
Opening Extract from...

The Fifth Heart

Written by Dan Simmons

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PART 1

CHAPTER 1

In the rainy March of 1893, for reasons that no one understands (primarily because no one besides us is aware of this story), the London-based American author Henry James decided to spend his April 15 birthday in Paris and there, on or before his birthday, commit suicide by throwing himself into the Seine at night.

I can tell you that James was deeply depressed that spring, but I can't tell you for a certainty *why* he was so depressed. Of course there had been the death in England, from breast cancer, of his sister Alice a year earlier on March 6, 1892, but Alice had been a professional invalid for decades and had welcomed the diagnosis of cancer. Death, she'd told her brother Henry, was the event which she'd always been anticipating with the greatest enthusiasm. At least in his letters to family and friends, Henry had seemed to support her in her eagerness for an ending, down to describing how lovely her corpse had looked.

Perhaps this unchronicled depression in James was augmented by the problem of his work not selling well over the immediately preceding years: his 1886 novels *The Bostonians* and *The Princess Casamassima,* both influenced by Alice's slow dying and her Boston-marriage relationship with Katharine Loring, had been a major sales disappointment for all concerned, both in America and England. So by 1890 James had turned his quest for riches toward writing for the theater. Although his first melodramatic stage offering, *The American,* had done only moderately well, and that only in the provinces rather than in London, he'd con-

vinced himself that the theater would turn out to be his ultimate pot of writer's gold. But already by early 1893, he was beginning to sense that this hope was both illusion and self-delusion. Just as Hollywood would beckon literary writers to their doom for more than a century to come, the English theater in the 1890's was sucking in men of letters who—like Henry James—really had no clue as to how to write a successful stage production for a popular audience.

Most biographers would understand this sudden, deep depression better if it were early spring of 1895 rather than March of 1893, since his first major London play, *Guy Domville,* two years hence will see him jeered and booed when he foolishly will step onto the stage to take his author's bow. Most of the paying spectators in the hall, as opposed to the many glittering ladies and gentlemen in attendance to whom James sent complimentary tickets, will have never read a novel by Henry James, most will not know he had written novels, and thus they will boo and jeer the play based on its merits alone. And *Guy Domville* will be a bad, bad play.

Even a year from now, after January of 1894 when his friend Constance Fenimore Woolson will throw herself to her death from a high window in Venice (possibly, some shall whisper, because Henry James had not come to stay near or with her in Venice as he'd promised), we know he will have to fight off a terrible depression tinged with real guilt.

By the end of 1909, the elderly James will fall into his deepest-depression yet—one so deep that his older (and dying from a heart condition) brother William will cross the Atlantic to literally hold Henry's hand in London. In those years, Henry James will be mourning the "disastrously low sales" and lack of profit from his 1906–1908 "New York Edition" of his works, an exhausting project to which he'd donated five years of his life rewriting the long novels and providing lengthy introductions to each piece.

But that final depression was sixteen years in our future in this March of 1893. We have no real clue as to why James was so terribly depressed that spring. Nor why he suddenly decided that suicide in Paris was his only answer.

One factor may have been the severe attack of the gout that James

had suffered that cold English winter of 1892–93, cutting down on his daily walks and causing him to put on more weight. Or it could have been the simple fact that his upcoming birthday in April was his 50th: a landmark that has brought depression to stronger men than the sensitive Henry James.

We'll never know.

But we do know that the reality of that depression—and his plan for self-annihilation by drowning in the Seine on or before his April 15 birthday—is where this story begins. So, in mid-March, 1893, Henry James (he'd dropped the "Jr." sometime after his father died in 1882) wrote from London to family and friends saying that he was "taking a short leave from the daily duties of composition to celebrate spring and my own mid-century anniversary in sunlit Paris before joining my brother William and his family in Florence later in April". James had no intention of ever going to Florence.

Carrying some of his sister Alice's purloined ashes in a snuffbox, James left his tidied-up apartments in De Vere Gardens, burned some letters from Miss Woolson and from a few younger male friends, took the boat-train to Cherbourg, and arrived in the City of Light the next evening on a day darker and wetter and colder than any he'd suffered that March in chilly London.

