

The

Sir

Arthur

Annals

**My Brother
Who Would Be
Sherlock**

Book I

by
James Ray

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“I have taken to living by my wits.”

Sherlock Holmes –*The Musgrave Ritual.*

TC2, Gold Canyon, AZ

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My Brother Who Would be Sherlock, Book I

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Lost Ledger

Through a cloud of black, acrid cigar smoke, Sir Arthur announced that the Cincinnati Reds clinched a playoff berth even though it was only the first week of September and opined that at the pace they were playing, he reckoned they would easily win more than a hundred games this year.

“Maybe so,” I mused, “But they’ll never match up with the A’s in the World Series, no sir, not with the power of Reggie Jackson’s bat and his Mr. October mystique. He’s one player who can easily carry a team to victory.”

“Pshaw, without the services of Catfish Hunter they’ll never make it to the Series.” Catfish had found a loophole in his contract and when team owner Charley Finley failed to send half of Hunter’s \$100k salary to a North Carolina bank as payment on an annuity. Arbitrator Peter Seitz ruled that Hunter was a free agent and Catfish went on to sign a contract with the Yankees for the 1975 season after winning the Cy Young award with the A’s in 1974 with a record of 25-12. “And without Blue Moon Odom, Vida Blue can’t carry the A’s past the Red Sox, the probable winners of the American League East.”

“Even so, Gene Tenace and Joe Rudi can add pop to their lineup to complement Jackson’s home run power.”

“There’s no way they can match up with the Reds, supposing that they can somehow win the American League pennant. The Reds just have too much power with Bench, Perez and Foster and no weakness in hitting up and down the lineup.

Morgan, Rose, Foster and Griffey are all batting over .300.”

“You make a powerful case, Sir Arthur, but I just can’t rule the A’s out; not just yet, anyway. Besides that, the Red’s pitching is their weakness and can be exploited by the A’s.” Sir Arthur and I loved to spend hours and hours debating the merits of one baseball team over another; one hitter over another as well as the strength of pitching. In fact, we debated about *everything*.

We were once again ensconced on the backyard patio of the Ray homestead on the north end of Rayfield Acres smoking a Virginian—a Marsh Wheeling knockoff brand cigarillo we’d taken up after watching those spaghetti westerns featuring Clint Eastwood as the *Man with No-Name*. “Pass me over that jar of Uncle Henry’s mountain dew,” I requested. Sir Arthur duly complied. A year or so ago I had managed to escape the United States Marine Corps with an Honorable Discharge and I was cooling my heels back in the Blue Ridge Mountains of northwestern North Carolina pondering the direction my future. I managed to pick up an infrequent odd job here and there to keep me in spending money; other than that, I wasn’t too concerned with the situation. I amused myself by chronicling an occasional adventure when I happened to tag along with Sir Arthur when he was on the trail solving another mystery that came his way. The *Sir Arthur* of course, came from the author of the *Sherlock Holmes* stories, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle a moniker we tagged him with early on in life for his uncanny powers of deduction and ability to solve conundrums.

“It appears we’ve got company,” I observed gesturing toward the cloud of dust drifting our way along the long driveway that led up to our house. “Looks like Miss Margaret from the Dodge Place, reckon what’s on her mind?” I wondered aloud as we watched her get out of the car and walk toward us in an obvious agitated state.

“Arthur!” She exclaimed, pronouncing it as aw-thoor, “You’ve got to help me!”

“Why don’t you pull up a chair,” I said as we rose to greet her, “Take a long, deep breath and tell us what’s on your mind that has you all worked up. I declare, Miss Margaret, you’re going to have a heart attack if you don’t calm down.”

Miss Margaret sat down, took several long breaths and composed herself before beginning her tale of woe. Miss Margaret was a distant cousin of ours, related somehow through the tangled branches of our family tree. She worked down at the Dodge dealership as a bookkeeper, though in reality she was in fact an accountant—though to call herself an accountant meant that she would have to be paid more money and the whole county knew there was no way old man Duncan was going to part with one thin dime more than he absolutely had to.

“As you probably know, Arthur, I’ve been working at the Dodge place for over a year now ever since Mr. Arlen’s accountant retired and moved to Virginia after Mr. Arlen sold the business to old man Duncan. Now that Wilber’s rheumatoid arthritis has pretty near incapacitated him, our only source of income is what I can bring home from the Dodge place, and believe me, it ain’t much. I mention that because if we weren’t in such dire

straits, there's no way, no sir, there's no way at all that I'd continue to work for that miserly old man Duncan. No sir, not at all. But I'm trapped now and you know how hard it is to get a job now a days, especially someone of my age. Once Wilber's disability kicks in, that will take some of the strain off of our finances. Until then, we've got to be all mighty careful on how we spend our money. I don't want to bore you with all my personal problems..."

