

Hannes Binder was born in Zürich, Switzerland. He studied at the School of Arts and Crafts in Zürich, and later worked as a graphic designer and illustrator in Milan and Hamburg. He has created more than fifty works for children and adults, using a special scratchboard technique. Among his many awards, he has won the Swiss Kinder- und Jugendliteraturpreis. He lives in Zürich and Tessin.

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Danger is part of my business.—S. H.

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Based on a story by Arthur Conan Doyle

NorthSouth Books | 56 pages | ISBN 978-0-7358-4488-9 | April 2023 | Grades 2 – Up | List Price \$18.95

SHERLOCK HOLMES THE FINAL PROBLEM

Hannes Binder

Sherlock Holmes is as English as afternoon tea and soccer.

But this spectacular case takes the brilliant detective to the Reichenbach Waterfalls in Switzerland.

The raging falls are the scene of the final showdown between Holmes and his archenemy, Professor Moriarty. How far is Holmes prepared to go in order to rid the world of this criminal genius?

The Zürich-based illustrator Hannes Binder tells this exciting story with epic illustrations.



Binder | Doyle

SHERLOCK HOLMES — THE FINAL PROBLEM

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SHERLOCK HOLMES

THE FINAL PROBLEM

Based on a story by Arthur Conan Doyle
illustrated by Hannes Binder

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Because of my marriage, and after I had gone into private practice, Sherlock Holmes and I had begun to see less and less of each other. It was only on rare occasions that I met him face-to-face. And so I was all the more surprised when on the evening of the twenty-fourth of April he suddenly appeared in my consulting room. . . .

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Translated by David Henry Wilson



“As you can see, the matter is not some airy fantasy. On the contrary, it is of a very tangible nature,” he added when he saw me looking at his bleeding knuckles.

Then he asked me if I would be able to accompany him for a week to the Continent. It didn't matter where.

I was surprised that Holmes was allowing himself to take a holiday without any particular purpose. But he seemed nervous and tense. What followed made it clear that he had every reason to be so.

He looked even paler and thinner than usual.

“Would you mind if I closed your shutters?” he asked after a quick word of greeting.

“Are you afraid of something, Holmes?” I asked. “That doesn't seem like you at all.”

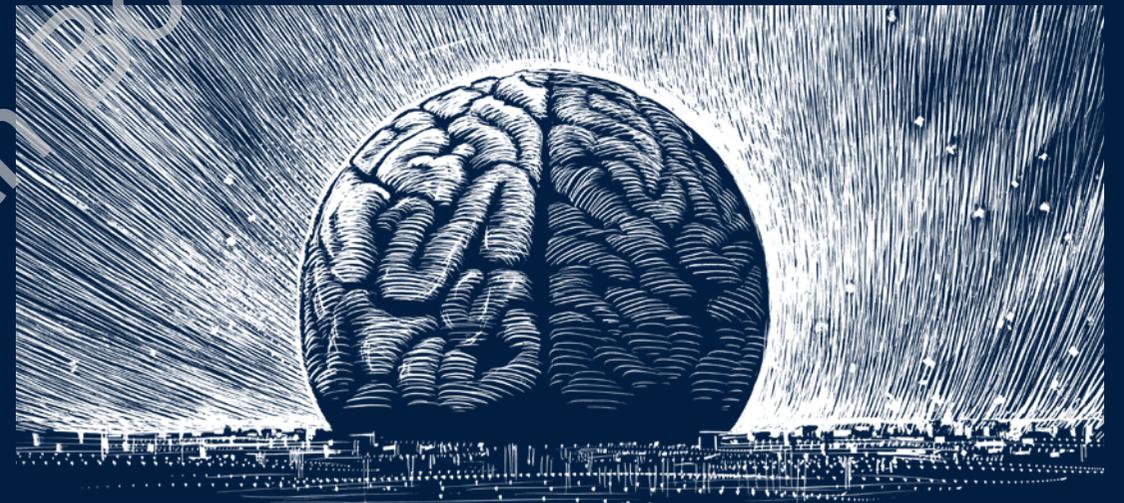
“Fear is definitely not one of my weaknesses, my dear Watson. But to ignore a direct danger would be nothing less than stupidity.”



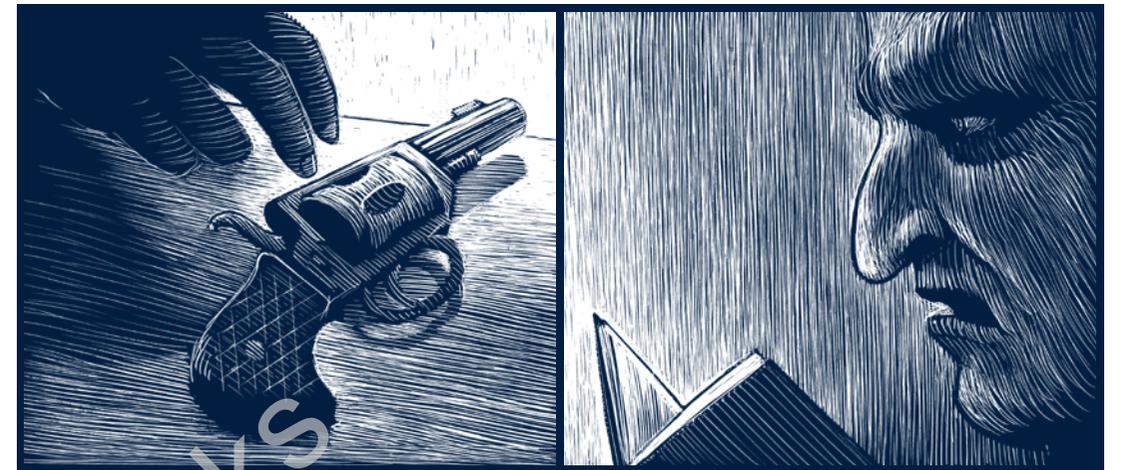
Holmes went on: “It’s all about a certain Professor Moriarty. You’ve probably never heard of him, although he lives among us here in London. Moriarty comes from a good family, and his gifts were apparent from very early on—especially in mathematics. But he abandoned a university career and instead devoted himself entirely to crime. He sits like a spider at the center of a giant web of intrigue, spreading wickedness wherever he can. And he’s a master of disguise. In brief, Moriarty is a genius of evil, the Napoleon of crime.”

Despite his revulsion at Moriarty’s evil deeds, it was also obvious how much Holmes admired the man’s intelligence. He evidently took pleasure at finding himself confronted by an enemy who was his intellectual equal. If he could outwit Moriarty, he felt he would be able to retire with complete peace of mind. He could not count on the police, because even if they did get to arrest anyone, it would only be some agent or accomplice from Moriarty’s vast network of criminals. The puppet master himself remained hidden behind an impenetrable wall of power and corruption.

“I’ve been after Moriarty for years now,” said Holmes. “For a long time it seemed impossible to get sufficient evidence to have him judged guilty at a trial. But then he made a mistake—just a tiny slip-up. That was enough for me to spin my own web around him.



“At last, after months of fierce conflict, the balance tipped in my favor. In three days’ time—that is to say next Monday—I shall finally have the chance to seal my victory. But my plans have been discovered. Because this morning, the door suddenly opened, and there stood Moriarty, directly in front of me.”



