

# 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

"Not clear? Well, if that isn't clear what could be clear? Here is a young man who learns suddenly that if a certain older man dies he will succeed to a fortune. What does he do? He says nothing to any one, but he arranges that he shall go out on some pretext to see his client that night. He waits until the only other person in the house is in bed, and then in the solitude of the man's room he murders him, burns his body in the wood pile and departs to a neighboring hotel. The blood stains in the room and also on the stick are very slight. It is probable that he imagined his crime to be a bloodless one and hoped that if the body were consumed it would hide all traces of the method of his death, traces which for some reason must have pointed to him. Is not all this obvious?"

"It strikes me, my good Lestrade, as being just a trifle too obvious," said Holmes. "You do not add imagination to your other great qualities, but if you could for one moment put yourself in the place of this young man would you choose the very night after the will had been made to commit your crime? Would it not seem dangerous to you to make so very close a relation between the two incidents? Again, would you choose an occasion when you are known to be in the house, when a servant has let you in? And, finally, would you take the great pains to conceal the body and yet leave your own stick as a sign that you were the criminal? Confess, Lestrade, that all this is very unlikely."

"As to the stick, Mr. Holmes, you know as well as I do that a criminal is often flurried and does such things, which a cool man would avoid. He was very likely afraid to go back to the room. Give me another theory that would fit the facts."

"I could very easily give you half a dozen," said Holmes. "Here, for example, is a very possible and even probable one. I make you a free present of it. The older man is showing documents which are of evident value. A passing tramp sees them through the window, the blind of which is only half down. Exit the solicitor. Enter the tramp. He seizes a stick, which he observes there, kills Oldacre and departs after burning the body."

"Why should the tramp burn the body?"

"For the matter of that, why should McFarlane?"

"To hide some evidence."

"Possibly the tramp wanted to hide that any murder at all had been committed."

"And why did the tramp take nothing?"

"Because they were papers that he could not negotiate."

Lestrade shook his head, though it seemed to me that his manner was less absolutely assured than before.

"Well, Mr. Sherlock Holmes, you may look for your tramp, and while you are finding him we will hold on to our man. The future will show which is right. Just notice this point, Mr. Holmes—that so far as we know none of the papers were removed and that the prisoner is the one man in the world who had no reason for removing them, since he was heir at law and would come into them in any case."

My friend seemed struck by this remark.

"I don't mean to deny that the evidence is in some ways very strongly in favor of your theory," said he. "I only wish to point out that there are other theories possible. As you say, the future will decide. Good morning! I dare say that in the course of the day I shall drop in at Norwood and see how you are getting on."

When the detective departed my friend rose and made his preparations for the day's work with the alert air of a man who has a congenial task before him.

"My first movement, Watson," said he as he bustled into his frock coat, "must, as I said, be in the direction of Blackheath."

"And why not Norwood?"

"Because we have in this case one singular incident coming close to the heels of another singular incident. The police are making the mistake of concentrating their attention upon the second because it happens to be the one which is actually criminal. But it is evident to me that the logical way to approach the case is upon the first incident the curious will, so suddenly made and so unexpected as an heir. It may do something to simplify what follows. No, my dear fellow, I don't think you can help me. There is no prospect of danger, or I should not dream of stirring out without you. I trust that when I see you in the evening I will be able to report that I have been able to do something for this unfortunate youngster who has thrown himself upon my protection."

"It was late when my friend returned, and I could see by a glance at his haggard and anxious face that the high hopes with which he had started had not been fulfilled. For an hour he froned away upon his violin, endeavoring to soothe his own ruffled spirits. At last he flung down the instrument and plunged into a detailed account of his misadventures.

"It's all going wrong, Watson—all as wrong as it can go. I kept a bold face before Lestrade, but, upon my soul, I believe that for once the fellow is on the right track and we are on the wrong. All my instincts are one way, and all the facts are the other, and I much fear that British juries have not yet attained that pitch of intelligence when they will give the preference to my theories over Lestrade's ones."

"Did you go to Blackheath?"