"That's good, Miss Margaret, so what has brought you up here in such a state of vexation?" I asked.

"I'm getting to that Jimmy, just hold your horses. When I took over the bookkeeping for old man Duncan, I don't mind telling you that the books were in a colossal mess. I don't care if Mr. Anderson calls himself an accountant or not—a certified public accountant mind you—he sure didn't know how to keep good books. It took me over a month to figure out what was what and clean up the bookkeeping mess he left behind. When the corporate folks from Detroit came in to do their semiannual audit, we faired very poorly. So poorly as a matter of fact, that they threatened old man Duncan that if we didn't get the books cleaned up they were going to pull our dealership license and demanded that we get our books in order. You can imagine the grief I caught from old man Duncan after that. Well sir, I cleaned up those books good and the next time they came into town we passed their audit with flying colors. Yes sir, that was three months ago. Do you think Mr. Duncan would have shown a little appreciation? No, sir, not at all. Well Arthur, in the course of cleaning up the books and preparing for the dealership audit, that's when I came across the *ledger*."

“The ledger, Miss Margaret?”

“Yes sir, Arthur, I came across THE ledger. As part of the sales agreement when Mr. Arlen sold the dealership to old man Duncan, he is supposed to receive an eight percent royalty for any used car that was sold by the dealership; he was to receive that royalty for two years: which brings us to the ledger. Old man Duncan has been keeping two sets of books. He has been recording a lot of used car sales in the ledger but not through the regular accounting and that way they don't show up on the profit and loss statement. All that is recorded in the ledger is the transfer of cars from one owner to another with no dollar amount so that we can keep track of where the cars came from and where they went. It's plain to see that by keeping two separate books he avoids paying Mr. Arlen the royalty on the sale, or in these cases, the trade of used cars.”

“Not really very clever, is it?” I observed.

“No sir, it's not. When I brought this up to old man Duncan's attention, he gave me a long song and dance about keeping track of used car trades and how there wasn't any money that changed hands and so forth. Then he had the unmitigated gall to foist the responsibility of recording those auto trades in the ledger on me. I declare! Well sir, like I said earlier, I needed the job—it pays me twenty cents more an hour than when I worked at the cheese factory—and I didn't want to rock the boat so I went along with old man Duncan's convoluted bookkeeping. What else could I do?”

“Surely, Miss Margaret, that is not the reason for your visit, not after all these months?” Sir Arthur probed.

“No sir, Arthur, you’re absolutely correct. This morning old man Duncan drove down to Winston Salem with his nephew, Harlan. There is a used car auction down there on the third Thursday of every month and he usually goes down there and buys a car or even sometimes more than one car depending on the inventory and the condition of the cars—everybody knows Mr. Duncan has a keen eye when it comes to evaluating cars. While he was gone, Billy Joe made a deal with young Colby on that orange 1970 Plymouth Roadrunner that old man Duncan has been trying to get rid of for months now. I went to record the trade in Mr. Duncan’s ledger and much to my horror discovered that the ledger was missing. Gone! Imagine my shock! I thoroughly searched my desk, not only the drawer where I usually keep the ledger locked up in but all through the desk. Then I searched through the filing cabinets without any luck. I remember hearing about how you are able to figure things like this out and solve mysteries, so I locked up my office and rushed over here as fast as I could. I’m hoping and praying that you can help me locate the ledger before old man Duncan gets back from Winston Salem this evening and finds out that the ledger is missing. Oh Lordy Arthur, I sure hope you can help me through this and locate old man Duncan’s ledger, cause if he gets back and finds out that the ledger is gone, there is no telling what he’s going to do. I’ll surely lose my job and then what are Wilber and I going to do?”

“I see Miss Margaret, it does appear that you’ve got yourself into a pickle,” I commented—needlessly, I might add when I saw new tears tracing down her cheeks.

“Miss Margaret, let’s start from the beginning. When you left yesterday evening you said that you locked the ledger in one of your desk drawers and you’re absolutely sure that it was locked up when you left yesterday evening?”

“That’s right, Arthur.”

“Does anyone else have a key to your office?”

“Only Mr. Duncan.”

“I see. And am I to presume that you and Mr. Duncan are the only ones who have keys to your desk drawers and filing cabinet?”

“That’s right.”

“Is it customary for you to be the last person to leave the dealership?”