“He had come to give me an ultimatum. Either I ended my pursuit of him immediately or he would have no other choice than to eliminate me. My enterprise was hopeless because he could foresee every move I made. ‘Danger is part of my business,’ I replied coolly, and now he must excuse me but I had other more urgent matters to attend to. He shook his head. ‘What a shame,’ he said. ‘You can do nothing before Monday, and then you won’t be able to lay a finger on me. But if you do, then I will take you down with me.’ ‘If that is the price of your destruction,’ I said, ‘then I will gladly pay it.’ He snarled at me, turned his round-shouldered back on me, and left the room. A most unpleasant encounter. And my worst fears have already been confirmed.”

“Has he attacked you?” I asked.

“My dear Watson,” he replied. “Moriarty is not a man to leave things till tomorrow.”



“Around midday, I had some business to attend to in Oxford Street. As I turned a corner, a horse and carriage came racing at top speed toward me. In the nick of time I managed to jump out of the way. From that moment, I was on full alert. Luckily for me, because not long afterward, I was in Vere Street when a brick came down from the roof of a house and missed me by a fraction of an inch. I sent for the police, and they found a pile of bricks and tiles up there, in readiness for repairs to the roof. A coincidence, Watson? Later, I took a cab to visit my brother in Pall Mall, where I spent the rest of the afternoon. But then, on my way here, I was attacked by a thug with a cudgel. I managed to overpower him, though he bit my hand—you can see the tooth marks on my knuckles. Perhaps now you will understand why I wanted to close your shutters. Everything is now ready for Moriarty’s arrest, and so the best thing for me to do is go away for a few days.”

“My wife’s away visiting her parents, and there’s not much going on in the practice,” I said. “I’ll be happy to accompany you.”

“Good, Watson. Now listen carefully. It’s important that you stick rigidly to my instructions. . . .”

When we had finished our conversation, Holmes left through the back door and disappeared with an elegant vault over the garden wall.





The next morning, I followed Holmes's instructions to the letter. They consisted of a series of intricate maneuvers designed to keep Moriarty off my trail. To my relief, everything went smoothly, and I reached Victoria Station at the agreed time.



As planned, I had sent my luggage on in advance, and it was standing on the platform next to our reserved carriage. But there was no sign of Holmes. There were only a few minutes to go before departure time, and I anxiously looked around in the hope of seeing the slim figure of my friend. I looked in vain. When I finally got into my compartment, I was extremely annoyed to find that an old Italian priest had erroneously been given a seat in the same compartment. My Italian was even more fragmentary than his English, and so I simply couldn't make it clear to him that he had made a mistake.



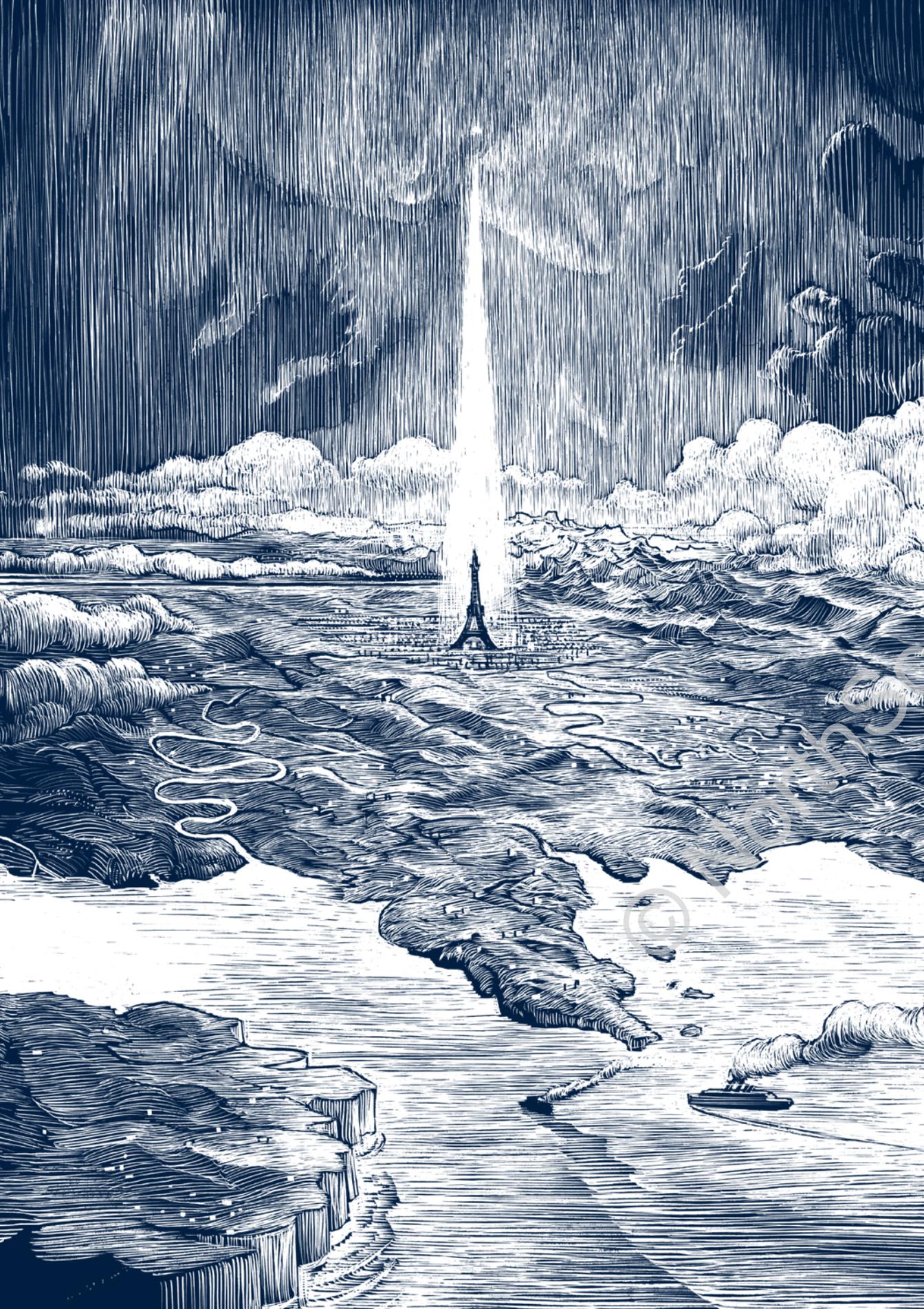
In the meantime, I was getting more and more worried about my friend. Suppose something had happened to him during the night? Now all the train doors were closed, and the signal for departure had sounded, and then suddenly these words came from the mouth of the old Italian priest: “My dear Watson, won't you even say good morning to me?”

What a disguise! But Holmes immediately gave me a warning sign. “I've every reason to believe that he's still hot on our heels. . . .”



“Ah, there he is—Moriarty himself!”