There he settled into the Westminster Hotel on the Rue de la Paix where he'd once stayed for a month when he was writing several stories in Paris, including a favorite of his, "The Pupil". But this time, "settled in" was not the correct phrase. He had no intention of spending the weeks there until his birthday. Besides, the fares at the Westminster were too extravagant for his current budget. He did not even unpack his steamer trunk. He did not plan to spend a second night there. Or, he decided on a whim, a second full night anywhere on this earth.

After a wet, cold day walking in the Jardin de Tuileries and a dismal, lonely dinner—given his resolve, he'd made no effort to contact any of his Parisian friends or other acquaintances who might have been passing through Paris—Henry James drank a final glass of wine, tugged on his woolen overcoat, made sure that the sealed snuffbox was still in his

pocket, and, with the bronze tip of his still-folded umbrella tapping on wet cobblestones, set off in the drizzle and darkness for his chosen final destination near Pont Neuf. Even at his portly gentleman's gait it was less than a ten-minute walk.

The ultimate man of the written word left no note behind.

CHAPTER 2

The place James had chosen from which to leave this life was on the north side of the river less than sixty yards from the broad, well-lighted bridge of le Pont Neuf, but it was dark there below the bridge, even darker on the promontory along the lowest level of walkways where the black, cold waters of the Seine swirled around the base of moss-darkened stone. Even in the daylight, this promontory was little used. Prostitutes, James knew, sometimes frequented the place at night, but not on a cold and drizzling March night such as this; tonight they stayed close to their hotels in Pigalle or stalked their furtive patrons in the narrow lanes on either side of the glowing Boulevard Saint Germain.

By the time James had umbrella-clacked his way to the narrow esplanade promontory that he'd picked out in the daylight—it had been just as he'd remembered it from earlier trips to Paris—he could no longer see to find his way. Distant street lamps across the Seine were ornamented with ironic halos by the rain. The barges and water taxis were few this night. James found his way down the final steps to the esplanade more by feel than by sight and tapped his way slowly beyond them like a blind man with a cane. Somewhere seemingly very far above, the usually distinctly pronounced sounds of carriage wheels and horses' hooves were muffled and made more distant, almost less real, by the worsening rain and deeply puddled thoroughfares.

James could sense and hear and smell the river's imminence rather than see it in the near-total darkness. Only the rather shocking empti-

ness of the point of his umbrella suddenly finding a void where pavement should be ahead brought him to a stop at the edge of what he knew to be the short, curved promontory. There were no steps going down to the river here, he knew: only a six- or seven-foot drop to the swirling black waters. The Seine ran fast and deep and wicked here. Now he could take one step forward into emptiness and it would be done.

James removed the small ivory snuffbox from his inner pocket and stood running his fingers across it for a moment. The motion made him remember a squib in *The Times* the previous year that claimed that the Eskimaux of the Arctic made no artwork to view, but shaped certain smooth stones to enjoy by touch during their many months of northern night. This thought made James smile. He felt he had spent enough of his own months in the northern night.

When he'd purloined a few pinches of his sister's ashes the previous year—Katharine Loring waiting just outside the door at the crematorium where she'd come to claim the urn she would take back to Cambridge and the Jameses' corner of the cemetery there—it had been with the sincere plan of spreading them at the place his younger sister had been most happy. But as the months passed, James had realized the impossibility of that idiot's mission. *Where?* He remembered her brittle happiness when they were both much younger and had traveled in Switzerland with their Aunt Kate, a lady as literal as Hamlet's by-the-card Grave Digger. Alice's already pronounced penchant for hysterical illnesses had receded somewhat during those weeks free from her larger family and American home—and his first thought for his fiftieth birthday was to travel to Geneva and spread her ashes where he and she had laughed and matched wits, with poor Aunt Kate understanding none of their ironic wordplay, happily teasing each other and Aunt Kate as they walked the formal gardens and lakeside promenades.

But, in the end, Geneva did not feel right to James. Alice had been play-acting her "recovery" from her destined life of invalidism during that trip, just as he had been play-acting his collusion with her brittle high spirits.

The point of land near Newport, then, where she'd built her little house and lived in apparent health and happiness for a year or so.

No. That had been her early days with Miss Loring and, James felt more grimly in every month that had passed since Alice's death, Miss Katharine P. Loring had had enough time and way with his sister. Not Newport.

