

JOHN HODGEN

Watson

“Watson, come here. I want you,” Bell said, and Watson came
running like a boy. What son
wouldn’t come to a father like that, ringing with delight, his acid
tongue turning into sound?
And Sherlock’s boy Watson came running as well, dim bulb, sure
thing, everything
elementary except to him, the watts on his fixture lower than
the norm. He took joy at being
called, simple as that, the sea of questions, demands, each one
hounding him, swirling
like a thousand Copley sharks. It didn’t even matter what it was
that he was called for.
As if Holmes, all his what’s and why’s, his withering condescension,
which was uncalled for,
was where the heart was. As if Watson were some winsome college
boy from Whatsamatta
U., some wind-up cosmic toy, some budding Lou Costello running
through the abattoir
of his father’s laughter to answer every hello with what he knew
about *What’s on second*,
Who’s on first, the Watson family crick in his neck, his DNA,
the queries growing louder
 (“What, Son? What, Son?”), the tom-tom golfing, clubbing in his
head whenever anyone
acidulously said, “What’s on your mind, Son? What is it, exactly?”
 “Nothing,” Son said,
though he came to wish that everyone would hold the phone,
would just drop dead,
or that, finally, at wit’s end, Holmes would buy a clue, put a bullet
through his head.
What is it fathers want? Someone to be in on it with, a co-
conspirator?
Someone to be included in insubstantial joy? Someone to be
lorded over?
Or just someone so as not to be alone, spirit descending, to
abandon, deride—
what son of a bitch? what son of mine?—some white sun day,
some Whitsuntide?