

Arthur Conan Doyle

THE MEMOIRS OF SHERLOCK HOLMES

**THE FINAL
PROBLEM**

and Other Stories



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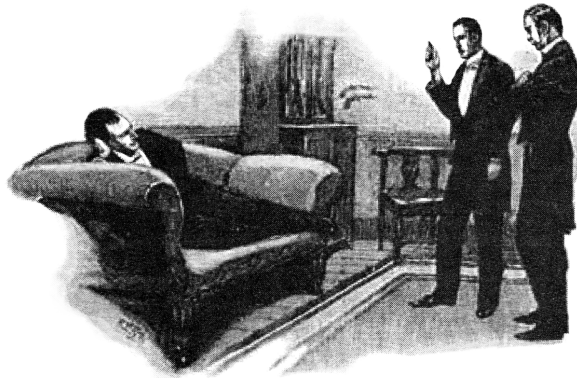
THE REIGATE SQUIRES

It was some time before the health of my friend Mr Sherlock Holmes recovered from the strain caused by his immense exertions in the spring of 1887. The whole question of the Netherland-Sumatra Company and of the colossal schemes of Baron Maupertuis are too recent in the minds of the public, and are too intimately concerned with politics and finance, to be fitting subjects for this series of sketches. They led, however, in an indirect fashion to a singular and complex problem which gave my friend an opportunity of demonstrating the value of a fresh weapon among the many with which he waged his life-long battle against crime.

On referring to my notes I see that it was upon the 14th of April that I received a telegram from Lyons which informed me that Holmes was lying ill in the Hotel Dulong. Within twenty-four hours I was in his sick-room, and was relieved to find that there was nothing formidable in his symptoms. Even his iron constitution, however, had broken down under the strain of an investigation which had extended over two months, during

which period he had never worked less than fifteen hours a day, and had more than once, as he assured me, kept to his task for five days at a stretch. Even the triumphant issue of his labours could not save him from reaction after so terrible an exertion, and at a time when Europe was ringing with his name and when his room was literally ankle-deep with congratulatory telegrams I found him a prey to the blackest depression. Even the knowledge that he had succeeded where the police of three countries had failed, and that he had outmanoeuvred at every point the most accomplished swindler in Europe, was insufficient to rouse him from his nervous prostration.

Three days later we were back in Baker Street together; but it was evident that my friend would be much the better for a change, and the thought of a week of springtime in the country was full of attractions to me also. My old friend, Colonel Hayter, who had come under my professional care in Afghanistan, had now taken a house near Reigate in Surrey, and had frequently asked me to come down to him upon a visit. On the last occasion he had remarked that if my friend would only come with me he would be glad to extend his hospitality to him also. A little diplomacy was needed, but when Holmes understood that the establishment was a bachelor one, and that he would be allowed the fullest freedom, he fell in with my plans, and a week after our return from Lyons we were under the colonel's roof. Hayter was a fine old soldier who had seen much of the world, and he soon found, as I had expected, that Holmes and he had much in common.



On the evening of our arrival we were sitting in the colonel's gunroom after dinner, Holmes stretched upon the sofa, while Hayter and I looked over his little armoury of Eastern weapons.

"By the way," said he suddenly, "I think I'll take one of these pistols upstairs with me in case we have an alarm."

"An alarm!" said I.

"Yes, we've had a scare in this part lately. Old Acton, who is one of our county magnates, had his house broken into last Monday. No great damage done, but the fellows are still at large."

"No clue?" asked Holmes, cocking his eye at the colonel.

"None as yet. But the affair is a pretty one, one of our little country crimes, which must seem too small for your attention, Mr Holmes, after this great international affair."

Holmes waved away the compliment, though his smile showed that it had pleased him.

“Was there any feature of interest?”

“I fancy not. The thieves ransacked the library and got very little for their pains. The whole place was turned upside down, drawers burst open, and presses ransacked, with the result that an odd volume of Pope’s *Homer*, two plated candlesticks, an ivory letter-weight, a small oak barometer, and a ball of twine are all that have vanished.”

“What an extraordinary assortment!” I exclaimed.

“Oh, the fellows evidently grabbed hold of everything they could get.”