So in the end he could think of no place to spread these few pitiful ashes where Alice had truly been happy. Perhaps she had glimpsed happiness, never really seized it, only during those months or years in Newport and then Cambridge, before what she called that "terrible summer" when her oldest brother William and Alice Gibbens were married on July 10, 1878. For years her brother William, her father, her brother Harry, brothers Bob and Wilkie, and an endless succession of visitors to their homes had kept up the joke that William would marry *her*—Alice James. Alice had always acted irritated at the running joke, but now—after her years of self-imposed invalidism and death—Henry James realized that she'd begun to believe in that marriage to William and had been all but destroyed when he married someone else. And someone else named, with cruel irony, Alice.

As she'd once put it to Henry James, that summer of William's marriage had been when she "went down to the deep sea, and the dark waves clouded over her."

So now, this night, this final night, James decided that he would merely hold tight to the snuffbox with its remnants of Alice's tentative existence as he stepped forward and fell into the black water and oblivion. To do this, he knew, he would have to shut his author's imagination down: no wondering in the second it will take to step forward as to whether the water will be freezing cold or whether, as the filthy water of the Seine began to fill his lungs, his atavistic urge for survival would cause him to thrash around, try to swim to the unclimbable mossy stone of the promontory.

No, he had to think of nothing but leaving his pain behind. Empty his mind of everything—always the hardest thing he'd ever tried to do.

James moved one foot forward, beyond the edge.

And suddenly realized that a dark shape he'd taken for a post was really the outline of a man standing not two feet from him. Seeing the dim outline of the soft hat pulled low and the silent figure's aquiline pro-

file half-hidden by the turned-up collar of a traveler's cape-coat, James could now hear the man's soft breathing.

* * *

With a stifled gasp, James took two clumsy steps backward and to the side.

"Pardonnez-moi, Monsieur. Je ne t'ai pas vu là-bas," he managed to say. It was the truth. He *hadn't* seen the man standing there.

"You're English," said the tall form. The man's English had a Scandinavian accent. Swedish? Norwegian? James was not sure which.

"Yes." James turned to go back up the steps and away from this spot.

At that moment a rare—for the season—Bateaux Mouches, part water taxi steamer, part tour-boat—passed by, and by the sudden light from the boat's starboard lanterns, James could clearly see the tall man's face.

"Mr. Holmes," he said almost involuntarily. In his surprise he stepped backward toward the river, his left heel went over the edge, and he would have ended up in the water after all if the tall man's right arm hadn't shot out with lightning speed. Long fingers grasped James's coat front in an amazingly firm grip and with one jerk the man pulled Henry James back onto the promontory.

Back to his life.

"What name did you just call me by?" asked the man, still tightly gripping James's coat front. The Scandinavian accent was gone now. The voice was distinctly upper-class British and nothing else.

"I am sorry," stammered James. "I must have been mistaken. I apologize for intruding upon your solitude here." At that second, Henry James not only knew the identity of the tall man—despite blacker hair than when he'd met him four years earlier, fuller hair somehow, now raised to odd spikes rather than slicked back, and a thick mustache that had been lacking four years ago, combined with a nose slightly altered with actor's putty or somesuch—but also knew that the man had been on the verge of throwing himself into the Seine when James had interrupted him with his arrival in the darkness announced by the tap-tap-tap of his ferule.

Henry James felt the fool at that moment, but he was a man on whom nothing was ever lost. Once he'd seen a face and learned its name, he never forgot.

He tried to move away, but the powerful fingers still gripped the front of his coat.

"What name did you call me by?" demanded the man again. His tone was as chill as iron in winter.

"I thought you were a man I'd met named Sherlock Holmes," gasped James, wanting only to get away, wanting only to be back in his bed in the comfortable hotel on the Rue de la Paix.

"Where did we meet?" demanded the man. "Who are you?"

James answered only the second part. "My name is Henry James." In his sudden panic, he'd almost added the long-abandoned "Jr."

"James," said Mr. Sherlock Holmes. "The younger brother of the great psychologist William James. You are the American scribbler who lives in London much of the time."

Even in his intense discomfort of being held and touched by another man, James felt an even stronger resentment at being identified as being the younger brother of the "great" William James. His older brother had not even been known, outside of small, tight Harvard circles, until he'd published his *The Principles of Psychology* three years earlier in 1890. The book, for reasons somewhat lost on Henry, had catapulted William to international fame among intellectuals and other students of the human mind.

