

# The Return of SHERLOCK HOLMES

By A. CONAN DOYLE

Author of "The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes," "The Hound of the Baskinville," "The Sign of the Four," "A Study in Scarlet," Etc.



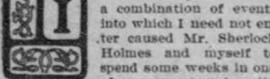
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## The Adventure of the Three Students

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It was in the year '03 that a combination of events into which I need not enter caused Mr. Sherlock Holmes and myself to spend some weeks in one of our great university towns, and it was during this time that the small but instructive adventure which I am about to relate befell us. It will be obvious that any details which would help the reader to exactly identify the college or the criminal would be injudicious and offensive. So painful a scandal may well be allowed to die out. With due discretion the incident itself may, however, be described, since it serves to illustrate some of those qualities for which my friend was remarkable. I will endeavor in my statement to avoid such terms as would serve to limit the events to any particular place or give a clue as to the people concerned.

We were residing at the time in furnished lodgings close to a library where Sherlock Holmes was pursuing some laborious researches in early English charters—researches which led to results so striking that they may be the subject of one of my future narratives. Here it was that one evening we received a visit from an acquaintance, Mr. Hilton Soames, tutor and lecturer at the College of St. Luke's. Mr. Soames was a tall, spare man, of a nervous and excitable temperament. I had always known him to be restless in his manner, but on this particular occasion he was in such a state of uncontrollable agitation that it was clear something very unusual had occurred.

"I trust, Mr. Holmes, that you can spare me a few hours of your valuable time. We have had a very painful incident at St. Luke's, and really, but for the happy chance of your being in town, I should have been at a loss what to do."

"I am very busy just now, and I desire no distractions," my friend answered. "I should much prefer that you called in the aid of the police."

"No, no, my dear sir, such a course is utterly impossible. When once the law is evoked it cannot be staved again, and this is just one of those cases where, for the credit of the college, it is most essential to avoid scandal. Your discretion is as well known as your powers, and you are the one man in the world who can help me. I beg you, Mr. Holmes, to do what you can."

My friend's temper had not improved since he had been deprived of the congenial surroundings of Baker street. Without his scrapbook, his chemicals and his homely untidiness he was an uncomfortable man. He shrugged his shoulders in ungracious acquiescence, while our visitor in hurried words and with much excited gesticulation poured forth his story.

"I must explain to you, Mr. Holmes, that tomorrow is the first day of the examination for the Fortescue scholarship. I am one of the examiners. My subject is Greek, and the first of the papers consists of a large passage of Greek translation which the candidate has not seen. This passage is printed on the examination paper, and it would naturally be an immense advantage if the candidate could prepare it in advance. For this reason great care is taken to keep the paper secret."

"Today about 3 o'clock the proofs of this paper arrived from the printers. The exercise consists of half a chapter of Thucydides. I had to read it over carefully, as the text must be absolutely correct. At 4:30 my task was not yet completed. I had, however, promised to take tea in a friend's rooms, so I left the proof upon my desk. I was absent more than an hour."

erty of examining my papers. He denied it, however, with the utmost earnestness, and I am convinced that he was speaking the truth. The alternative was that some one passing had observed the key in the door, had known that I was out and had entered to look at the papers. A large sum of money is at stake, for the scholarship is a very valuable one, and an unscrupulous man might very well run a risk in order to gain an advantage over his fellows.

"Bannister was very much upset by the incident. He had nearly fainted when we found that the papers had undoubtedly been tampered with. I gave him a little brandy and left him collapsed in a chair, while I made a most careful examination of the room. I soon saw that the intruder had left other traces of his presence besides the rumpled papers. On the table in the window were several shreds from a pencil which had been sharpened. A broken tip of lead was lying there also. Evidently the rascal had copied the paper in a great hurry, had broken his pencil and had been compelled to put a fresh point to it."

"Excellent!" said Holmes, who was recovering his good humor as his attention became more engrossed by the case. "Fortune has been your friend."

