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The Spirit

Albert Goldbarth

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THE SPIRIT

A.C.D., d. 1930

That afternoon, precisely between
the dray horse and the violin, Holmes
measured the paper, weighed it, clipped
one corner to burn and analyzed the ashes
under chemicals and the glass.

That night,
Jean Doyle wrote—her living hand a
glove for a spirit's. Her brother Malcolm
has crossed over. Conan Doyle's first wife had
crossed over. Once his mother appeared
in a seance, gray and vague but "in an
ecstasy of delight." His son Kingsley
had crossed over, now he wrote to them,
through them, in childish scrawl.
And Phineas spoke, he was busy "connecting
vibratory lines of seismic power," and
Walter rang a bell in a box. In
those days, every pencil a piece of
wood the dead knocked on.

"How
could he do it? fairies!—Sherlock's author!"
Elementary. Holmes, that morning,
counted the whorls in a print. Outside,
the hansom passed, and his mind kept track
of its shrill, specific pattern of noise
over cobbles. There was a Queen, her
crown and throne fit—perfect. This many
whorls and this many grams of ash,
Empire, empirical.

That dusk,
somewhere hazy before true dark, Doyle
looked up from his photograph of fairies
butterfly-winged in a Yorkshire garden,

from his photograph of the “psychic cylinder” manifested when Margery turned intense, from his page: “God’s own light must descend and burn. . .” A black horse somewhere passed by, or maybe stopped. He was busy, believing. Something. . . A whiteness could, really could, appear at the door.

“How could he? *How?*” But how can anyone, and anyone does. It was 7 July, 1930. He saw the world in which Holmes stood, disguised, on Baker Street, the metrics in his head computing such a logical outcome the whole curb shimmered a moment. And then he crossed over.