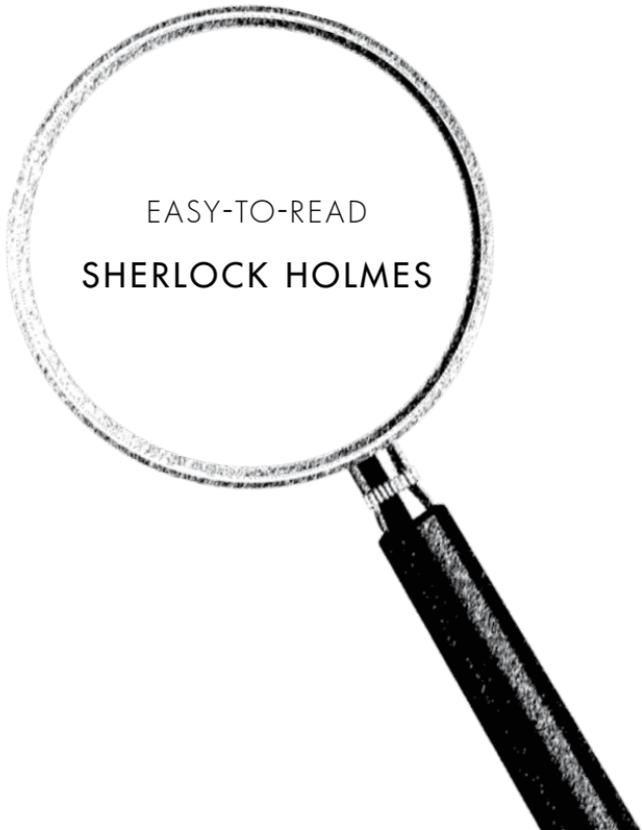


Sherlock Holmes

The Sign of Four

The famous story by Arthur Conan Doyle,
retold by Helene Bakker



Sherlock Holmes was a famous English private detective. He didn't really exist, but the writer Arthur Conan Doyle wrote so well that many people think he did.

Sherlock Holmes started work as a detective about 150 years ago in the city of London, along with his friend Doctor Watson. The way Holmes solved attacks and murders has made him famous all over the world. Even today, films are still made about his detective work. A film was made recently about the mysterious case you will read about in this book.

CHAPTER 1

A mysterious letter

Holmes and Watson have been living in the same house for many years.

One day the doorbell rings. Watson opens the door.

A young woman is standing there.

Such beautiful blue eyes, and what a sweet face, he thinks.

‘I’m Mary Morstan. I’ve heard you can solve difficult cases.’

Watson chuckles. ‘Oh no, you’re looking for my friend Sherlock Holmes, but come on in. You can tell him yourself what’s up.’

Watson takes her to the living room.

She walks over to Holmes, introduces herself and says, ‘Help me, please, Mr Holmes. Strange things are happening. I don’t understand it at all.’

She turns to Watson and asks if he will stay.

‘It’s very important that you hear what happened too,’ she says.

‘Of course I’ll stay – gladly,’ says Watson.

He pulls up a chair for her, near to Holmes, and sits down himself.

‘My father,’ the woman begins, ‘Was a captain in the British army in India.* I was still a small child when my mother died there.

‘My father decided it was best for me to return to England. I had no family here at all, so he arranged very good lodgings for me.

‘Ten years ago my father retired. He came back to England. When he arrived in London, he let me know immediately which hotel he was staying in, and invited me to come and see him. I went, but he wasn’t there. He had gone out the evening before and had not returned.

‘I waited all day at the hotel, but he didn’t come. That evening I called the police.

* India was a British colony at this time, which is why the British army was there.

‘When he was still missing a day later, I put a notice in all the newspapers.’

‘When was that exactly?’ Holmes wants to know.

‘He disappeared on 3rd December 1878, almost 10 years ago.’

‘Was there anything left at the hotel?’ Holmes asks.

‘Only a suitcase with some clothes and a couple of souvenirs from India.’

‘Did he have friends in London too?’

‘One. An old colleague from the army. Major Sholto. But he didn’t even know my father was in England.’

‘Strange.’

‘Yes, but six years ago it became even stranger. In *The Times* newspaper on 4th May 1882, I read my name in an advertisement. *Where does Mary Morstan live? This is important*, it read.

‘I placed a notice in the same newspaper with my address. Soon afterwards a package came for me in the post.’

'It was a little box containing a very large pearl. From then on I received a little box every year on the same date, always containing a pearl. Look!'

Mary shows them all six pearls.

'I say, they're magnificent!' says Watson.

'Yes, they're rare, precious pearls, but there's something else too, and that's why I'm here. Today I received this mysterious letter,' says Mary.

'Would you like to read it yourself?'

Holmes takes the letter and reads aloud:

'Come to the Lyceum Theatre this evening at seven o'clock. Go and stand by the third pillar on the left. You have suffered an injustice and we must make it up to you.

You may bring two friends along if you do not trust me, but no police, otherwise the whole thing will be pointless.

Your unknown friend.'

'So what are you going to do, Miss Mary?' asks Holmes.

'That's what I wanted to ask you.'

'I suggest we go there this evening, you, me and Doctor Watson. Don't you agree, Watson?'

'Of course.'

'Another thing,' says Mary. 'The letter and the pearls were sent by the same person. Look, I saved the package with my address written on it.'

Holmes picks up his magnifying glass and compares the handwriting.

'Indeed, it is the same person.'

They agree that Miss Morstan will return at six o'clock in the evening.

She leaves the letter behind, but tucks the box with the six pearls into her blouse.

Then she leaves.

CHAPTER 2

In love?

‘What a lovely woman!’ says Watson.

He stands at the window, watching Mary Morstan walk down the street.

‘Oh yes?’ says Holmes. ‘I wasn’t paying attention.’

‘Sometimes you’re like a robot, Holmes. Who doesn’t pay attention to beautiful women!’

‘I don’t want to have feelings for a client. If I do, I can’t think clearly.’

‘But Mary Morstan...’

‘No, Watson. You can fall in love if you want to, but I need to focus. I’m off now. It’s already half past three and I need to investigate something. I’ll be back in an hour.’

Watson tries to read a book, but he keeps thinking of Mary – her smile, her blue eyes, her sweet voice. She must be twenty-seven years old now, a beautiful age...

Holmes doesn't get back until half past five.

'I can only think of one explanation,' he says excitedly.

'What?' Watson cries out. 'Have you already solved the case?'

'No, but I have discovered something important. Didn't Mary mention Major Sholto, her father's colleague, his only friend in London? That man has been dead for six years.

'Since then Mary has received a pearl a year on the anniversary of his death, and now a letter saying that she has suffered an injustice.

'Why would she only receive those pearls after Sholto's death? I think his heir wants to make up for something.'

'But Holmes, why is this heir only writing a letter now, rather than six years ago?'

'I think we're about to find out, but first let's have something to eat quickly – it's almost six.'