"This was not all. I have a new writing table with a fine surface of red leather. I am prepared to swear, and so is Bannister, that it was smooth and unstained. Now I found a clean cut in it about three inches long—not a mere scratch, but a positive cut. Not only this, but on the table I found a small ball of black dough or clay, with specks of something which looks like sawdust in it. I am convinced that these marks were left by the man who rifled the papers. There were no foot-



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marks and no other evidence as to his identity. I was at my wits' end when suddenly the happy thought occurred to me that you were in the town, and I came straight round to put the matter into your hands. Do help me, Mr. Holmes. You see my dilemma. Either I must find the man or else the examination must be postponed until fresh papers are prepared, and since this cannot be done without explanation there will ensue a hideous scandal which will throw a cloud not only on the college, but on the university. Above all things I desire to settle the matter quietly and discreetly."

"I shall be happy to look into it and to give you such advice as I can," said Holmes, rising and putting on his overcoat. "The case is not entirely devoid of interest. Had any one visited you in your room after the papers came to you?"

"Yes; young Daulat Ras, an Indian student, who lives on the same stair, came in to ask me some particulars about the examination."

"For which he was entered?"

on college. A Gothic arched door led to a worn stone staircase. On the ground floor was the tutor's room. Above were three students, one on each story. It was already twilight when we reached the scene of our problem. Holmes halted and looked earnestly at the window; then he approached it and, standing on tiptoe with his neck craned, he looked into the room.

"He must have entered through the door. There is no opening except the door pane," said our learned guide. "Dear me!" said Holmes, and he smiled in a singular way as he glanced at our companion. "Well, if there is nothing to be learned here we had better go inside."

The lecturer unlocked the outer door and ushered us into his room. We stood at the entrance while Holmes made an examination of the carpet.

"I am afraid there are no signs here," said he. "One could hardly hope for any upon so dry a day. Your servant seems to have quite recovered. You left him in a chair, you say. Which chair?"

"By the window there."

"I see. Near this little table. You can come in now. I have finished with the carpet. Let us take the little table first. Of course what has happened is very clear. The man entered and took the papers, sheet by sheet, from the central table. He carried them over to the window table, because from there he could see if you were across the courtyard and so could effect an escape."

"As a matter of fact he could not," said Soames, "for I entered by the side door."

"Ah, that's good! Well, anyhow, that was in his mind. Let me see the three strips. No finger impressions—not well, he carried over this one first, and he copied it. How long would it take him to do that, using every possible contraction? A quarter of an hour, not less. Then he tossed it down and seized the next. He was in the midst of that when your return caused him to make a very hurried retreat—very hurried, since he had not time to replace the papers which would tell you that he had been there. You were not aware of any hurrying feet on the stair as you entered the outer door?"

"No, I can't say I was."

"Well, he wrote so furiously that he broke his pencil, and had, as you observe, to sharpen it again. This is of interest, Watson. The pencil was not an ordinary one. It was above the usual size, with a soft lead, the outer color was dark blue, the inner name was printed in silver lettering, and the piece remaining is only about an inch and a half long. Look for such a pencil, Mr. Soames, and you have got your man. When I add that he possesses a large and very blunt knife you have an additional aid."

Mr. Soames was somewhat overwhelmed by this flood of information. "I can follow the other points," said he, "but, really, in this matter of the length—"

Holmes held out a small chip with the letters NN, and a space of clear wood after them.

"I think it is clear enough. You came back by an unexpected way, and so he had no warning until you were at the very door. What could he do? He caught up everything which would be tray him, and he rushed into your bedroom to conceal himself."

"Good gracious, Mr. Holmes, do you mean to tell me that all the time I was talking to Bannister in this room we had the man prisoner if we had only known it?"

"So I read it."

"Surely there is another alternative. Mr. Holmes, I don't know whether you observed my bedroom window?"

"Lattice paneled, lead framework, three separate windows, one swinging on hinge and large enough to admit a man."

"Exactly. And it looks out on an angle of the courtyard so as to be partly invisible. The man might have effected his entrance there, left traces as he passed through the bedroom, and finally, flung the door open, have escaped that way."

Holmes shook his head impatiently. "Let us be practical," said he. "I understand you to say that there are three students who use this stair and are in the habit of passing your door?"

"Yes, there are."

"And they are all in for this examination?"

"Yes."

"Have you any reason to suspect any one of them more than the others?"

Soames hesitated.

"I should like to have a peep at each of them," said Holmes. "Is it possible?"