"Yes, Watson, I went there, and I found very quickly that the late lamented Oldacre was a pretty considerable blackguard. The father was away in search of his son. The mother was at home a little, flabby, blue-eyed person, in a tremor of fear and indignation. Of course she would not admit even the possibility of his guilt. But she would not express either surprise or regret over the fate of Oldacre. On the contrary, she spoke of him with such bitterness that she was unconsciously considerably strengthening the case of the police. For, of course, if her son had heard her speak of the man in this fashion it would predispose him toward hatred and violence. He was more like a malignant and cunning ape than a human being," said she, "and he always was, ever since he was a young man."

"You knew him at that time?" said I.

"Yes, I knew him well. In fact, he was an old suitor of mine. Thank heaven that I had the sense to turn away from him and to marry a better, if poorer, man. I was engaged to him, Mr. Holmes, when I heard a shocking story of how he had turned a hot house in an asylum, and I was so horrified at his brutal cruelty that I would have nothing more to do with him." She rummaged in a bureau, and presently she produced a photograph of a woman shamefully defaced and mutilated with a knife. "That is my own photograph," she said. "He sent it to me in that state, with his curse upon my wedding morning."

"Well," said I, "let him be his for ever, but you, since he has left all his property to your son?"

"Oh, that's some one I want you to

thing from Jonas Oldacre, dead or alive," she cried, with a proper spirit. "There is a God in heaven, Mr. Holmes, and that same God who has punished that wicked man will show in his own good time that my son's hands are guiltless of his blood."

"Well, I tried one or two leads, but could get at nothing which would help our hypothesis and several points which would make against it. I gave it up at last, and off I went to Norwood.

"This place, Deep Dene House, is a big modern villa of staring brick standing back in its own grounds, with a laurel clumped lawn in front of it. To the right and some distance back from the road was the timber yard which had been the scene of the fire. Here's a rough plan on a leaf of my notebook. This window on the left is the one which opens into Oldacre's room. You can look into it from the road, you see. That is about the only bit of consolation I have had today. Lestrade was not there, but his head constable did the honors. They had just found a great treasure trove. They had spent the morning raking among the ashes of the burned wood pile, and besides the charred organic remains they had secured several discolored metal disks. I examined them with care, and there was no doubt that they were trouser buttons. I even distinguished that one of them was marked with the name of Hyams, who was Oldacre's tailor. I then walked the lawn very carefully for signs and traces, but this drought has made everything as hard as iron. Nothing was to be seen save that some body or bundle had been dragged through a low privet hedge which is in a line with the wood pile. All that, of course, fits in with the official theory. I crawled about the lawn with an August sun on my back, but I got up at the end of an hour no wiser than before.

"Well, after this fiasco I went into the bedroom and examined that also. The blood stains were very slight, mere smears and discolorations, but undeniably fresh. The stick had been removed, but there also the marks were slight. There is no doubt about the stick belonging to our client. He admits it. Footmarks of both men could be made out on the carpet, but none of my third person, which again is a trick for the other side. They were piling up their score all the time, and we were at a standstill.

"Only one little gleam of hope did I get, and yet it amounted to nothing. I examined the contents of the safe, most of which had been taken out and left on the table. The papers had been made up into sealed envelopes, one or two of which had been opened by the police. They were not, so far as I could judge, of any great value, nor did the bank book show that Mr. Oldacre was in such very affluent circumstances. But it seemed to me that all the papers were not there. There were allusions to some deeds, possibly the mere valuable which I could not find. This, of course, if we could definitely prove it, would turn Lestrade's argument against himself, for who would steal a thing if he knew that he would shortly inherit it?"

