A Study In Scarlet

By Arthur Conan Doyle
Retold by Alex Woolf
Illustrated by Eve O'Brien



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Contents

CHAPTER 1
Mr. Sherlock Holmes 4

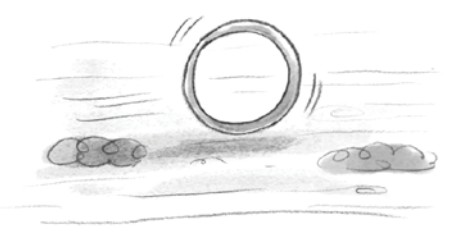
CHAPTER 2
The Scene of the Crime 18

CHAPTER 3
Gregson Solves the Case! 30

CHAPTER 4
The Mysterious Pills 42

CHAPTER 5
Jefferson Hope's Tale 50

CHAPTER 6
How He Knew 62



CHAPTER 1

Mr. Sherlock Holmes

People often ask me how I first met Sherlock Holmes. In the year 1878, I became a surgeon in the army and joined a regiment stationed in India. In 1880, I was struck in the arm by a bullet in Afghanistan. Then, while recovering in hospital, I came down with a fever which left me so weak that the army medical board decided to send me back to England.



I ended up in London where I took up residence in a hotel on the Strand. London is a vast, unfriendly place when you don't know anyone. It's also expensive, and I could barely make ends meet. One day, I was sitting in a bar by myself, thinking I should probably find somewhere cheaper to live, when I felt a tap on the shoulder. To my delight, I saw it was Stamford, an old colleague from my days as a hospital doctor.

"Where have you been, Dr. Watson?" he cried. "You're as thin as a rake."

I told him briefly about my misadventures in the East.

"Poor devil!" he said. "What are you up to now?"

"Looking for lodgings."

"By Jove!" he said. "You're the second person to say that to me today."

"Who was the first?" I asked.

"A fellow called Sherlock Holmes, who works in the chemical laboratory at the hospital. He was complaining this morning because he couldn't find anyone to go halves with him on some lovely rooms he'd found on Baker Street."

"Well, if he's looking for a roommate, I'm the man for him," I said. "I'm fed up with living alone."

"I warn you, he's a little strange," said Stamford.

"Strange in what way?"

"He's rather too scientific for my tastes—almost cold-blooded in his search for the truth."

"Is he a medical student?"

"No—I don't really know what he is. He's very knowledgeable on anatomy, and a first-class chemist, but his studies are very eccentric."

Something about this man intrigued me. "I should like to meet him," I said.

So, after lunch, we drove over to the hospital, where we found Holmes in the chemical laboratory. At the sound of our steps, he glanced around and uttered a cry of pleasure. "I've found it!" he cried. "I've found the perfect test for identifying blood stains."

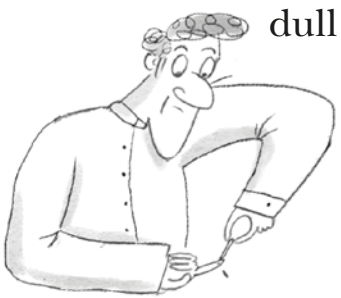


"Sherlock Holmes, meet Dr. John Watson," said Stamford.

"Pleased to meet you," said Holmes, shaking my hand. "You've been in Afghanistan, I see."

"How on earth did you know that?" I asked in astonishment.

"Never mind," he said. "Come and observe this test." He seized me by the coat sleeve and dragged me to the table where he'd been working. "I need fresh blood," he said, pricking his finger with a long needle and drawing a drop of blood into a jar full of water and stirring it. He added some crystals and a drop of transparent fluid, and the water turned a dull brown. "You see!" he said. "The presence of even the tiniest drop of blood can



be revealed by this method."



"And how is this useful?" I asked.

"Why, it could determine a person's guilt or innocence of a crime," he declared. "A suspect might have brownish stains on his clothing. Are they blood, mud, or fruit juice? The Sherlock Holmes test will determine the truth!" His eyes glittered as he spoke, and he gave a bow, as if to an applauding crowd.

"Congratulations, Holmes," said Stamford, "but we're actually here on business. My friend here is, like you, looking for lodgings, so I thought I'd bring you two together."