"No difficulty in the world," Soames answered. "This set of rooms is quite the oldest in the college, and it is not unusual for visitors to go over them. Come along, and I will personally conduct you."

"No names, please," said Holmes as we knocked at Gilchrist's door. A tall, flaxen haired, slim young fellow opened it and made us welcome when he understood our errand. There were some really curious pieces of mediæval domestic architecture within. Holmes was so charmed with one of them that he insisted on drawing it in his notebook, broke his pencil, and had to borrow one from our host and finally borrow a knife to sharpen his own. The same curious accident happened to him in the rooms of the Indian—a silent little book nosed fellow, who eyed us askance and was obviously glad when Holmes' architectural studies had come to an end. I could not see that in either case Holmes had come upon the clew for which he was searching. Only at the third did our visit prove abortive. The outer door would not open to our knock and nothing more substantial than a torrent of bad language came from behind it. "I don't care who you are. You can go to blazes!" roared the angry voice. "Tomorrow's the exam, and I won't be drawn by any one."

"A rude fellow!" said our guide, flushing with anger as we withdrew down the stair. "Of course he did not realize that it was I who was knocking, but none the less his conduct was very unbecoming and, indeed, under the circumstances rather suspicious."

Holmes' response was a curious one. "Can you tell me his exact height?" he asked.

"Really, Mr. Holmes, I cannot undertake to say. He is taller than the Indian, not so tall as Gilchrist. I suppose five foot six would be about it."

"That is very important," said Holmes. "And now, Mr. Soames, I wish you good night."

Our guide cried aloud in his astonishment and dismay. "Good gracious, Mr. Holmes, you are surely not going to leave me in this abrupt fashion! You don't seem to realize the position. Tomorrow is the examination. I must take some definite action tonight. I cannot allow the examination to be held if one of the papers has been tampered with. The situation must be faced."

"You must leave it as it is. I shall drop round early tomorrow morning and chat the matter over. It is possible that I may be in a position then to indicate some course of action. Meanwhile, you change nothing—nothing at all."

"Very good, Mr. Holmes."

"You can be perfectly easy in your mind. We shall certainly find some way out of your difficulties. I will take the black clay with me; also the pencil cuttings. Goodbye."

When we were out in the darkness of the quadrangle we again looked up at the windows. The Indian still paced his room. The others were invisible.

were three little pyramids of black, doughy clay.

"Why, Holmes, you had only two yesterday."

"And one more this morning. It is a fair argument that wherever No. 3 came from also the source of Nos. 1 and 2. Eh, Watson? Well, come along and put friend Soames out of his pain."

The unfortunate tutor was certainly in a state of pitiable agitation when we found him in his chambers. In a few hours the examination would commence, and he was still in the dilemma between making the facts public and allowing the culprit to compete for the valuable scholarship. He could hardly stand still, so great was his mental agitation, and he ran toward Holmes with two eager hands outstretched.

"Thank heaven that you have come! I feared that you had given it up in despair. What am I to do? Shall the examination proceed?"

"Yes, let it proceed, by all means."

"But this rascal!"

"He shall not compete."

"You know him?"

"I think so. If this matter is not to become public we must give ourselves certain powers and resolve ourselves into a small private court martial. You there, if you please, Soames! Watson, you here! I'll take the anomalies in the middle. I think that we are now sufficiently imposing to strike terror into a guilty breast. Kindly ring the bell!"

Bannister entered and shrank back in evident surprise and fear at our judicial appearance.

"You will kindly close the door," said Holmes. "Now, Bannister, will you please tell us the truth about yesterday's incident?"

"Come, come," said Holmes. "It is human to err, and at least no one can accuse you of being a callous criminal. Perhaps it would be easier for you if I were to tell Mr. Soames what occurred, and you can check me where I am wrong. Shall I do so? Well, well, don't trouble to answer. Listen, and see that I do you no injustice."

"From the moment, Mr. Soames, that you told me that no one, not even Bannister, could have told that the papers were in your room the case began to take a definite shape in my mind. The printer one could, of course, dismiss. He could examine the papers in his own office. The Indian I also thought nothing of. If the proofs were in roll he could not possibly know what they were. On the other hand, it seemed an unlikely coincidence that a man should dare to enter the room, and that by chance on that very day the papers were on the table. I dismissed that. The man who entered knew that the papers were there. How did he know?"