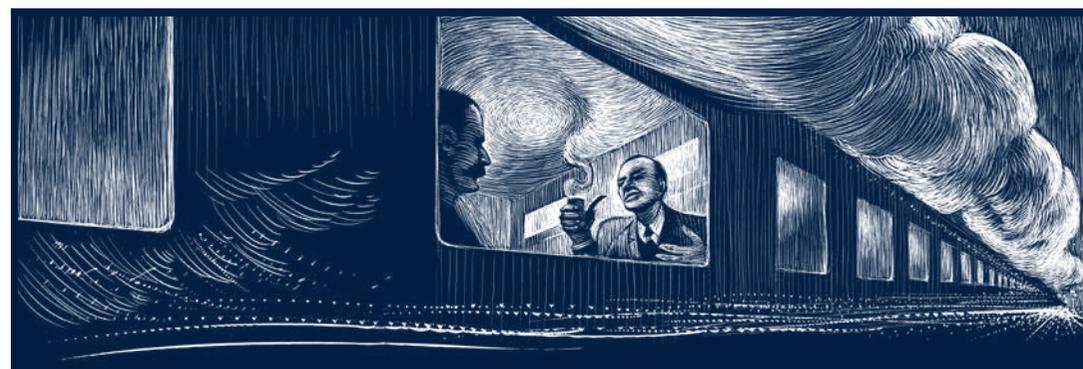
But Moriarty was too late to board the train. It was gathering speed, and in no time had left the station.

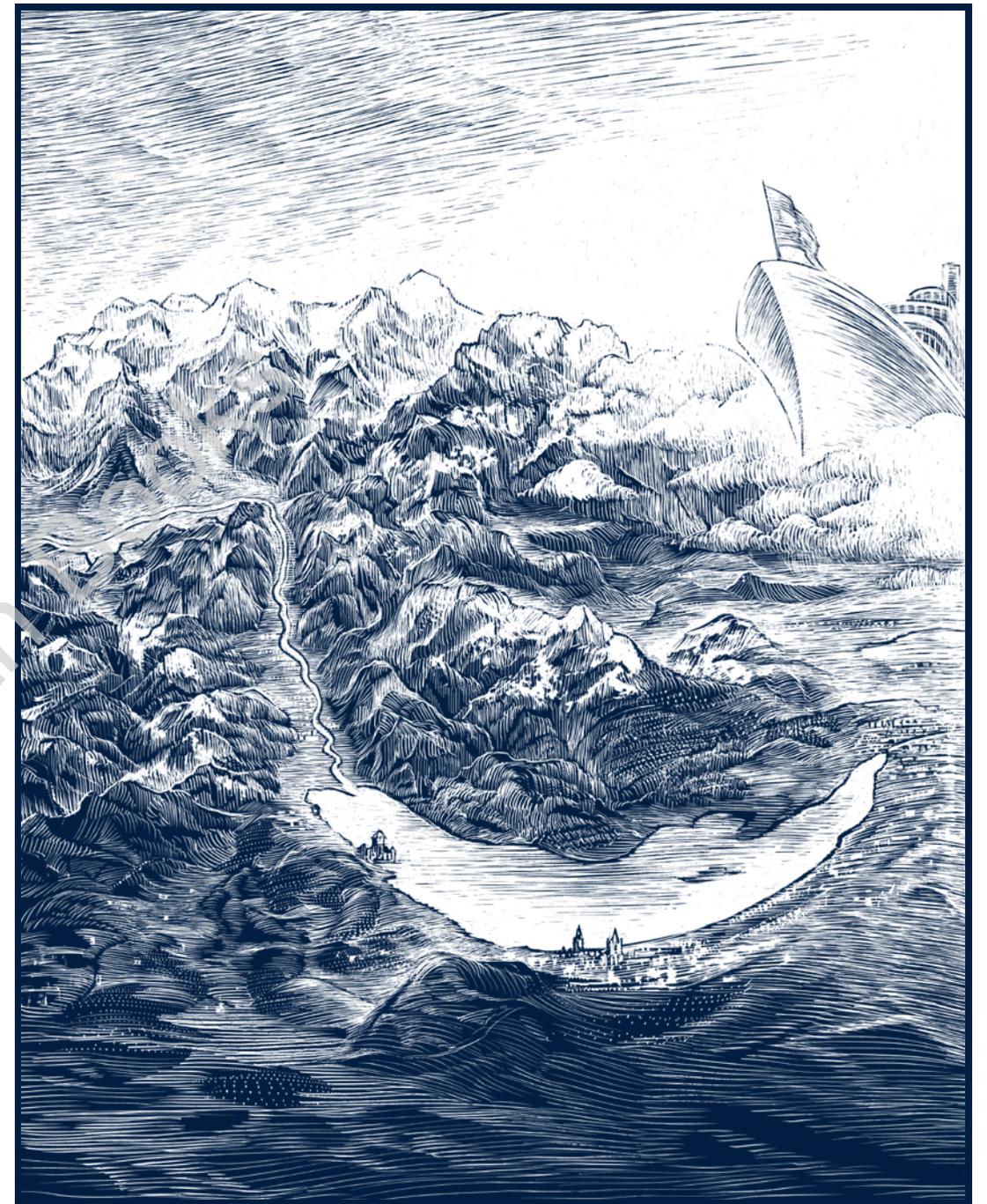
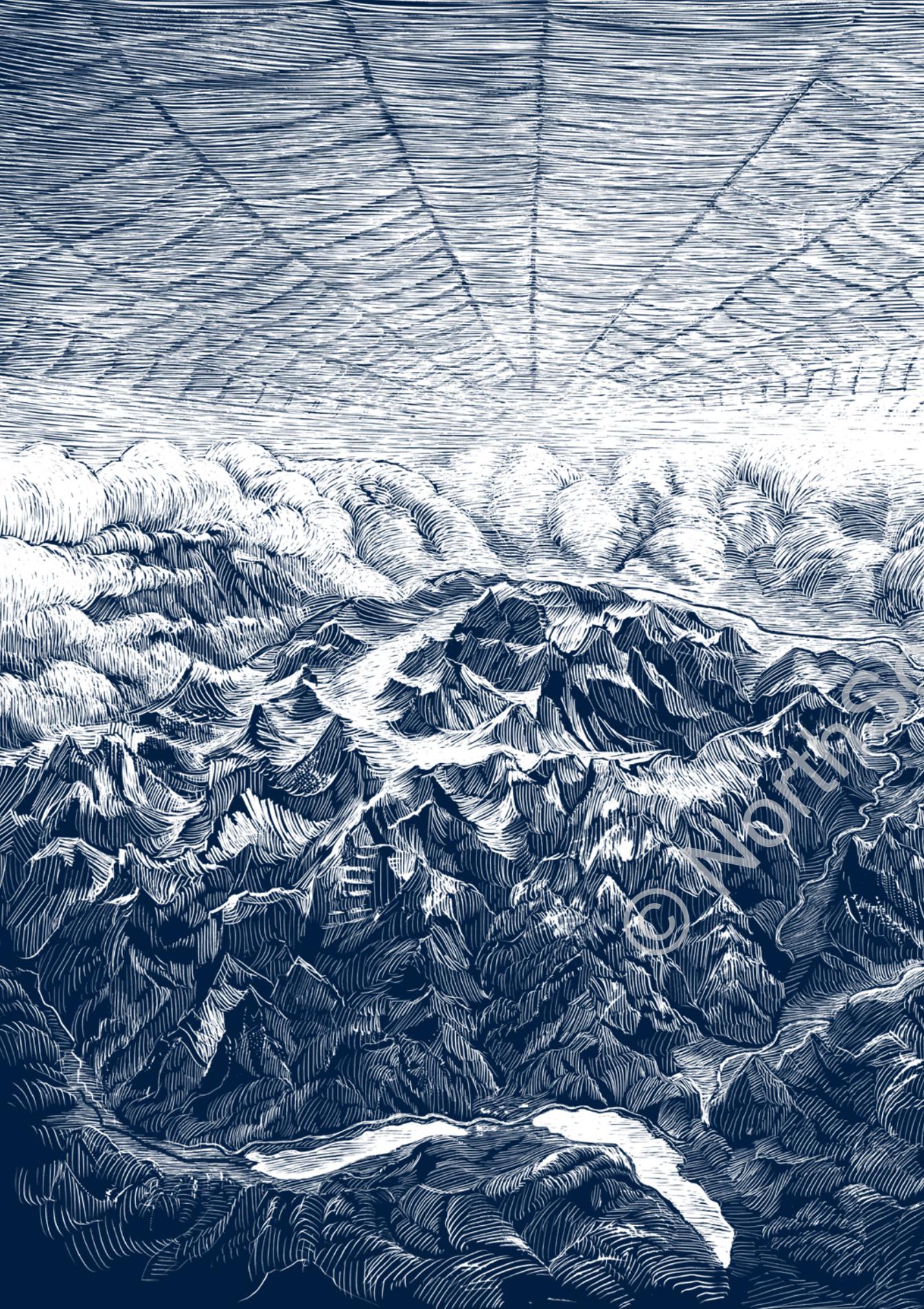