Holmes seemed delighted by the idea.

"You don't mind me conducting chemical experiments in the flat?" he asked. "Or playing the violin?"



"Not at all," I said.

"I get down in the dumps sometimes. You mustn't think I'm sulky. Just leave me alone and I'll soon be all right."

"That's fine," I said.

"Well, that's settled then," he smiled. "Why don't you come and see the rooms tomorrow?"

We met the next day at noon and inspected the flat at 221B Baker Street. It consisted of a couple of comfortable bedrooms and a large sitting room, cheerfully furnished. The landlady, Mrs. Hudson, seemed very friendly. We moved

in that same evening and began unpacking and getting settled.



Holmes was an interesting man to live with. When busy on some project, he worked on it nonstop with a frenzied kind of energy, barely stopping to sleep or eat. But when he had nothing going on, he'd lie around for days on end, barely uttering a word or moving a muscle.

I discovered he had an extraordinary knowledge of certain subjects, such as poisons and the law, but was surprisingly ignorant about other things.

"You mean you really didn't know that the Earth goes round the Sun?" I cried.

"What does it matter whether we go around the Sun or the Moon?" he declared impatiently. "It makes no difference to me or my work."

I often wondered what that work was, but something about his manner stopped me from asking. He had many visitors, who he called his "clients", and they seemed to come from all walks of life: there was a sallow-faced, bespectacled man called Lestrade, who called three or four times a week. Holmes was also visited by a fashionably dressed young woman, an elderly tradesman, and a railway porter in his uniform.



Holmes would meet with his clients in our sitting room. I was filled with curiosity about what went on in these meetings, but I preferred to wait for Holmes to tell me about it himself.

One morning—it was March 4, 1881—he finally did. We were eating breakfast, and I happened to be glancing at an article in a magazine. "What complete twaddle!" I said after a moment, flinging the magazine aside.

"What's that?" asked Holmes.

"This article claims you can work out the personality, habits, and job of a complete stranger simply through observation and deduction. It's utter nonsense!"

"Oh yes, I wrote that one," said Holmes calmly.

"You?" I cried.

"Yes, and I assure you the methods I describe are entirely practical—in fact, I use them to do my job."

"And what job is that?"

"I'm a consulting detective—possibly the only one in the world. When police detectives and private detectives get stuck, they come to me. Lestrade, for example—that bespectacled chap who's often here—works for the London police."

"Not all your visitors look like detectives," I remarked.

"Some are ordinary citizens recommended to me by private investigators. They're all people with troubles of one sort or another. I listen to their stories, solve their problems, then pocket my fee."

"And you do all this using observation and deduction? It sounds impossible."

"Oh, you'd be surprised. When we first met, I used those methods to work out you'd been in Afghanistan."

"But how?"

"Well, Stamford introduced you as 'Doctor' and you have a military way of walking, so most likely an army doctor. Your tan wasn't your natural skin tone because your wrists were pale, so you'd been somewhere hot. Your haggard face and the stiffness in your arm suggested you'd undergone hardship and injury. The most recent military action involving the British army in a hot country was in Afghanistan, so that had to be where you'd been."



"It's quite simple when you explain it," I said.

Holmes sighed. "Everyone says that—yet no one seems able to do it but me."

There was a knock at the door and a messenger handed Holmes a letter. He opened it and read it to me:

Dear Mr. Holmes

There was a murder last night at 3 Lauriston Gardens, off the Brixton Road. A policeman saw a light on at about two o'clock and went to investigate. He found the door open and, in the front room, the corpse of a man. Cards in his pocket identify him as Mr. Enoch Drebber of Cleveland, Ohio, USA. The house is empty and there's blood in the room, but no evidence of how the man met his death. The whole affair is a puzzler. Come any time before twelve and you'll find me here. I would be grateful for your opinion.

Yours faithfully,

Tobias Gregson



"Gregson is one of the brightest detectives in the London police force," remarked Holmes. "He and Lestrade are both quick and energetic, but they're too conventional in their thinking. They're jealous of each other, too. I'll have some fun in this case if they're both put on the scent!"