"Please be so kind as to release me at once," said James in as stern a tone as he could muster. His outrage at being handled made him forget that Holmes—he was certain it was Sherlock Holmes—had just saved his life. Or perhaps that salvation was another mark against this hawk-nosed Englishman.

"Tell me when we met and I shall," said Holmes, still gripping the front of James's overcoat. "My name is Jan Sigerson. I am a Norwegian explorer of some renown."

"A thousand apologies then, sir," said James, feeling absolutely no apology in his heart. "I am obviously mistaken. For a second here, in the darkness, I thought you to be a gentleman I met four years ago at a

tea-party benefit in Chelsea. The party was given by an American lady of my acquaintance, Mrs. T. P. O'Connor. I arrived with Lady Wolseley, you see, along with some other writers and artists of the stage—Mr. Aubrey Beardsley, Mr. Walter Besant . . . Pearl Craigie, Marie Corelli, Mr. Arthur Conan Doyle, Bernard Shaw, Genevieve Ward. During the tea, I was introduced to Mrs. O'Connor's house guest for the weekend, a certain Sherlock Holmes. I see now that there is . . . no real resemblance."

Holmes released him. "Yes, I remember now. I was there at Mrs. O'Connor's estate briefly while solving a series of country home jewel thefts. It was the servants, of course. It always is."

James straightened the front of his overcoat, arranged his cravat, firmly planted the tip of his umbrella, and resolved to leave Holmes's presence without another word.

Ascending the dark steps, he realized with a shock that Holmes was walking beside him.

"It's amazing, really," said the tall Englishman in the slight Yorkshire accent James had heard at Mrs. O'Connor's tea party in 1889. "I've used this Sigerson disguise for the past two years and passed close by—in daylight!—personages I've known for years, without their recognizing me. In New Delhi, in broad daylight in a sparsely populated square and for more than ten minutes, I stood next to Chief Inspector Singh, a man with whom I'd spent two months solving a delicate murder in Lahore, and the trained professional never glanced at me twice. Right here in Paris, I have passed by old English acquaintances and asked directions of my old friend Henri-August Lozé, the recently retired Prefect of Police for Paris with whom I'd worked on a dozen cases. With Lozé was the new Prefect de la Somme, Louis Lépine, with whom I have also had a close working relationship. Yet neither man recognized me. And yet you did. In the dark. In the rain. When you had nothing but self-murder on your mind."

"I *beg* your pardon," said James. He stopped out of sheer shock at Holmes's effrontery. They were on the street level now and the rain had subsided a bit. But the numerous street lamps there still held their halos.

"Your secret is safe with me, Mr. James," said Holmes. He was trying to light his pipe despite the damp. When the match finally flared, James

could see even more easily that this was the "consulting detective" whom he'd met at Mrs. O'Connor's tea party four years earlier. "You see," continued Holmes, speaking now between puffs on the pipe, "I was there for the same purpose, sir."

James could think of no reply to that. He turned on his heel and headed west along the sidewalk. Holmes caught up to him with two strides of his longer legs.

"We need to go somewhere for a late meal and wine, Mr. James."

"I prefer to be alone, Mr. Holmes. Mr. Sigerson. Whomever you are pretending to be this night."

"Yes, yes, but we need to talk," insisted Holmes. He did not seem angered or perturbed by being found out. Or frustrated that his own suicide-by-Seine had been interrupted by the writer's arrival. Only fascinated that James had seen through his disguise.

"We have absolutely nothing to discuss," snapped James, trying to walk more quickly but only making himself look foolish in a portly way as the tall Englishman easily kept pace.

"We could discuss why you were ending your life with your sister Alice's ashes in a snuffbox clenched so tightly in your right hand," said Holmes.

James came to a full stop. After a moment he managed, "You . . . can . . . not . . . know . . . such a . . . thing."

"But I do," said Holmes, still working with his pipe. "And if you join me for a late snack and some good wine, I shall tell you how I know and why I know you will never complete the grim task you assigned yourself tonight, Mr. James. And I know just the clean, well-lighted café where we can talk."

Holmes grasped James's left elbow and the two began walking arm-in-arm up the Avenue de l'Opéra. Henry James was too shocked and astonished—and curious—to resist.

CHAPTER 3

Despite Holmes's promise to lead them to a "well-lighted place," James expected a dimly lighted out-of-the-way café opening onto some back alley. Instead, Holmes had brought him to the Café de la Paix, very near James's hotel and at the intersection of Boulevard des Capucines and Place de l'Opéra in the 9th arrondissement.