I thought that we had now freed ourselves from Moriarty, but Holmes was certain that he would continue to pursue us and insisted on planning the rest of the journey. As if he were playing some intricate game of chess, he analyzed every move that Moriarty might make. It was a finely balanced game of expectations and bluffs. Holmes thought that Moriarty would most probably assume we would go to Paris. And so we got out of the train in Canterbury, and from there went via Newhaven to Dieppe, then on to Luxemburg and finally to Basel.

On the Monday morning, Holmes telegraphed the police in London. That evening, a reply was waiting for us at the hotel. “Just as I thought,” growled Holmes, and threw the message into the fireplace. “Moriarty slipped through their fingers. They arrested everyone except him. But they’ve barred his way back to London, and so now he’s going to devote all his time and energy into getting his revenge on me. Watson, it would be better for you to go back home now. You are no longer safe in my company.”

I objected vehemently, and we discussed the problem for a good half hour as we sat in the hotel dining room. I refused to give way, and that same evening we took the train to Geneva.

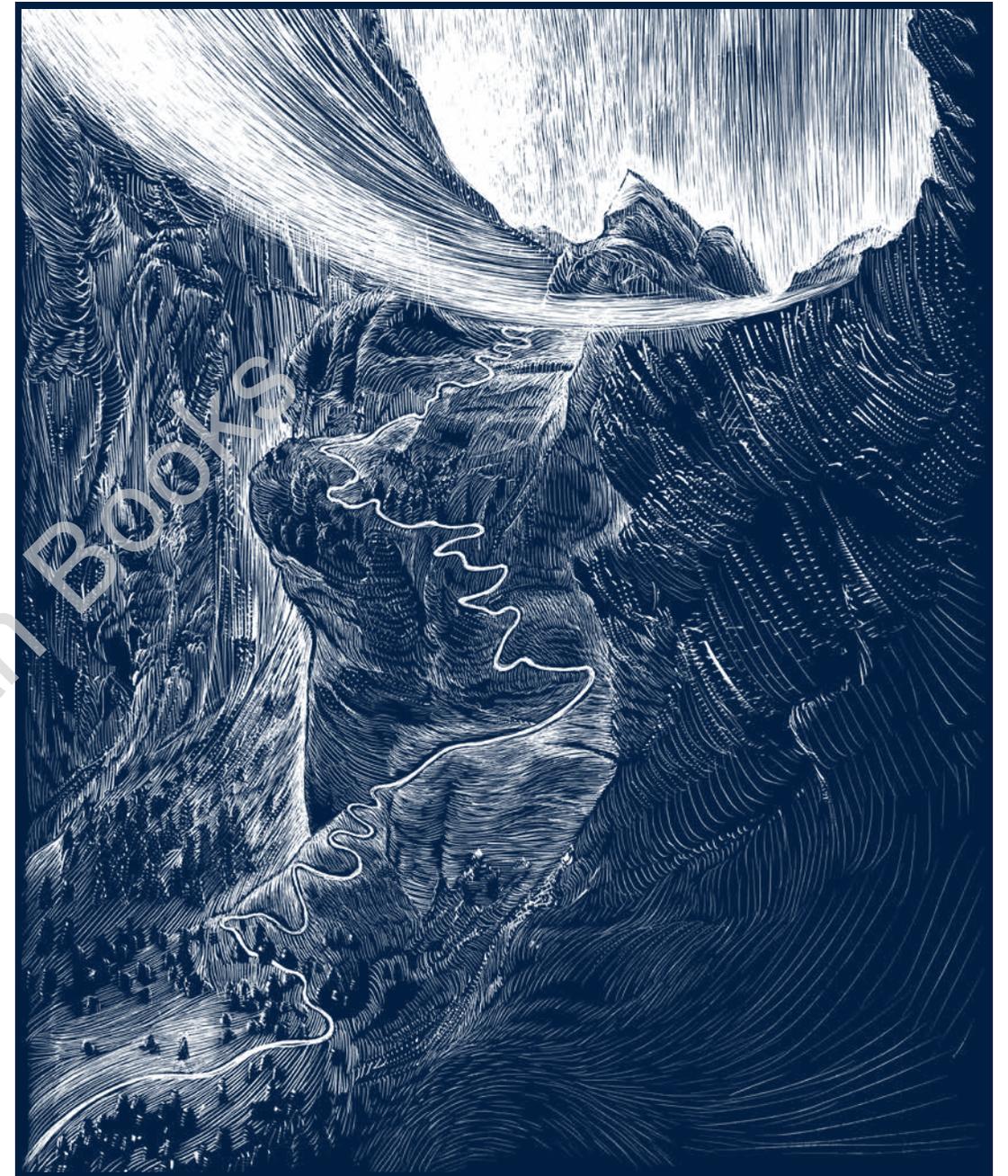




Against all our expectations, the week that followed was very enjoyable: we wandered through the Rhône Valley, branched off at Leukerbad, and crossed the Gemmi Pass, which was still covered with snow. From there we made our way via Interlaken to Meiringen.



