

My First Meeting with Sherlock Holmes

by TWEED ROOSEVELT

It began in the wilds of Scotland where I went from the United States as a young boy to live with my mother. My parents had been divorced and my mother had recently remarried a Scottish psychiatrist. To me he was intimidating indeed. He was a huge man, taciturn in the way of many Scots. He had a formidable temper, of which I was aware but from which I had never suffered. As well as being a physician, he was a writer of some note, having just published a successful book about his experiences doctoring the sailors of a Scandinavian whaling fleet. He decided to pursue a career as a writer and moved my mother to the Scottish Borders.

They lived in Tweedsmuir, Peebleshire, at the end of a deep glen, miles up a dirt track accessible only by Land Rover, fording the burn numerous times and passing through seven heavy wooden gates that had to be lifted open by hand. Down the burn the nearest house was three miles away. In every other direction it was many miles over high, almost impassible "hills" to the nearest habitations. Above the house up the glen was a great peat bog of many thousands of acres (reminiscent of Grimpen Mire). The house itself was a three-room shepherd's cottage of stone built at least 200 years ago and with neither electricity nor a telephone.

That first summer I arrived from boarding school, a lonely, confused little boy. As you might imagine, I viewed my stepfather with considerable suspicion. On his part, he had had little experience with children, and was, no doubt, uncertain as to how to deal with an apprehensive and standoffish new stepson. During the first two days he made some clumsy attempts to ingratiate himself with me, all failures that only served to confirm my suspicions.

On the second evening, as I was preparing to go to bed, my stepfather handed me a copy of a heavy book of well over 1000 pages. Its dense type and lack of pictures only confirmed my initial impression that this was yet another inappropriate offering by this strange and aloof man who clearly had no clue how to deal with young boys. Nonetheless, I dutifully carried it under my arm the 100 or so yards to the little hut my mother had had built to serve as my bedroom. I had no intention of reading it, but finding I had left behind my other book, and neither wishing to trudge back through the cold, dark night, nor having any desire to confront my stepfather again that evening, I resigned myself. Turning on the gaslight, I climbed into bed and started the first chapter—"Mr.

Sherlock Holmes.” That night I finished *Study in Scarlet* and began *Sign of the Four* before falling asleep as the Coleman lantern sputtered into darkness.

I was captivated, reading the Canon through twice that summer. I have re-read it many times since. I have before me now the very book I opened that night so many years ago. It is a little battered, and the spine is falling off, but I love it, for it reminds me of what my stepfather did for a lonely, confused little eleven-year-old boy to help him get through that difficult summer. I will always be grateful to him for giving me the tools to build a small romantic chamber in my heart where it will always be 1895.