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CRIME

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CRIME

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CRIME

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READING SCHEDULE

This volume should take you a grand total of twelve days. Here's the official schedule:

DAY 1:	Reading 1 in this volume <i>Introduction</i> <i>The Adventure of the Speckled Band</i> <i>Poetry Workbook: Lesson 81</i>	13
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CRIME

Crime fiction is quite a popular genre, but it is also a relatively recent development in the world of literature. Some consider Edgar Allen Poe to be the first real crime author, others credit Wilkie Collins, who was a good friend of Charles Dickens and wrote at the same time. No matter whom you decide to give the credit to, the genre is generally considered to have come into its own in the 19th century, despite the fact that you can point to several earlier examples which might technically qualify as “mysteries.”

There are numerous subdivisions under the general heading of Crime Fiction, but in this volume we will be focusing specifically on “detective fiction,” rather than, for instance, legal thrillers, spy novels, courtroom dramas, psychological thrillers, or police procedural stories. These other categories are all later spin-offs of the proto-typical “detective” story, and so we will be focusing on the original, “classic” style crime stories.

Detective Fiction can be divided into several further main categories, among which are the “Whodunit” and the “Locked Room Mystery.” In this volume you’ll be reading examples of each of these. The “Whodunit” is a story which is complex and plot-driven, but in which all the clues are provided to the reader before the solution is revealed at the end. As the name indicates, the pressing question in a whodunit is the question of who committed the crime. A Locked Room Mystery on the other hand, is one in which a crime is committed under seemingly impossible circumstances - for instance, a locked room into which no one could possibly have entered. The detective’s job is to figure out *how* it could have happened.

The very earliest mystery stories, written during the nineteenth century, are classified as the Early School of Detective Fiction, and the most famous author from this period is of course Sir Arthur Conan Doyle who created the arch-typical detective, Sherlock Holmes.

The later Golden Age of Detective Fiction is considered, for the most

part, to have flourished in the 1920s and 1930s - between the two world wars, and many of the most well-known mystery authors came out of England during this time. A group called The Detection Club was formed in London in 1930, and the list of members reads like a Who's Who of mystery writers. Dorothy Sayers, Agatha Christie, Baroness Orczy (author of *The Scarlet Pimpernel*), and GK Chesterton. Chesterton was the first president of the club and they had regular dinner meetings for years. An oath of initiation, written by either Sayers or Chesterton, was required at membership, and is as follows:

“Do you promise that your detectives shall well and truly detect the crimes presented to them using those wits which it may please you to bestow upon them and not placing reliance on nor making use of Divine Revelation, Feminine Intuition, Mumbo Jumbo, Jiggery-Pokery, Coincidence, or Act of God?”

This group of authors treated mystery stories like a game that had very strict rules - a game which could be played elegantly and well, or a game at which someone could cheat. They had become frustrated by the abundance of cheap and badly written mysteries with lame solutions the plots. So another member of the club named Ronald Knox spelled out a list of ten rules for “proper” detective fiction, and which all members of the club agreed to abide by. Since they treated writing and reading detective stories as a game, these “10 Commandments” were considered to be the rules of fair play.

1. The criminal must be mentioned in the early part of the story, but must not be anyone whose thoughts the reader has been allowed to know.
2. All supernatural or preternatural agencies are ruled out as a matter of course.
3. Not more than one secret room or passage is allowable.

4. No hitherto undiscovered poisons may be used, nor any appliance which will need a long scientific explanation at the end.
5. No Chinaman must figure in the story.
6. No accident must ever help the detective, nor must he ever have an unaccountable intuition which proves to be right.
7. The detective himself must not commit the crime.
8. The detective is bound to declare any clues which he may discover.
9. The “sidekick” of the detective, the Watson, must not conceal from the reader any thoughts which pass through his mind: his intelligence must be slightly, but very slightly, below that of the average reader.
10. Twin brothers, and doubles generally, must not appear unless we have been duly prepared for them.