The Café de la Paix was one of the largest, brightest, and most vividly decorated establishments in all of Paris, rivaled in its elaborate décor and number of mirrors only by Charles Garnier's Opéra directly across the plaza. The place had been built, James knew, in 1862 to serve guests at the nearby Grand-Hôtel de la Paix and had come into its full fame during the Expo Exhibition of '67. It had been one of the first of Paris's public buildings to be lighted by electricity, but as if the hundreds or thousands of electric bulbs were not enough, bright lanterns with focal prisms still threw beams of light onto the grand mirrors. Henry James had avoided the place over the decades, if for no other reason than it was a common saying in Paris that to dine in the Café de la Paix meant one would eventually run into friends and acquaintances. The place was that popular. And Henry James preferred to choose the times and places that he would "run into" old acquaintances or friends.

Holmes seemed undisturbed by the crowds, the roar of conversation, and scores of eager faces looking up as they entered. James listened as the faux-Norwegian explorer requested his "usual table" from the maître d'—in fluent and properly accented French—and they were led to a

small, round table somewhat away from the primary hustle and bustle of the buzzing establishment.

"You come here often enough to have a 'usual table'?" asked James when they were alone. Or as alone as they could be amidst such bustle and noise.

"I have dined here at least three times a week in the two months I've been in Paris," said Holmes. "I've seen dozens of acquaintances, former police partners in my detection business, and clients. None have looked twice at or through my Jan Sigerson disguise."

Before James could respond, the waiter appeared and Holmes had the effrontery to order quickly for the both of them. After designating a rather good champagne, and perhaps due to the late hour, he ordered a huge after-Opera assortment for two: *le lièvreen civet, pâtes crémeuses d'épeautre* accompanied by a *plateau de fromage affinés* and a concurrent platter of *la figue, l'abricot, le pruneau, en marmelade des fruits secs au thé Ceylan* and *biscuit spéculos,* concluding with *mousse légère chocolat.*

James had no appetite. His delicate stomach was upset by the shocks of the past hour. More than that, he did not care for hare—especially jugged hare with the heavy and grainy French wheat-sauce ladled on it—and this night he had no taste whatsoever for the fruit. And after indulging in it far too much when he was a small boy in France, he detested chocolate mousse.

He said nothing.

James was dying to know how Holmes—this cut-rate street-corner magus—"knew" that sister-Alice's ashes were in the snuffbox, but he would die rather than bring up the subject here in this public place. It was true, however, that between the din of chatting, laughing diners and the placement of their table, it would have been terribly hard for anyone to eavesdrop on them. But that was not the issue.

As they sipped the rather good champagne, Holmes said, "Did you read my obituary in *The Times* almost two years ago?"

"Friends brought it to my attention," said James.

"I read it. The paper was three weeks old—I was in Istanbul at the time—but I did get to read it. That and the later interview with poor Watson describing my death at Reichenbach Falls while struggling with the 'Napoleon of Crime', Professor James Moriarty."

Henry James would have preferred to stay silent, but he knew he was expected to fulfill his role as interlocutor.

"How *did* you survive that terrible fall, Mr. Holmes?"

Holmes laughed and brushed crumbs from his bristling black mustache. "There was no fall. There was no struggle. There was no 'Napoleon of Crime'."

"No Professor James Moriarty?" said James.

Holmes chuckled and dabbed at his lips and mustache with the white linen serviette. "None whatsoever, I am afraid. Invented from whole cloth for my own purposes . . . purposes of disappearance, in this event."

"But Watson has told *The Times* of London that this Professor Moriarty had authored a book—*The Dynamics of an Asteroid,*" persisted James.

"Also invented by me," said Holmes with a smug smile under the Sigerson mustache. "No such book exists. I cited it to Watson only so that he could later give the press—and his own inevitable publication of the events preceding Reichenbach Falls in his only recently released tale 'The Final Problem'—some . . . what do you authors call it? . . . verisimilitude. Yes, that's the word. Verisimilitude."

"But might not," said James, "after this detail has been mentioned in the various newspaper accounts of Moriarty and your demise, might not people attempt to find this *Dynamics of an Asteroid* book, even if just out of simple curiosity? If it does not exist, your entire Reichenbach Falls story must collapse."

