye as he turned the conversation to other matters.

Emily gave to Katie the only thing left of the treasure they had found in the kit bag. The cherrywood box that had once held the largest diamond in the world and fabulous jewels that had been the gift of the Emperor to a loyal and brave little servant now went every day with Katie in her briefcase to her desk in the Durwood Street School. In it she kept her pencils and paper clips. Boys and girls in her class who had been very, very good were occasionally allowed to pick it up and feel the beautiful carving of oak leaves and roses. Katie loved the box because it connected her not only with her generous and loving sister, but with the little boy whose bravery and pluck had saved her life on that horrible night when she was a prisoner on the *ms Chiko Roll*.