Aside from number 5 which is completely weird, those all seem to be quite good rules of thumb for what makes an enjoyable story. No doubt you've been annoyed before by a breach of one of those rules in either a book, movie, or tv show. Nothing is more frustrating than perservering all the way through a story, paying close attention to all the details, only to have a solution to the crime revealed at the last second as one which you couldn't possibly have seen coming. Even the strange rule 5 makes some sense when you think about it. What these authors were trying to eliminate were cheap solutions to mysteries - things like feminine intuition, magic, or ridiculous coincidences. They wanted everything in the story to be explainable and rational. At the time, Chinamen often appeared in stories as mysterious men of the east who had strange powers or abilities that didn't need to be explained because, after all, they were Chinamen.

Eliminating that from the stories was not a racist move, it was an attempt to eliminate something which had become completely cliché.

In this volume you'll be introduced to four of the most legendary fictional detectives of all time, and each one of them is quite a distinct personality. You'll meet Sherlock Holmes, Lord Peter Wimsey, Father Brown, and Hercule Poirot.

As an example of the Early School of Detective Fiction, the first selection in this book is a Sherlock Holmes story by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle called *The Adventure of the Speckled Band*. This exemplifies the Locked Room style detective story, and was written in 1892. Sherlock Holmes stories are, of course, the archetypal detective stories, and Doyle is responsible for many of the common tropes found throughout much other detective fiction - for instance, the brilliant, keenly observant yet eccentric detective, the plodding and faithful sidekick of very average intelligence, the bumbling local police, red herrings, etc. Oddly enough, now that the crime genre is so huge and so popular, Sherlock Holmes has been done, done, re-done, copied, mimicked, and ripped-off in every possible way, and because of this, when you read the actual Sherlock Holmes stories it's possible for them to come across as a bit cliché. The thing to remember is that this style of story was hugely innovative, and the average reader in the nineteenth century would have had his mind blown by their originality.

Sherlock Holmes was a very distinctive and memorable figure in fiction. He was brilliant, uncannily observant, and had amazing deductive powers. He was a cocaine addict, wretchedly untidy, and something of a recluse. His friend and sidekick, Dr. Watson is the narrator for most of the four novels and fifty-six short stories which Doyle wrote.

The next selection in this volume is a full length novel called *Whose Body* by Dorothy Sayers, the first novel she ever wrote featuring her detective Lord Peter Wimsey. It is in the classic Whodunit format and a great example of Golden Age Detective Fiction. Sayers featured Lord Peter in eleven books and eighteen short stories, and his character is the premiere English Gentleman Detective. He is impeccably educated, impeccably

dressed, from one of the oldest families in England. Lord Peter fought in WW1, was a victim of shell-shock which makes him quite a complex character, and he has a valet named Bunter who helps him solve crimes.

Wimsey is such a romantically perfect character that it seems quite likely that Dorothy Sayers was somewhat obsessed with her own fictional creation - a bit Pygmalion-esque. Wimsey seems to embody Sayers' own personal fantasy of the ideal man. He was educated at Eton and Oxford, collects rare manuscripts and folios, and in some ways is quite formidably academic. You'll notice as you read that Wimsey himself purchases a rare Dante manuscript and is quite an expert on it - Dante was Sayers' own particular area of study, and her translation of *Divine Comedy* is what she considered to be her best work. She created an entire persona for Wimsey, complete with a family tree going back to the twelfth century which is incredibly detailed and very romantic. He is descended from a line which included men who fought with Richard the Lionheart, were followers of Wycliffe, friends with Sir Philip Sidney, and boxed the ears of Francis Bacon. Wimsey himself is shockingly wealthy, intensely charming, an accomplished musician, and an amazing athlete (well, cricket - for the English that counts!) In some of the later novels, a romance is introduced between Wimsey and a woman named Harriet Vane. Harriet is very much a fictional version of Sayers herself. Both were educated at Oxford, (very unusual for a woman of the time - Sayers was one of the first) and both are mystery writers. All in all, as weird as it may have been for Sayers to become infatuated with her own character, her attention to detail certainly makes Wimsey a very life-like (and extremely likeable) character.