“Yes sir, Arthur, I am always the last person to leave the Dodge place and I’m the one who locks up.”

“So you saw the ledger yesterday afternoon but this morning when you went to record the automobile trade the ledger was missing; and that’s the first time you noticed that the ledger was missing?”

“Yes sir.”

“When you were in your office and you were going to record the automobile trade, was anybody else in the office with you?”

“No sir. After Billy Joe made the deal with Colby and left me with the paperwork, he went down to the diner to get a cup of coffee—and brag about his latest car deal, I suppose. He likes to brag about how good of a horse trader he is.”

“Was there any time this morning when you weren’t in your office?”

“No sir, I was in my office all morning. Well, there was a time around nine-thirty that I had to use the lady’s room.”

“So other than that, you were in your office all morning, is that correct?”

“Yes sir.”

My, oh my, Miss Margaret, you do seem to have a situation on your hands. I can’t promise you anything, but how about if James here and I go down to the dealership and have a look-see? Would that be all right with you?”

“Oh, thank you, Arthur. Thank you so much. I knew you could figure it out and help me find Mr. Duncan’s ledger.”

“Don’t get your hopes up too high, Miss Margaret, we haven’t found the ledger yet.” I interjected.

“Oh, but I know you *will*,” Miss Margaret assured us as she got up and headed for her car. “Thank you so much, Arthur. I need to get back to the Dodge dealership.”

As Miss Margaret drove away, Sir Arthur turned and inquired of me, “So what do you make of Miss Margaret’s little situation, James?”

“There surely is a dearth of clues as far as I can see from my vantage point. Who would profit from stealing the ledger, assuming that the ledger was indeed stolen?”

“If the contents of the ledger were to get back to Mr. Arlen, he certainly wouldn’t be a happy camper.”

“What if the ledger simply got misplaced?”

“That too is a possibility. With any luck at all it’s still in the dealership somewhere. No sense sitting around jawing about it, come James, the game is afoot!” Having said that, Sir Arthur jumped up out of his lawn chair and raced to my ’72 Ford, blue F-150 pickup with me in pursuit. “You drive while I contemplate the situation.”

We got to the Dodge place in only a matter of minutes and fortunately there weren’t any customers about. It looked like Billy Joe was still at the diner which didn’t surprise me any given his reputation for socializing which probably accounted for him being such a good salesman. Sir Arthur spent a long while going through Miss Margaret’s office, desk, and filing cabinet and even went through the trash. He spent a lot of time examining the locks on the desk and announced that there was no sign of foul play and it didn’t look like any of the drawers had been forced open. Satisfied that the ledger was indeed missing, Sir Arthur asked Miss Margaret to wait here in her office while he went back to talk to the mechanics and auto parts manager.

When we got back to the service area, Sir Arthur talked to one and then the other mechanic making small talk about the cars they were working on and never once mentioned anything about the ledger. As we were walking over to the parts counter I asked him how come he didn’t mention the ledger.

“James, James, James. The last thing we need to do is betray a confidence and besides that, we don’t need to start any rumors or plant any seeds of discord. For Miss Margaret’s benefit we need to keep our inquiry as low key as possible.”

Well, of course, I thought. That wasn’t very astute of me.

At the parts counter Sir Arthur dinged the bell and a moment later Larry came over and asked if he could help us with anything.

“Yes sir, Larry. I see that you have a Keil Key duplicating machine over there on the bench and I was wondering if you could make a copy of our front door key. James, hand me over that front door key so that Larry can have a look at it.”

I silently passed over the house key to Sir Arthur who handed it over to Larry.

“Give me a few minutes and I’ll make you a copy,” Larry said as he went back to the bench and started working on duplicating our key.

“How long have you been working here, Larry?” Sir Arthur asked making conversation.

“Going on eight years now.”

“Mr. Duncan treating you well?”

At that question Larry glanced up and gave us a dirty look. “You mean old man Duncan? He’s got to be the biggest tight wad in the county. I haven’t had a raise since Mr. Arlen sold him the business.”

“I suppose he’s nothing like Mr. Arlen,” I interjected.

“No sir, nothing at all.”

“Do you ever see Mr. Arlen now that he’s out of the car business?”

“I heard tell he’s moved up to Marion, Virginia where he does a little buying and selling of cars on the side. He’s pretty much retired now.”

“Is that a fact?”

“Well, here’s your key,” Larry announced as he walked back to the counter. “That’ll be sixty-nine cents plus tax.”

Sir Arthur paid Larry and we left the parts department and returned to Miss Margaret’s office.

“Have you found my ledger?”

“No ma’am, not yet.”