"When I approached your room I examined the window. You amused me by supposing that I was contemplating the possibility of some one having in broad daylight, under the eyes of all these opposite rooms, forced him to do so. Such an idea was absurd. I was measuring up all a man would need to be in order to see as he passed what papers were on the central table. I am six feet high, and I could do it with an effort. No one less than that would have a chance. Already, you see, I had reason to think that if one of your three students was a man of unusual height he was the most worth watching of the three."

"I entered, and I took you into my confidence as to the suggestions of the side table. Of the center table I could make nothing until he gave me a description of Gilchrist who mentioned that he was a long distance jumper. Then the whole thing came to me in an instant, and I only needed certain corroborative proofs, which I speedily obtained."

"What happened was this: This young fellow had employed his afternoon at the athletic grounds, where he had been practicing the jump. He returned carrying his jumping shoes, which are provided, as you are aware, with several sharp spikes. As he passed your window he saw, by means of his great height, these spikes upon your table and conjectured what they were. No man would have been done had it not been that as he passed your door he perceived the key which had been left by the carelessness of your servant. A sudden impulse caused him to enter and see if they were indeed the proofs. It was not a dangerous exploit, for he could always pretend that he had simply looked in to ask a question."

"Well, when he saw that they were indeed the proofs it was then that he yielded to temptation. He put his shoes on the table. What was it you put on that chair near the window?"

"Gloves," said the young man.

Holmes looked triumphantly at Bannister. "He put his gloves on the chair, and he took the proof sheet by sheet, and he took them to the main gate and that he would see him. As we know, he came back by the side gate. Suddenly he heard him at the very door. There was no possible escape. He forgot his gloves, but he caught up his shoes and darted into the bedroom. You observe that the scratch on that table is slight at one side, but deepens in the direction of the bedroom door. That in itself is enough to show us that the shoe had been drawn in that direction and that the culprit had taken refuge there. The earth round the spike had been left on the table, and a second sample was loosened and fell in the bedroom. I may add that I walked out to the athletic grounds this morning, saw that tenacious black clay is used in the jumping pit and carried away a specimen of it, together with some of the fine tan or sawdust which is strewn over it to prevent the athlete from slipping. Have I told the truth, Mr. Gilchrist?"

"The student had drawn himself erect. 'Yes, sir; it is true,' said he. 'Good heavens! Have you nothing to add?' cried Soames.

"Yes, sir, I have, but the shock of this disgraceful exposure has bewildered me. I have a letter here Mr. Soames, which I wrote to you early this morning in the middle of a restless night. It was before I knew that my sin had found me out. Here it is, sir. You will see that I have said: 'I have determined not to go in for the examination. I have been offered a commission in the Rhodesian police, and I am going out to South Africa at once.'"

"I am indeed pleased to hear that you did not intend to profit by your unfair advantage," said Soames. "But why did you change your purpose?"

Gilchrist pointed to Bannister. "There is the man who set me in the right path," said he.



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Miles McLaren.

"I have told you everything, sir."

"Nothing to add?"

"Nothing at all, sir."

"Well, then, I must make some suggestions to you. When you sat down on that chair yesterday did you do so in order to conceal some object which would have shown who had been in the room?"

Bannister's face was ghastly. "No, sir; certainly not."

"It is only a suggestion," said Holmes suavely. "I frankly admit that I am unable to prove it. But it seems probable enough, since the moment that Mr. Soames' back was turned you released the man who was hiding in that bedroom."



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Daulat Ras.

"To my bedroom."

"Have you been in it since your adventure?"

"No, I came straight away for you."



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Gilchrist.

ant open face. His troubled blue eyes glanced at each of us and finally rested with an expression of blank dismay upon Bannister in the farther corner.

"Just close the door," said Holmes. "Now, Mr. Gilchrist, we are all quite alone here, and no one need ever know one word of what passes between us. We can be perfectly frank with each other. We want to know, Mr. Gilchrist, how you, an honorable man, ever came to commit such an action as that of yesterday."

The unfortunate young man staggered back and cast a look full of horror and reproach at Bannister.