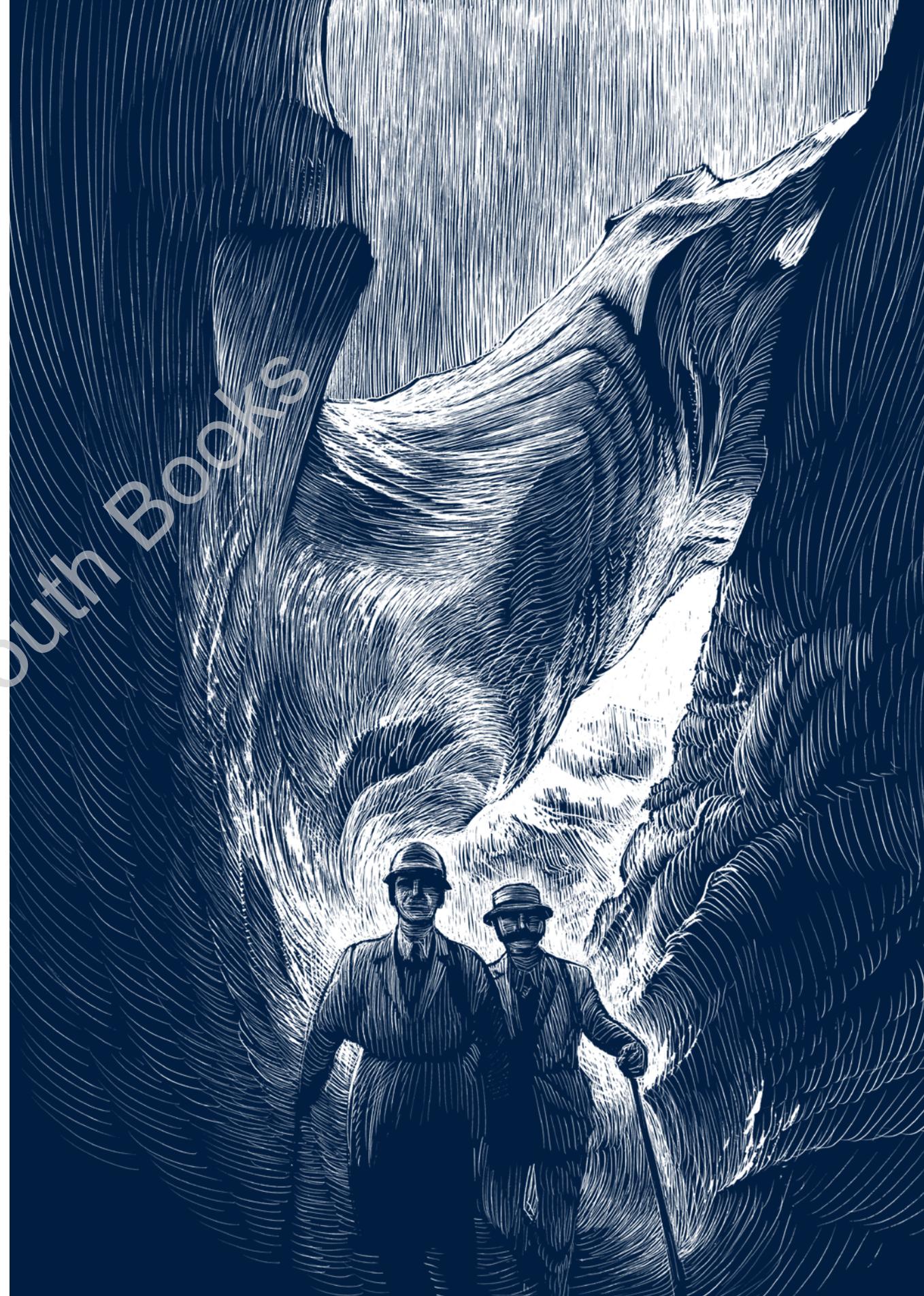
It was in Leukerbad that a mountain guide recommended bathing our sore feet in schnapps. He also advised us never to cut blisters, but simply to pierce them with a needle ...



and to be careful when crossing the Gemmi Pass: anyone who was subject to dizziness would be better off choosing a different route. We should also take our own food with us. The drinks were very bad in Kandersteg, and we would do well to take our own supply of strong wine. We thanked him for his advice.

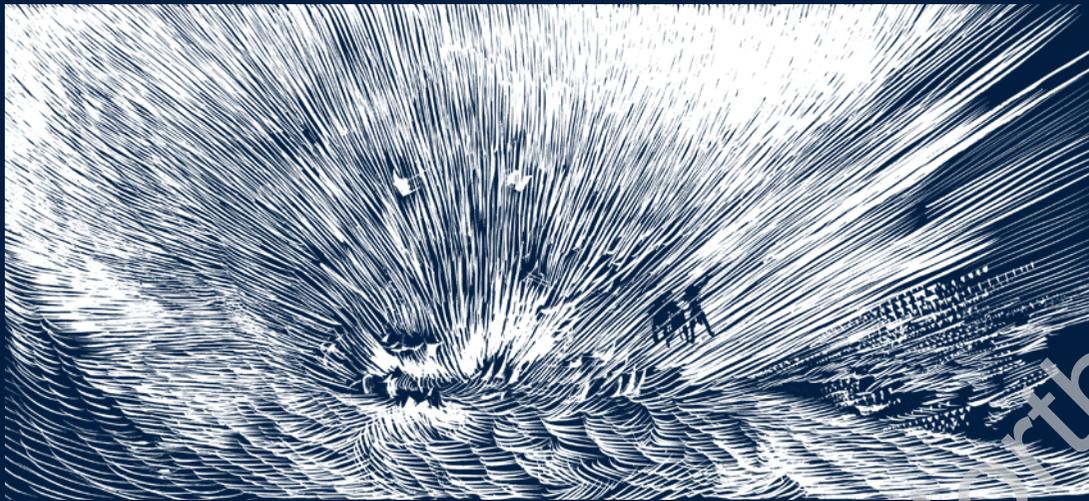
The heights displayed themselves in wintry white, whereas farther down, there were already green signs of spring. But a shadow lay over Holmes, and it never left him even in the most idyllic mountain villages and the most isolated passes. His eyes never ceased to look nervously around him, watching out for dangers.

And not without good reason.





On the shore of the Daubensee, a large boulder suddenly detached itself and came thundering down just behind us into the water. Holmes raced up the slope and climbed to the top of a tall rock in order to scan the surroundings. Our guide assured us that there was nothing unusual about stones falling at this time of the year. Holmes simply gave me a meaningful look. A dark menace seemed to be hanging over our heads.



In spite of all this, I have never seen Holmes in such high spirits. He talked enthusiastically about his achievements in the war against crime and about his plans for the future, in which he intended to devote himself completely to the study of Nature.



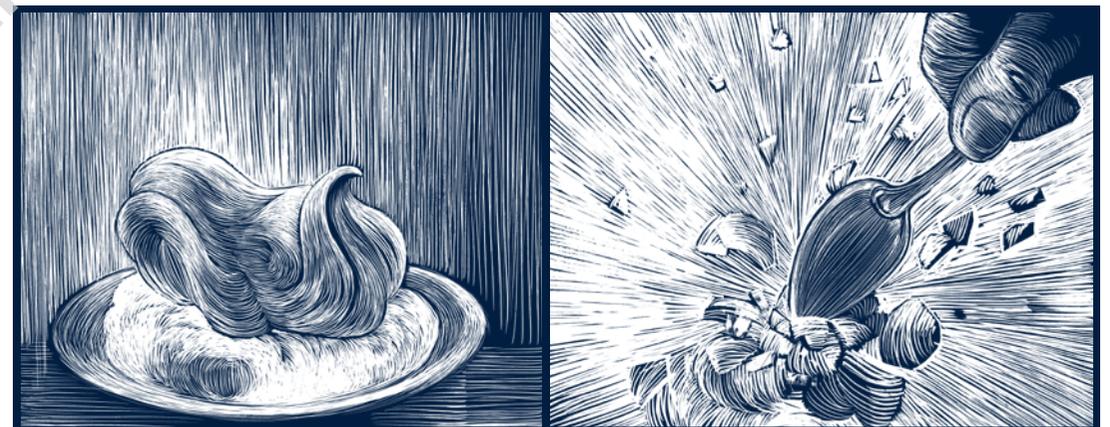
In the sheer beauty that lay all around us, evil seemed to have no place. The people that lived out here in this clean and open environment led a simple and natural life with which they seemed completely happy.





