


The Return of SHERLOCK HOLMES

By A. CONAN DOYLE,
Author of "The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes,"
"The Hound of the Baskervilles," "The Sign of the Four," "A Study in Scarlet," Etc.



ILLUSTRATED BY F. D. STEELE

Late last night or early this morning an incident occurred at Lower Norwood which points to a serious crime. Mr. Jones Oldacre is a well known resident of that suburb, where he has carried on his business as a builder for many years. Mr. Oldacre is a bachelor, fifty-two years of age, and lives in Dees Den House at the 85-denham end of the road of that name. He has had the reputation of being a man of eccentric habits, sensitive and retiring. For some years he has practically withdrawn from the business in which he is said to have amassed considerable wealth. A small timber yard still exists, however, at the back of the house, and last night, about 12 o'clock, an alarm was given that one of the stacks was on fire. The engines were soon upon the spot, but the dry wood burned with great fury, and it was impossible to arrest the conflagration until the stack had been entirely consumed. Up to this point the incident bore the appearance of an ordinary accident, but fresh indications seem to point to serious crime. Street was expressed at the absence of the master of the establishment from the scene of the fire, and an inquiry followed, which showed that he had disappeared from the house. An examination of his room revealed that the bed had not been slept in, that a safe which stood in it was open, that a number of important papers were scattered about the room and finally that there were signs of a murderous struggle, slight traces of blood being found within the room, and an open walking stick, which also showed signs of blood upon the handle. It is known that Mr. Jones Oldacre had received a late visitor in his bedroom upon that night, and the stack found has been identified as the property of this person, who is a young London solicitor named John Hector McFarlane, Junior partner of Graham & McFarlane of 42 Grosvenor Gardens, E. C. The police believe that he has evidence in their possession which supplies a very convincing motive for the crime, and altogether it cannot be doubted that sensational developments will follow.

Later—it is rumored or we go to press that John Hector McFarlane has actually been arrested on the charge of the murder of Jones Oldacre. It is at least certain that a warrant has been issued. There have been further and sinister developments in the investigation at Norwood. Besides the signs of a struggle in the room of the unfortunate builder it is now known that the French window of his bedroom which is on the ground floor were found to be open, that there were marks as if some bulky object had been dragged across to the wood pile, and finally it is asserted that charred remains have been found among the charred ashes of the fire. The police theory is that a most sensational crime has been committed, that the victim was clubbed to death in his own bedroom, his papers piled and his dead body dragged across to the wood stack, which was then struck, so as to hide all traces of the crime. The conduct of the criminal investigation has been left in the experienced hands of Inspector Lestrade of Scotland Yard, who is following up the case with his accustomed energy and sagacity.

Sherlock Holmes listened, with closed eyes and finger tips together, to this remarkable account.

"The case has certainly some points of interest," said he in his languid fashion. "May I ask, in the first place, Mr. McFarlane, how it is that you are still at liberty, since there appears to be enough evidence to justify your arrest?"

"I live at Torrington Lodge, Blackheath, with my parents, Mr. Holmes, but last night, having to do business very late with Mr. Jones Oldacre, I stayed at a hotel in Norwood and came to my business from there. I knew nothing of this affair until I was in the train, when I read what you have just heard. I at once saw the horrible danger of my position, and I hurried to put the case into your hands. I have no doubt that I should have been arrested either at my city office or at my home. A man followed me from London Bridge station, and I have no doubt—Great heaven! What is that?"

"It was a clang of the bell, followed instantly by heavy steps upon the stair. A moment later our old friend Lestrade appeared in the doorway. Over his shoulder I caught a glimpse of one or two uniformed policemen outside."

"Mr. John Hector McFarlane?" said

the land and time it was impossible for me to say how late I might be. Mr. Oldacre had told me that he would like me to have supper with him at 8, as he might not be home before that hour. I had some difficulty in finding his house, however, and it was nearly half past before I reached it. I found him."

"One moment," said Holmes. "Who opened the door?"

"A middle aged woman, who was, I suppose, his housekeeper."

"And it was she, I presume, who mentioned your name?"

"Exactly," said McFarlane.

"Pray proceed."

McFarlane wiped his damp brow and then continued his narrative:

"I was shown by this woman into a sitting room, where a frugal supper was laid out. Afterward Mr. Jones Oldacre led me into his bedroom, in which there stood a heavy safe. This he opened and took out a mass of documents, which we went over together. It was between 11 and 12 when we finished. He remarked that we must not disturb the housekeeper. He showed me out through his own French window, which had been open all this time."

"Was the blind down?" asked Holmes.

"I will not be sure, but I believe that it was only half down. Yes, I remember how he pulled it up in order to swing open the window. I could not find my stick, and he said, 'Never mind, my boy, I shall see a good deal of you now, I hope, and I will keep your stick until you come back to claim it.' I left him there, the safe open and the papers made up in packets upon the table. It was so late that I could not get back to Blackheath, so I spent the night at the Aerley Arms, and I knew nothing more until I read of this horrible affair in the morning."

"Anything more that you would like to ask, Mr. Holmes?" said Lestrade, whose eyebrows had gone up once or twice during this remarkable explanation.

"Not until I have been to Blackheath."

"You mean to Norwood?" said Lestrade.

"Oh, yes; no doubt that is what I must have meant," said Holmes, with his enigmatical smile. Lestrade had learned by more experience than he would care to acknowledge that that razor-like brain could cut through that which was impenetrable to him. I saw him look curiously at my companion.

"I think I should like to have a word with you presently, Mr. Sherlock Holmes," said he. "Now, Mr. McFarlane, two of my constables are at the door, and there is a four wheeler waiting." The wretched young man arose and with a last beseeching glance at us walked from the room. The officers conducted him to the cab, but Lestrade remained.

Holmes had picked up the pages which formed the rough draft of the will and was looking at them with the keenest interest upon his face.

"There are some points about that document, Lestrade, are there not?" said he, pushing them over.

The official looked at them with a puzzled expression.

"I can read the first few lines and these in the middle of the second page and one or two at the end. Those are as clear as print," said he, "but the writing in between is very bad, and there are three places where I cannot read it at all."

"What do you make of that?" said Holmes.

"Well, what do you make of it?"

"That it was written in a train. The good writing represents stations, the bad writing movement, and the very bad writing passing over points. A self-evident expert would pronounce at once that this was drawn up on a suburban line, since nowhere save in the immediate vicinity of a great city could there be so quick a succession of points. Granting that his whole journey was occupied in drawing up the will, then the train was an express, only stopping once between Norwood and London bridge."

Lestrade began to laugh.

"You are too many for me when you begin to get on your theories, Mr. Holmes," said he. "How does this bear on the case?"

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