

# SHERLOCK HOLMES STORIES

## THE REIGATE PUZZLE

By SIR ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE

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This is the third installment of the 27 Sherlock Holmes stories by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, appearing each Sunday morning in The Star. The story for next Sunday will be "The Resident Patient."

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 '17. The whole question of the Netherlands-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 the 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 11th 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 sickroom, and was relieved to find that there was nothing serious about the illness. Even his iron constitution, however, had broken down under the strain of an investigation which had extended over two months during which he had worked for 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 triumphantly issued telegram could not prevent him from reacting 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 outmaneuvered 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 spring time in the country was full of attraction 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 and his little diplomatic 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 plan, 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 his labor could not be 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 armory 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. "Why, 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 rimes, which must seem too small for your attention, Mr. Holmes, after this great international affair."

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, in my opinion, it is not 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."

"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 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 word or two about it. I have usually found my chair in the familiar attitude I know that the case was hopeless."

"We had no clue in the Acton affair. But here we have plenty to go on, and there's no doubt, it is the same party in each case. The man was seen."

"Yes, sir, but he was off like a deer after the shot that killed poor William Kirwan was fired. Mr. Cunningham saw him from the bedroom window, and Mr. Alec Cunningham saw him from the back passage. It was quarter of eight when the alarm broke out, and Mr. Alec had just got into bed, and Mr. Alec was smoking a pipe in his dressing-gown. They both heard help, and Mr. Alec ran down to see what was the matter. The back door was open, and as he came to the foot of the stairs he saw two men wrestling together outside. One of them fired a shot, the other dropped, and the murderer pushed across the garden and over the hedge. Mr. Cunningham, looking out of his bedroom, saw the fellow as he gained the road, but lost sight of him at once. Mr. Alec stopped to see if he could help the dying man, and so the villain got clean away. Beyond the fact that he was a middle-sized man and dressed in some dark stuff, we have no personal clue; but we are making energetic inquiries, and if it is a stranger we shall soon find him out."

est thought. When he raised his face again, I was surprised to see that his cheek was tinged with color, and his eyes as bright as before his illness. He sprang to his feet with all his old energy.

"I'll tell you what," said he, "I should like to have a quiet little glance into the details of this little case. There is something in it which fascinates me extremely. If you will permit me, Colonel, I will leave my friend Watson and you and I will step round with the inspector to test the truth of one or two of the points outside. I will be with you again in half an hour."

An hour and a half had elapsed before the inspector returned alone. "Mr. Holmes is walking up and down in the field outside," said he. "He wants us all four to go up to the house together."

"What for?" "The inspector shrugged his shoulders. "I don't quite know, sir. Between ourselves, I think Mr. Holmes has been behaving very queerly, and he is very much excited."

"I don't think you need alarm yourself," said Holmes, smiling. "I have usually found that there was method in his madness."

"Some folk might say there was madness in his method," muttered the inspector. "But you are a fire to start, Colonel, so we had best get out if you are ready."

We found Holmes pacing up and down in the field, his chin sunk upon his breast, and his hands thrust into his trousers pockets. "The matter grows in interest," said he. "Watson, your country-trip has been a distinct success. I have had a charming morning."

assumed the most dreadful expression. His eyes rolled upwards, his features writhed in agony, and with a suppressed groan he dropped on his face upon the ground. Horrified at the suddenness and severity of the attack, we carried him into the kitchen, where he lay back in a large chair, and breathed heavily for some minutes. Finally, with a shamefaced apology for his weakness, he rose to his feet.

"Watson would tell you that I have only just recovered from a severe illness," he explained. "I am liable to these sudden nervous attacks. Shall I send you home in my trap?" asked Old Cunningham.

"Well, since I am here, there is one point on which I should like to feel sure. We can very easily verify it."

"What was it?" "Well, it seems to me that it is just possible that the arrival of this poor fellow William was not before, but after, the entrance of the burglar into the house. You appear to take it for granted that, although the door was forced, the robber never got in."

"Mr. Cunningham, gravely. 'Why, my son Alec had not yet gone to bed, and he would certainly have heard any one moving about.'"

"I was smoking in my dressing-room."

"Which window is that?" "The last on the left, next my father's study."

"Both of your lamps were lit, of course?" "Undoubtedly."

the end of the stairs, and my son's is the one beyond it. I leave it to your judgment whether it was possible for the thief to have come up here without disturbing us."

"You must try round and get on with a fresh scent, I fancy," said the son with a rather malicious smile.

"Still, I must ask you to humor me a little further. I should like, for example, to see how far the windows of the bedrooms command the front. This, I understand, is your son's room?"

"He pushed open the door, and that, I presume, is the dressing-room in which he sat smoking when the alarm was given. Where does the window of that look out to?"

"He stepped across the bedroom, pushed open the door, and glanced round the other chamber."

"I hope that you are satisfied now?" said Mr. Cunningham, tartly.

"Thank you, I think I have seen all that I wished."

"Then if it is really necessary we can go into my room."

"That of murdering their coachman, William Kirwan."

The inspector stared about him in bewilderment. "Oh, come now, Mr. Holmes," said he, "last 'I'm sure you don't really mean to—"

"Tut, man, look at their faces!" cried Holmes, curtly.

Never certainly have I seen a plainer confession of guilt upon human countenances. The older man seemed numbed and dazed, with a heavy, sullen expression upon his strongly-marked face. The son, on the other hand, had dropped all that jaunty, dashing style which had characterized him, and the ferocity of a dangerous wild beast gleamed in his dark eyes and distorted his handsome features.

The inspector said nothing, but, stepping to the door, he blew his whistle. Two of his constables came at the call.

"I have no alternative, Mr. Cunningham," said he. "It is true that this may all prove to be an absurd mistake, but you can see that—Ah, would you drop it?"

"He struck out with his hand, and a revolver which the younger man was in the act of cocking clattered down upon the floor."

"Keep that," said Holmes, quietly putting his foot upon it; "you will find it useful at the trial. But this is what we really wanted." He held up a little crumpled piece of paper.

"We will come to that in its turn," said he. "I will lay an account of the case before you in its due order, giving you the various points which I interrupt me if there are any inferences which is not perfectly clear to you."

"It is of the highest importance, the art of detection to be able to recognize out of a number of faces, which are incidental and what other wise your energy and attention are dissipated instead of being concentrated. Now, in this case there is not the slightest doubt that the matter must be looked for in the paper in the dead man's hand."

"Before going into this, I would draw your attention to the fact that if Alec Cunningham's narrative was correct, and if the assailant, after shooting William Kirwan, had instantly then it obviously could not be the hand. But if it was not the hand, it would have been Alec Cunningham's for by the time that the old man descended several servants were upon the scene, and the part which had been played by Mr. Alec Cunningham had had nothing to do with the matter."

"The remainder of the sheet!" cried the inspector.

"Where I was sure it must be. I'll make the whole matter clear to you presently, I think, Colonel, that you will certainly see me back at luncheon time."

Sherlock Holmes was as good as his word, for about 1 o'clock he rejoined us in the Colonel's smoking-room. He was accompanied by a little elderly gentleman, who was introduced to me as the Mr. Acton whose house had been the scene of the original burglary.

"Now, I make a point of giving you a very brief analysis of the facts. A very brief analysis of the facts, four words would enable you to learn with the utmost confidence that the 'learn' and the 'maybe' are written in the stronger hand, and the 'what' the weaker."

"By Jove, it's as clear as day," cried the Colonel. "Why on earth should two men write a letter in such a fashion?"

*at graduate schools learn what maybe*

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