Dorothy Sayers was not only friends with GK Chesterton and Agatha Christie, she was also a friend of Lewis and Tolkien's in Oxford and wrote many things besides detective stories. Her essay *The Lost Tools of Learning* is what is responsible for the re-birth of classical education in America - of which you, presumably, are a part.

After you finish *Whose Body*, you will read a Father Brown story by GK Chesterton. Father Brown was a detective created by Chesterton,

based off the character of the Catholic priest who was instrumental in Chesterton's own conversion to Catholicism. He's quite a different sort of detective than Sherlock Holmes, because he relies more on eminently rational, and yet still intuitive knowledge of human nature, and less on scientific, "deductive" reasoning. Many of his solutions to crimes are based off of his eye for detail combined with his spiritual insights and his knowledge of human nature and sin. He's different from Lord Peter Wimsey in that he's a short little stumpy Catholic priest who wears shapeless clothes and carries an enormous umbrella rather than being elegant, well dressed, and charming. His "sidekick" is Flambeau - a French reformed criminal. Father Brown is incredibly insightful, and through him we get a lot of Chesterton's own wisdom about human nature, and life. Chesterton wrote over fifty Father Brown stories, but he was a prolific writer of much more than simply detective fiction. He is well known for his work on apologetics, philosophy, poetry, etc.

The last selection in this volume is another full length novel, this time by Agatha Christie, entitled *The Mysterious Affair at Styles*. No treatment of Golden Age Crime fiction would be complete without Agatha Christie, and it is in this book that she introduced her famous detective Hercule Poirot to the public. Poirot is featured in thirty-three novels and more than fifty short stories and is another very distinctive personality. He is a small and excessively tidy little Belgian man, who achieves his results through being intently observant and thoroughly methodical. Hastings is his sidekick, friend, and the narrator of this story as well as a number of the other Poirot novels.

Agatha Christie is the best selling novelist of all time, coming in third after Shakespeare and the Bible, and her works have been translated into more languages than Shakespeare. While Dorothy Sayers was clearly an academic who wrote detective fiction on the side, and Chesterton was a great thinker and apologist who wrote detective fiction on the side, Christie seems to have lived a life consistent with her often exotic mysteries. She was incredibly well traveled and participated in many

READING I

archeological digs in all kinds of obscure places throughout the world with her second husband, a distinguished archeologist. She was not especially religious, and you'll notice that shows through in her story. For instance, you'll notice things like the fact that she seems to take it for granted that her characters will become romantically attached to other people's spouses. In this book it doesn't develop into anything sordid, but it simply tells you where Christie herself was in terms of her understanding of life and morality. She wrote mysteries simply for the sake of writing mysteries, and the public has eaten them up for nearly a century.

THE ADVENTURE OF THE SPECKLED BAND

BY SIR ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE

On glancing over my notes of the seventy odd cases in which I have during the last eight years studied the methods of my friend Sherlock Holmes, I find many tragic, some comic, a large number merely strange, but none commonplace; for, working as he did rather for the love of his art than for the acquirement of wealth, he refused to associate himself with any investigation which did not tend towards the unusual, and even the fantastic. Of all these varied cases, however, I cannot recall any which presented more singular features than that which was associated with the well-known Surrey family of the Roylotts of Stoke Moran. The events in question occurred in the early days of my association with Holmes, when we were sharing rooms as bachelors in Baker Street. It is possible that I might have placed them upon record before, but a promise of secrecy was made at the time, from which I have only been freed during the last month by the untimely death of the lady to whom the pledge was given. It is perhaps as well that the facts should now come to light, for I have reasons to know that there are widespread rumours as to the death of Dr. Grimesby Roylott which tend to make the matter even more terrible than the truth.

It was early in April in the year '83 that I woke one morning to find Sherlock Holmes standing, fully dressed, by the side of my bed. He was a late riser, as a rule, and as the clock on the mantelpiece showed me that it was only

It should probably be mentioned that this expression means something quite different in England than it does in America.

a quarter-past seven, I blinked up at him in some surprise, and perhaps just a little resentment, for I was myself regular in my habits.

“Very sorry to knock you up, Watson,” said he, “but it’s the common lot this morning. Mrs. Hudson has been knocked up, she retorted upon me, and I on you.”