At that moment Billy Joe walked in the front door and came over to where we were talking. “How’s it going Art, Jimmy? Looking to trade for a car? Or a pickup?”

“We’re doing well, and yourself?”

“To be honest about it, it sure is a lot quieter without old man Duncan around,” Billy Joe joked. “I get all the walk-in business to myself when he’s gone—especially when that nephew of his is out of the dealership. Old man Duncan has been trying to teach the car business to Harlan but that boy just ain’t got it, if you know what I mean.”

While I stood there jawing with Billy Joe about the new line of Dodge pickups, Sir Arthur slipped away and I could see him out of the corner of my eye walking around inspecting the showroom. Suddenly without warning the fire alarm went off and the blare darn near busted my ear drums. Billy Joe and I rushed out the front door

followed by Miss Margaret. The two mechanics came running around the side of the building to the front parking lot followed closely by Larry from the parts department.

“What’s going on?” Everybody was yelling all at once. During the ensuing melee and chaos I noticed that Sir Arthur was nowhere in sight which led me to believe that he was the one who set off the fire alarm to clear the dealership. He must be pursuing a lead to the ledger I surmised to myself. With that in mind, I went around stirring up as much confusion as I could and kept everyone excited and talking. Within minutes the volunteer fire department truck arrived on the scene and the firefighters took over and restored order. Not seeing any smoke, Mr. Larkin, the fire chief, went inside and soon disabled the blaring fire alarm. After a quick inspection of the place he came outside and announced that it was safe to return inside—a false alarm. After that the fire department volunteers drove away we all went back inside.

Miss Margaret and I walked back to her office where Sir Arthur was sitting in one of her chairs smiling like a Cheshire cat who caught the canary. “Well Miss Margaret, it looks like we’ve had a little excitement this afternoon,” he said with a twinkle in his eye.

“I don’t know if I can stand much more of this excitement, with the missing ledger and now a false fire alarm I’m not sure my nerves can take much more of this kind of *stimulation*.”

“Now, now Miss Margaret, don’t you worry about a thing. James, why don’t you go fetch Miss Margaret a glass of water from the drinking

fountain.” I duly complied and when I returned handed her a cup of cool water.

Noticing for the first time the ledger on her desk, Miss Margaret let out a shriek and exclaimed, “Arthur, you found Mr. Duncan’s ledger!”

“Yes ma’am that I did. Now you don’t have anything to worry about.”

“How did you figure it out where it was?” she asked.

“When we went back to the parts department and I saw that key duplicating machine on Larry’s work bench that gave me the idea that just possibly Larry managed to duplicate either your keys or Mr. Duncan’s keys to the office and your desk. I didn’t want to raise any suspicions so I contrived a plan to cause a diversion which gave me a few minutes to go back and search around Larry’s office to see if he had the ledger and sure enough I found it in one of the drawers of his desk.”

“So you’re the one who set off the fire alarm?”

“Yes ma’am.”

“Why in the world would Larry pilfer Mr. Duncan’s ledger?”

“Larry must have figured out what Mr. Duncan was up to in keeping two sets of books and by getting possession of the ledger he would be able to either blackmail Mr. Duncan or go running to Mr. Arlen and maybe sell it to him. It’s no secret that Larry has a long standing, shall we say, gambling hobby.”

“Well, I’m going straight to Mr. Duncan and when I get done telling him what happened we’ll soon be free of that thieving Larry.”

“Now, now Miss Margaret, I wouldn’t do that if I were you. Now that Larry knows that we know I suspect that he wouldn’t dare try that again. Besides, everybody in the county knows that Larry is the best auto parts counter man around. Mr. Duncan would have a heck of a time replacing him. Just for security’s sake though, I would recommend that you get a locksmith to re-key your office door and desk locks—just to be on the safe side, mind you. And in the future you may want to better guard your keys.”

“You’re right; I won’t say a word to old man Duncan. And I’ll call the locksmith this afternoon to get that taken care off. How am I ever going to thank you enough for helping me out, Arthur?”

“No problem, Miss Margaret, don’t worry about it. We are most happy to be of service. Now if you’ll excuse me, James and I have some business to tend to and bid your leave.”

“That was pretty clever, Sir Arthur,” I remarked as we drove away. “I would never have thought to handle the situation that way which is probably why I am the chronicler and you’re the sleuth.”

“I begin to think that I make a mistake in explaining. *Omne ignotum pro magnifico*, you know, and my poor little reputation, such as it is, will suffer shipwreck if I am so candid,” Sir Arthur quoted Sherlock from *The Red Headed League*.

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