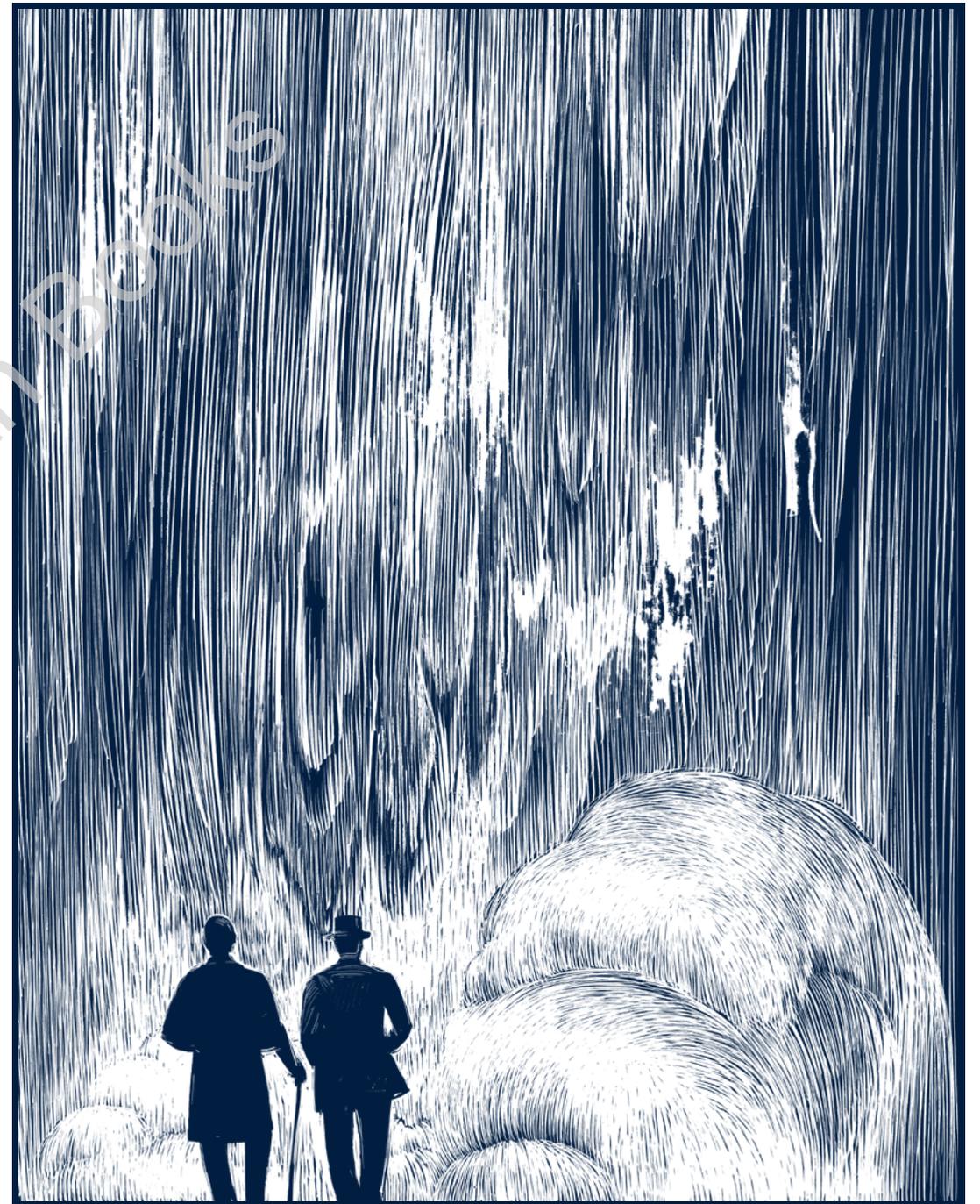
On the third of May, we reached Meiringen. We stayed at the Englischer Hof, where our host was Peter Steiler. He spoke excellent English and was also highly intelligent and knowledgeable.

Steiler recommended that the following day we should take a trip across the hills to Rosenlauri, where we should spend the night. On the way, we should make a detour to see the Reichenbach Falls. That evening he spoiled us with a wonderful meal. The dessert was a local speciality consisting of whipped egg white and sugar—a dish created by a Meiringer confectioner. The next day, we set out for Rosenlauri.





We soon reached the falls, which went hurtling down a chasm lined with black rocks, their waters thundering into the bottomless depths of a seething cauldron. The ceaseless downward torrent and the rising white curtain of spray made both of us feel dizzy.





There is a path that winds halfway round the waterfall and then comes to an abrupt end. We found ourselves at this spot and were just turning round to go back when a boy came hurrying toward us with a letter in his hand. The envelope bore the seal of the Englischer Hof in Meiringen and was addressed to me. Steiler had written that shortly after we had left the hotel, an elderly English lady had arrived. She was in the final stages of tuberculosis, but her condition had suddenly worsened and she now had only a few hours to live. Could I come back to attend to her? I'd be doing him a great favor.

Of course I could hardly refuse the request of a fellow countrywoman dying in a foreign land.



We agreed that Holmes should continue on his way, and we would meet later that evening in Rosenloui. As I turned to leave, I saw him lean against the rock face, fold his arms, and fix his eyes on the waterfall. It is an image I shall never forget.

At the foot of the winding path, I looked back once more. I saw a man swiftly moving upward, but I soon forgot about him as my mind was on the problem that awaited me. It took about an hour to get back to Meiringen. Steiler was standing at the entrance to the hotel, as if he was waiting for me.

"I hope her condition hasn't worsened," I said.

Steiler's puzzled expression made me shudder. He knew nothing about a dying English lady.

I turned on my heels and hurried back along the route I had taken. But it took me two hours to reach the top of the waterfall path and the spot where I had left Holmes.





When I finally got there, all I found was his Alpine walking stick leaning against the rock and making his absence all the more tangible.

At the end of the path I could see two sets of footprints that ended at the abyss. There were no returning prints.