“What is it, then--a fire?”

“No; a client. It seems that a young lady has arrived in a considerable state of excitement, who insists upon seeing me. She is waiting now in the sitting-room. Now, when young ladies wander about the metropolis at this hour of the morning, and knock sleepy people up out of their beds, I presume that it is something very pressing which they have to communicate. Should it prove to be an interesting case, you would, I am sure, wish to follow it from the outset. I thought, at any rate, that I should call you and give you the chance.”

“My dear fellow, I would not miss it for anything.”

I had no keener pleasure than in following Holmes in his professional investigations, and in admiring the rapid deductions, as swift as intuitions, and yet always founded on a logical basis with which he unravelled the problems which were submitted to him. I rapidly threw on my clothes and was ready in a few minutes to accompany my friend down to the sitting-room. A lady dressed in black and heavily veiled, who had been sitting in the window, rose as we entered.

“Good-morning, madam,” said Holmes cheerily. “My name is Sherlock Holmes. This is my intimate friend and associate, Dr. Watson, before whom you can speak as freely as before myself. Ha! I am glad to see that Mrs. Hudson has had the good sense to light the fire. Pray draw up to

it, and I shall order you a cup of hot coffee, for I observe that you are shivering.”

“It is not cold which makes me shiver,” said the woman in a low voice, changing her seat as requested.

“What, then?”

“It is fear, Mr. Holmes. It is terror.” She raised her veil as she spoke, and we could see that she was indeed in a pitiable state of agitation, her face all drawn and grey, with restless frightened eyes, like those of some hunted animal. Her features and figure were those of a woman of thirty, but her hair was shot with premature grey, and her expression was weary and haggard. Sherlock Holmes ran her over with one of his quick, all-comprehensive glances.

“You must not fear,” said he soothingly, bending forward and patting her forearm. “We shall soon set matters right, I have no doubt. You have come in by train this morning, I see.”

“You know me, then?”

“No, but I observe the second half of a return ticket in the palm of your left glove. You must have started early, and yet you had a good drive in a dog-cart, along heavy roads, before you reached the station.”

The lady gave a violent start and stared in bewilderment at my companion.

“There is no mystery, my dear madam,” said he, smiling. “The left arm of your jacket is spattered with mud in no less than seven places. The marks are perfectly fresh. There is no vehicle save a dog-cart which throws up mud in that way, and then only when you sit on the left-hand side of the driver.”

“Whatever your reasons may be, you are perfectly correct,” said she. “I started from home before six, reached

This is trademark Holmes - seeing every detail, and being able to deduce a much bigger story on the basis of it.

Leatherhead at twenty past, and came in by the first train to Waterloo. Sir, I can stand this strain no longer; I shall go mad if it continues. I have no one to turn to--none, save only one, who cares for me, and he, poor fellow, can be of little aid. I have heard of you, Mr. Holmes; I have heard of you from Mrs. Farintosh, whom you helped in the hour of her sore need. It was from her that I had your address. Oh, sir, do you not think that you could help me, too, and at least throw a little light through the dense darkness which surrounds me? At present it is out of my power to reward you for your services, but in a month or six weeks I shall be married, with the control of my own income, and then at least you shall not find me ungrateful."

Holmes turned to his desk and, unlocking it, drew out a small case-book, which he consulted.

"Farintosh," said he. "Ah yes, I recall the case; it was concerned with an opal tiara. I think it was before your time, Watson. I can only say, madam, that I shall be happy to devote the same care to your case as I did to that of your friend. As to reward, my profession is its own reward; but you are at liberty to defray whatever expenses I may be put to, at the time which suits you best. And now I beg that you will lay before us everything that may help us in forming an opinion upon the matter."

"Alas!" replied our visitor, "the very horror of my situation lies in the fact that my fears are so vague, and my suspicions depend so entirely upon small points, which might seem trivial to another, that even he to whom of all others I have a right to look for help and advice looks upon all that I tell him about it as the fancies of a nervous woman. He does not say so, but I can read it from his

soothing answers and averted eyes. But I have heard, Mr. Holmes, that you can see deeply into the manifold wickedness of the human heart. You may advise me how to walk amid the dangers which encompass me.”