Holmes grunted from the sofa.

“The county police ought to make something of that,” said he; “why, it is surely obvious that —”

But I held up a warning finger.

“You are here for a rest, my dear fellow. For Heaven’s sake don’t get started on a new problem when your nerves are all in shreds.”

Holmes shrugged his shoulders with a glance of comic resignation towards the colonel, and the talk drifted away into less dangerous channels.

It was destined, however, that all my professional caution should be wasted, for next morning the problem obtruded itself upon us in such a way that it was impossible to ignore it, and our country visit took a turn which neither of us could have anticipated. We were at breakfast when the colonel’s butler rushed in with all his propriety shaken out of him.

“Have you heard the news, sir?” he gasped. “At the Cunninghams’ sir!”

“Burglary!” cried the colonel, with his coffee-cup in mid-air.

“Murder!”

The colonel whistled. “By Jove!” said he. “Who’s killed, then? The JP or his son?”

“Neither, sir. It was William, the coachman. Shot through the heart, sir, and never spoke again.”

“Who shot him, then?”

“The burglar, sir. He was off like a shot and got clean away. He’d just broke in at the pantry window when William came on him and met his end in saving his master’s property.”

“What time?”

“It was last night, sir, somewhere about twelve.”

“Ah, then, we’ll step over afterwards,” said the colonel, coolly settling down to his breakfast again. “It’s a baddish business,” he added when the butler had gone; “he’s our leading man about here, is old Cunningham, and a very decent fellow too. He’ll be cut up over this, for the man has been in his service for years and was a good servant. It’s evidently the same villains who broke into Acton’s.”

“And stole that very singular collection,” said Holmes, thoughtfully.

“Precisely.”

“Hum! It may prove the simplest matter in the world, but all the same at first glance this is just a little curious, is it not? A gang of burglars acting in the country might be expected to vary the scene of their operations, and not to crack two cribs in the same district within a few days. When you spoke last night of taking precautions I remember that it passed through

my mind that this was probably the last parish in England to which the thief or thieves would be likely to turn their attention — which shows that I have still much to learn.”

“I fancy it’s some local practitioner,” said the colonel. “In that case, of course, Acton’s and Cunningham’s are just the places he would go for, since they are far the largest about here.”

“And richest?”

“Well, they ought to be, but they’ve had a lawsuit for some years which has sucked the blood out of both of them, I fancy. Old Acton has some claim on half Cunningham’s estate, and the lawyers have been at it with both hands.”

“If it’s a local villain there should not be much difficulty in running him down,” said Holmes with a yawn. “All right, Watson, I don’t intend to meddle.”

“Inspector Forrester, sir,” said the butler, throwing open the door.

The official, a smart, keen-faced young fellow, stepped into the room. “Good-morning, colonel,” said he; “I hope I don’t intrude, but we hear that Mr Holmes of Baker Street is here.”

The colonel waved his hand towards my friend, and the inspector bowed.

“We thought that perhaps you would care to step across, Mr Holmes.”

“The fates are against you, Watson,” said he, laughing. “We were chatting about the matter when you came in, inspector. Perhaps you can let us have a few details.” As he leaned back in his chair in the familiar attitude I knew that the case was hopeless.

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Дойл, Артур Конан

Д62 Спогади про Шерлока Холмса: Остання справа та інші історії / Артур Конан Дойл. К. : Знання, 2020. — 190 с. — (English Library). ISBN 978-617-07-0150-3 (English Library) ISBN 978-617-07-0753-6

У пропонувані оповіданнях Артура Конана Дойла (1859—1930) Шерлок Холмс вкотре виявляє унікальну спостережливість і талант детектива. Завдяки проникливому розуму, а часом і хитрощам він розкриває вбивство за краечком записки, знайденим у руках убитого (“Рейгетські сквайри”), розплутує доволі делікатну справу, в якій на карту поставлено дипломатичні інтереси країни (“Морський договір”), розслідує загадкові справи, пов’язані з розплатою за гріхи минулого (“Горбань”, “Постійний пацієнт”). Та нарешті Холмс зустрічає гідного супротивника — найрозумнішого злочинця ХІХ століття. Чим же обернеться ця зустріч?

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