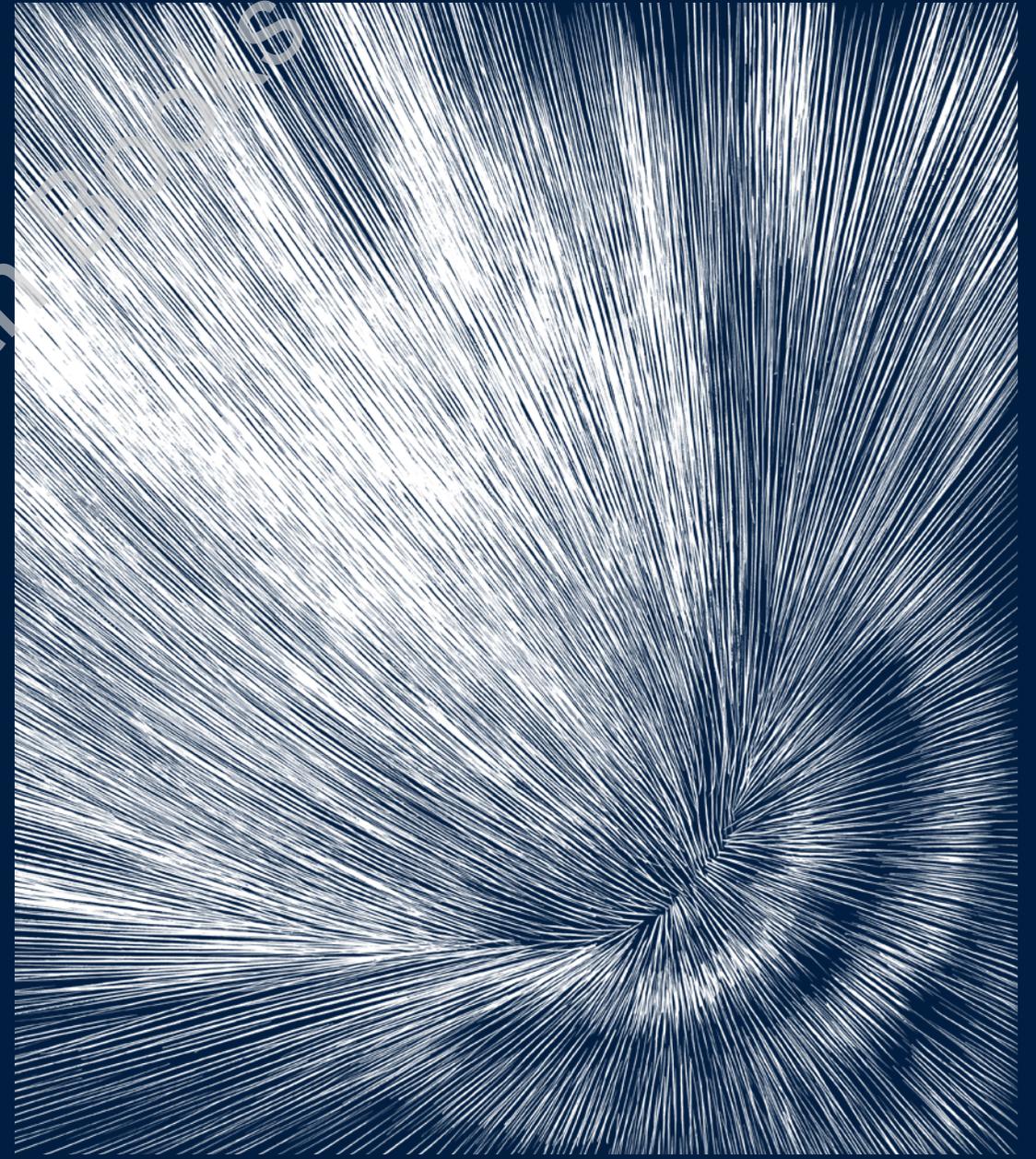
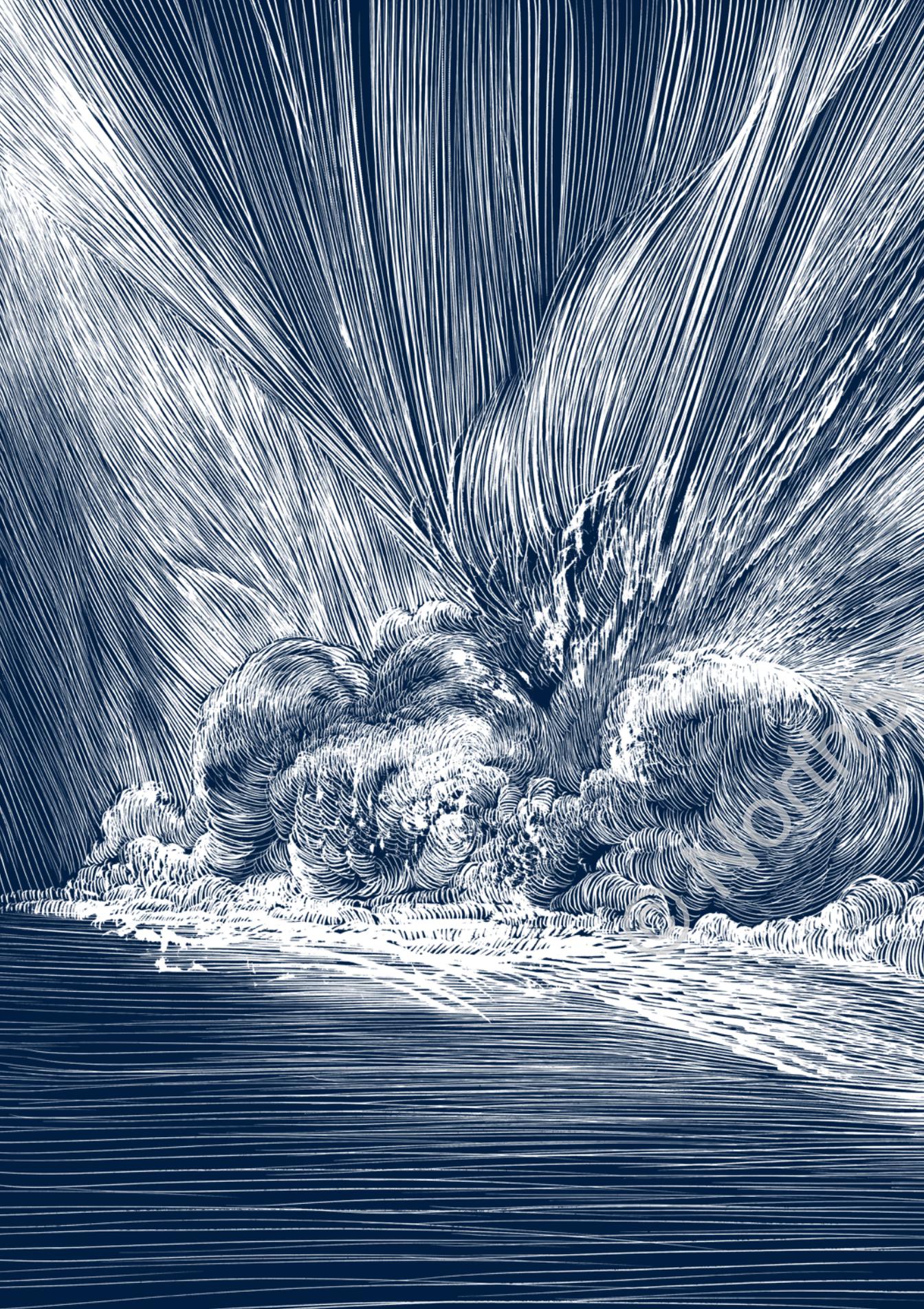
I went to the very edge and looked down into the depths. But by now it was getting dark and it was impossible to see anything clearly in that roaring mass of water.



Sounds broke up against the rocky walls, but from the depths there came a rumbling that seemed to contain the call of a human voice. In vain I shouted Holmes's name into the thunder of the waterfall . . .

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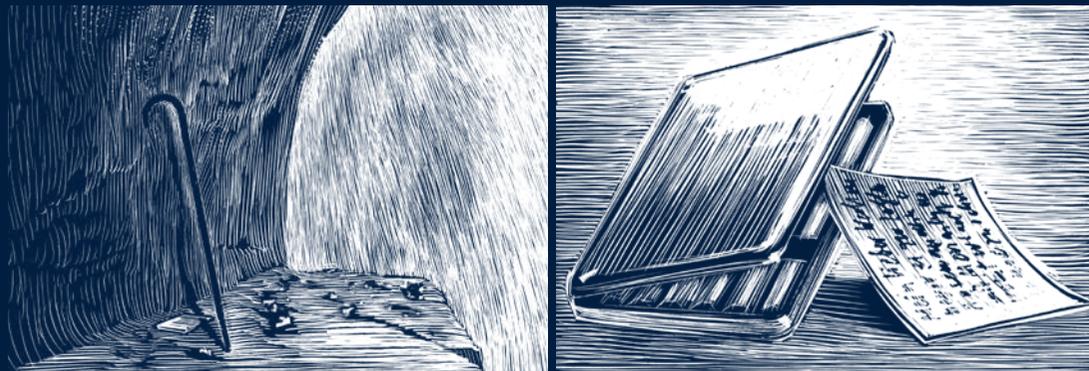


I used Holmes's own methods of deduction, and they left no room for doubt: He had not gone on to Rosenloui, but he had waited here on this narrow path for his archenemy to find him. Then there had been an inevitable fight to the death.