“I am all attention, madam.”

“My name is Helen Stoner, and I am living with my stepfather, who is the last survivor of one of the oldest Saxon families in England, the Royslotts of Stoke Moran, on the western border of Surrey.”

Holmes nodded his head. “The name is familiar to me,” said he.

“The family was at one time among the richest in England, and the estates extended over the borders into Berkshire in the north, and Hampshire in the west. In the last century, however, four successive heirs were of a dissolute and wasteful disposition, and the family ruin was eventually completed by a gambler in the days of the Regency. Nothing was left save a few acres of ground, and the two-hundred-year-old house, which is itself crushed under a heavy mortgage. The last squire dragged out his existence there, living the horrible life of an aristocratic pauper; but his only son, my stepfather, seeing that he must adapt himself to the new conditions, obtained an advance from a relative, which enabled him to take a medical degree and went out to Calcutta, where, by his professional skill and his force of character, he established a large practice. In a fit of anger, however, caused by some robberies which had been perpetrated in the house, he beat his native butler to death and narrowly escaped a capital sentence. As it was, he suffered a long term of imprisonment and afterwards returned to England a morose and disappointed man.

“When Dr. Royslott was in India he married my moth-

er, Mrs. Stoner, the young widow of Major-General Stoner, of the Bengal Artillery. My sister Julia and I were twins, and we were only two years old at the time of my mother's re-marriage. She had a considerable sum of money--not less than 1000 pounds a year--and this she bequeathed to Dr. Roylott entirely while we resided with him, with a provision that a certain annual sum should be allowed to each of us in the event of our marriage. Shortly after our return to England my mother died--she was killed eight years ago in a railway accident near Crewe. Dr. Roylott then abandoned his attempts to establish himself in practice in London and took us to live with him in the old ancestral house at Stoke Moran. The money which my mother had left was enough for all our wants, and there seemed to be no obstacle to our happiness.

“But a terrible change came over our stepfather about this time. Instead of making friends and exchanging visits with our neighbours, who had at first been overjoyed to see a Roylott of Stoke Moran back in the old family seat, he shut himself up in his house and seldom came out save to indulge in ferocious quarrels with whoever might cross his path. Violence of temper approaching to mania has been hereditary in the men of the family, and in my stepfather's case it had, I believe, been intensified by his long residence in the tropics. A series of disgraceful brawls took place, two of which ended in the police-court, until at last he became the terror of the village, and the folks would fly at his approach, for he is a man of immense strength, and absolutely uncontrollable in his anger.

“Last week he hurled the local blacksmith over a parapet into a stream, and it was only by paying over all the money which I could gather together that I was able to

avert another public exposure. He had no friends at all save the wandering gipsies, and he would give these vagabonds leave to encamp upon the few acres of bramble-covered land which represent the family estate, and would accept in return the hospitality of their tents, wandering away with them sometimes for weeks on end. He has a passion also for Indian animals, which are sent over to him by a correspondent, and he has at this moment a cheetah and a baboon, which wander freely over his grounds and are feared by the villagers almost as much as their master.

“You can imagine from what I say that my poor sister Julia and I had no great pleasure in our lives. No servant would stay with us, and for a long time we did all the work of the house. She was but thirty at the time of her death, and yet her hair had already begun to whiten, even as mine has.”

“Your sister is dead, then?”

“She died just two years ago, and it is of her death that I wish to speak to you. You can understand that, living the life which I have described, we were little likely to see anyone of our own age and position. We had, however, an aunt, my mother’s maiden sister, Miss Honoria Westphail, who lives near Harrow, and we were occasionally allowed to pay short visits at this lady’s house. Julia went there at Christmas two years ago, and met there a half-pay major of marines, to whom she became engaged. My stepfather learned of the engagement when my sister returned and offered no objection to the marriage; but within a fortnight of the day which had been fixed for the wedding, the terrible event occurred which has deprived me of my only companion.”

Sherlock Holmes had been leaning back in his chair