Holmes laughed this away with a flick of his hand. "Oh, I stressed to Watson, who has in turn stressed to the press, that Moriarty's book was of the most unreadable and difficult advanced mathematics—I believe my exact words to Watson were 'it was a book which ascends to such rarefied heights of pure mathematics that it is said that there was no man in the scientific press capable of criticizing it'. *That* should give pause to the merely curious. I also remember telling Watson that so few copies of Moriarty's famous book—famous within mathematical circles only—were published that copies were extremely rare, perhaps not even findable today."

"So you deliberately lied to your friend about this . . . this 'Napoleon of Crime' . . . only so that Dr. Watson would repeat these total fabrications

to the press?" said James, hoping that the chill in his tone would get through to Holmes.

"Oh, yes," said Holmes with a slight smile. "Absolutely."

James sat in silence for a while. Finally he said, "But what if Dr. Watson were called to give sworn testimony . . . perhaps in an inquest into your demise?"

"Oh, any such inquest would have been completed long before this," said Holmes. "It's been almost two years since Reichenbach Falls, after all."

"But still . . ." began James.

"Watson would not have been perjuring himself in such testimony," interrupted Holmes, showing the slightest hint of irritation now, "because he sincerely believed that Moriarty was, as I explained to him in such detail, the Napoleon of Crime. And Watson believes with equal sincerity that I died with Moriarty at Reichenbach Falls in Switzerland."

James blinked several times despite his best effort to show no reaction to this. "You have no remorse about lying to your best friend? The press has reported that Dr. Watson's wife has died in the interval since your . . . disappearance. So presumably the poor man is now mourning the loss of both his wife and his best friend."

Holmes helped himself to more fruit. "I did more than lie, Mr. James. I led Watson on a merry chase—pursuing the mythical Moriarty, you understand—across England and Europe, ending at the fabled waterfall from whose waters neither my body, nor Professor Moriarty's, shall ever be recovered."

"That was beastly," said James.

"That was necessary," Holmes said with no anger or emphasis. "I had to disappear completely, you see. Disappear without a trace and in a manner that convinced the multitudes—or at least that small share of the multitudes that has shown interest in my modest adventures—that I was dead. Was there much mourning in London upon news of my demise?"

James blinked at this and was sure it was levity. Sure, that is, until he saw the serious expression on Sherlock Holmes's disguised face.

"Yes," he said at last. "Or so I hear."

Holmes waited. Finally he said, "Watson's telling of the Reichenbach

tale, his story called 'The Final Problem', appeared in *The Strand* only three months ago—December of 'ninety-two. But I'm curious about the reaction when the news stories appeared two years ago."

James resisted a sigh. "I don't read *The Strand,"* he said. "But I'm told that young men in London, both when the news of your death was first published and then again this winter when Dr. Watson's story appeared, started wearing black armbands."

It was true that James would never read the kind of cheap-romance fiction and casual science-fact and household gossip that appeared in *The Strand.* But his younger friends Edmund Gosse and Jonathan Sturges both did. And both had worn black mourning armbands for months in solemn memory of Holmes's presumed death. James had thought it all ridiculous.

Sherlock Holmes was smiling as he finished the last of his mousse.

Henry James, still terrified that the conversation would turn back to the contents of his snuffbox if Holmes were allowed to guide it, said, "But why carry out such a hoax, sir? Why betray your good friend Dr. Watson and thousands of your loyal readers with such a ruse if there were no grand criminal conspiracy—no Napoleon of Crime—pursuing you? What could be your motive? Sheer perversity?"

Holmes set his spoon down and stared directly at the writer. "I wish it had been something so simple, Mr. James. No, I decided that I had to fake my own death and disappear completely because of discovering through my own ratiocination . . . through the inductive and deductive processes by which I've become the most famous consulting detective in the world . . . a fact so shocking that it not only irrevocably changed my life but led me, as you found me tonight by le Pont Neuf, ready to end it."

"What single fact could possibly . . ." began Henry James and then closed his mouth. It would be the worst of manners and presumptuousness to ask.

Holmes smiled tightly. "I discovered, Mr. James," he said as he leaned closer, "that I was not a real person. I am . . . how would a literary person such as yourself put it? I am, the evidence has proven to me most conclusively, a literary construct. Some ink-stained scribbler's creation. A mere fictional character."