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Suddenly I saw something shining on a ledge by the stick. It was his cigarette case. And beneath it lay three pages from his notebook.



My dear Watson,

Professor Moriarty has been kind enough to let me write these few lines before we devote ourselves to finally answering the questions that have arisen between us.

He has given me a rough idea of the methods he used to outwit the police. These explanations confirm the high opinion I already had of his intellect. I am pleased to think that I have been able to free society from his presence. Unfortunately, I must pay a high price for doing so. I'm afraid I shall bring great sorrow to my friends, and especially to you. However, my career had already reached its peak, and I can scarcely think of a more suitable ending.

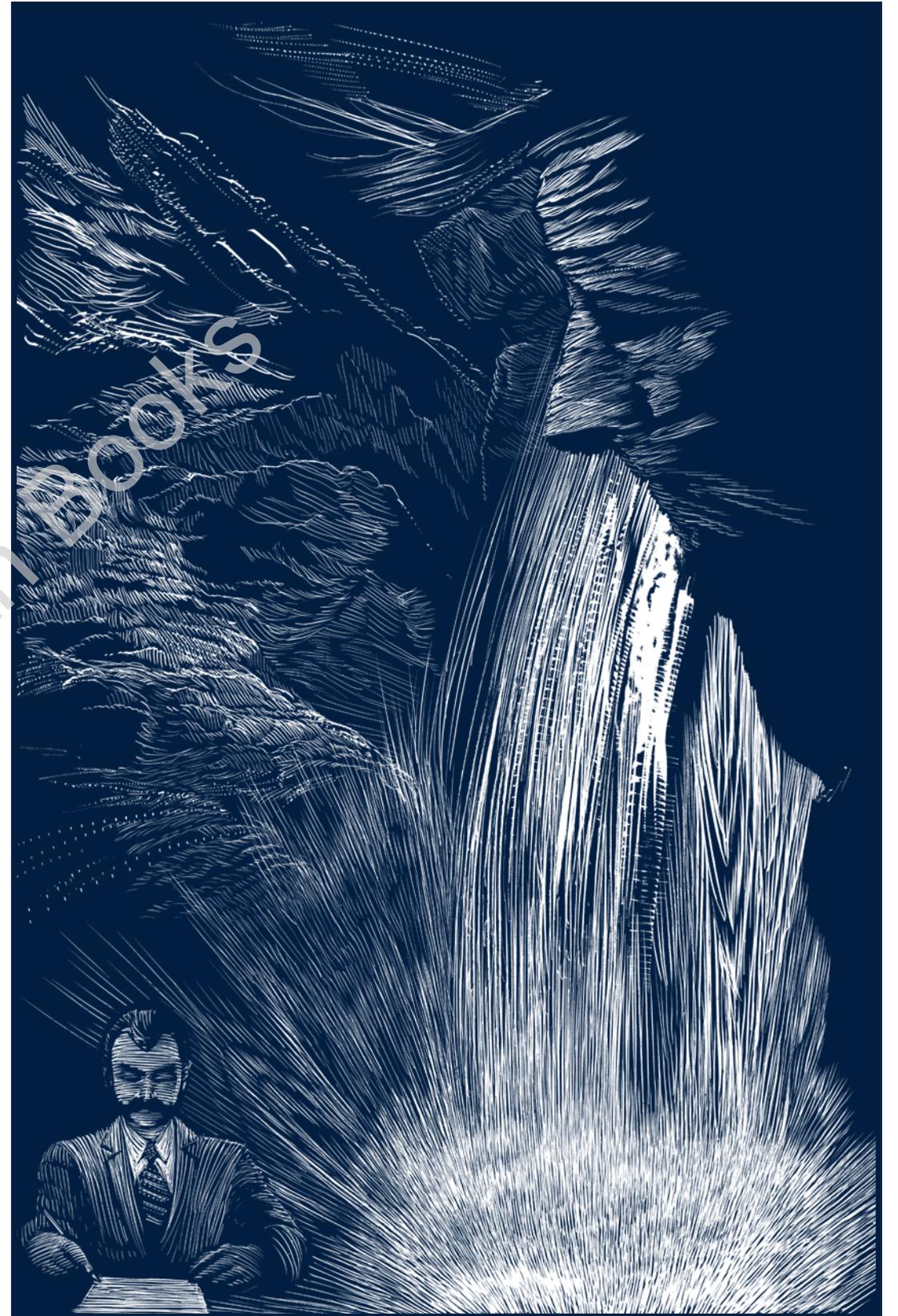
One last confession: I saw through the letter hoax immediately, but I let you leave because I suspected what would follow.

You'll find all the documents needed for the arrest of Moriarty's henchmen in my files under "M." My personal affairs are in the safe hands of my brother, Mycroft. Pray give my greetings to Mrs. Watson.

*Yours ever faithfully,
Sherlock Holmes*



An official examination of the scene of the crime concluded that the two men must have fought and, locked together, fallen into the abyss. The most despicable man the world has ever seen. And the finest of men. One of the rocks, like a stone monument, bears a resemblance to his face.





Two years have passed, but still I feel the gap that Holmes's death has left in my soul.

Current events now compel me to pick up my pen and defend the name of my friend against slanderous tongues. James Moriarty, the brother of Sherlock Holmes's most notorious adversary, has written a book that attempts to glorify some of his deeds, and newspaper reports have also been full of errors.

I hope that my own account will rectify these distortions once and for all, as it contains nothing but the truth.

Sherlock Holmes—the story continues

“The Final Problem” (1893) was actually meant to mark the end of Sherlock Holmes. The author, Dr. Arthur Conan Doyle, had had enough of the character he had created. But fans and publishers would not let him disappear. Finally, Conan Doyle was offered so much money to continue the series that ten years later he resurrected his hero. In *The Return of Sherlock Holmes*, we learn what really happened at the Reichenbach Falls: Holmes had used his superior fighting skills to overcome Moriarty and send him hurtling into the abyss. He had staged his own death in order to make it easier for himself to pursue Moriarty’s remaining henchmen. This revelation comes when suddenly, three years after the Reichenbach incident, Dr. Watson is stunned to see the supposedly dead Holmes standing in front of him. After that, the unbeatable duo continue to solve many more crimes together.



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First published in Switzerland in 2022 by NordSüd Verlag under the title *Sherlock Holmes - Das letzte Problem*

English translation copyright © 2022 by NorthSouth Books Inc., New York 10016.

Translated by David Henry Wilson

First published in the United States, Great Britain, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand in 2022 by NorthSouth Books, Inc., an imprint of NordSüd Verlag AG, CH-8050 Zürich, Switzerland.

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Distributed in the United States by NorthSouth Books Inc., New York 10016.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data is available.

ISBN: 978-0-7358-4488-9

Printed in Latvia

1 3 5 7 9 • 1 0 8 6 4 2

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