"Finally, having drawn every other cover and picked up no scent, I tried my luck with the housekeeper. Mrs. Lexington is her name, a little, dark, silent person, with suspicious and sidelong eyes. She could tell us something if she would. I am convinced of it. But she was as close as wax. Yes, she had let Mr. McFarlane in at half past 9. She wished her hand had withered before she had done so. She had gone to bed at half past 10. Her room was at the other end of the house and she could hear nothing of what passed. Mr. McFarlane had left his hat and, to the best of her belief, his stick in the hall. She had been awakened by the alarm of fire. Her poor, dear master had certainly been murdered. Had he any enemies? Well, every man had enemies, but Mr. Oldacre kept himself very much to himself and only met people in the way of business. She had seen the buttons and was sure that they belonged to the clothes which he had worn last night. The wood pile was very dry, for it had not rained for a month. It burned like tinder, and by the time she reached the spot nothing could be seen but flames. She

and all the firemen smelled the burned flesh from inside it. She knew nothing of the papers nor of Mr. Oldacre's private affairs.

"So, my dear Watson, there's my report of a failure. And yet—and yet"—he clinched his thin hands in a paroxysm of conviction—"I know it's all wrong. I feel it in my bones. There is something that has not come out, and that housekeeper knows it. There was a sort of sulky defiance in her eyes which only goes with guilty knowledge. However, there's no good talking any more about it, Watson. But unless some lucky chance comes our way I fear that the Norwood disappearance case will not figure in that chronicle of our successes which I foresee that a patient public will sooner or later have to endure."

"Surely," said I, "the man's appearance would go far with any jury."

"That is a dangerous argument, my dear Watson. You remember that terrible murderer, Bert Stevens, who wanted us to get him off in '87? Was there ever a more mild mannered, Sunday school 'young man'?"

(To be continued.)

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CONGREGATIONAL—Sabbath school, 9:45 a. m. Preaching, 11 a. m. and 8:00 p. m. Sermon, 10:00 a. m. Prayer meeting Thursday evening, 7:30 p. m. Ladies Auxiliary first Wednesday in each month at 2:30 p. m. Ladies Missionary society last Wednesday in each month at 3 p. m. G. A. McNee, Pastor.

GERMAN EVANGELICAL-PROTESTANT—Sunday school, 10:30 a. m. Preaching service, 10:30 a. m. Young People's Society, every two weeks, Sunday 7:30 p. m. Ladies Aid Society, first Thursday of each month, 2:30 p. m. Parochial school, Saturday 9 to 12 a. m. Confirmation class, Tuesday and Friday, 2:30 p. m. Rev. R. NEUBERGER, Pastor.

METHODIST—Preaching, 10:45 a. m. and 8:00 p. m. Sunday school, 12:30 p. m. Junior League, 4:30 p. m. Epworth League, 7:00 p. m. Prayer meeting, Thursday, 8:00 p. m. Ladies Aid society every other Wednesday at 3:30 p. m. LOUIS REID DE WOLF, Pastor.

BAPTIST—Sunday school, 10:30 a. m. Sermon, 11:00 a. m. Junior B. Y. P. U., 4:30 p. m. Senior B. Y. P. U., 7:00 p. m. Sermon, 8:00 p. m. Prayer meeting Thursday, 8:00 p. m. Rev. E. J. CLARK, Pastor.

GRACE EPISCOPAL—Low celebration, 8:00 a. m. Sunday School, 10:30 a. m. Preaching, 11:00 a. m. Evening service, 8:00 p. m. St. Andrews Brotherhood, second Tuesday of each month. Prayers of the King, second Tuesday of each month. Ladies Guild, second Wednesday of each month. Rev. W. A. CASH, Rector.

GERMAN LUTHERAN—Preaching, 10:30 a. m. Sunday School, 2 p. m. Ladies Society meets one Thursday in each month. Rev. H. MUEHLER, Pastor.

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ST. BONAVENTURA CATHOLIC—Sunday services, mass and sermon, 8, 9 and 10:30 o'clock. Sunday school and benediction at 1 o'clock. The 9 o'clock mass is given in Polish and the 10 o'clock mass in German and English. Week-day mass every morning at 7 o'clock. Fridays at 3:45 o'clock, stations and benediction. Confessions heard from 4 to 6 o'clock on Saturdays and from 7 to 9 on Sunday morning. Confessions also Sunday morning before 8 o'clock mass. PATRICK THEODORE KALAMAJA, Priest.

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