The Return of SHERLOCK HOLMES

By A. CONAN DOYLE.

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

ILLUSTRATED BY F. D. STEELE

The Adventure of the Empty House

No. 1 of the Series

My friend's plans were gradually unfolding themselves. From this excellent retreat the watchers were being watched and the trackers tracked. That night's work up Baker street was to lead, and we knew the moment. It simplified our task greatly in the darkness and mist that the hunting tigress who paced and prowled in front of us. Holmes was in his element, and I could tell by his manner, which always became more demonstrative and vivacious as the crisis approached, that he felt that the end was near. And I—I had my own peculiar reasons for excitement. My nerves were strung as high as those of the trained hunters around me. I was fierce with eagerness for the sport. I remember that I cursed the stolidity of the London detective who paced beside me, and I recall the precise words which I used in order to control myself. I was conscious of a wild desire to throw my arms round him and to embrace him for the joy which thrilled within me. Perhaps I had been overstrained by the events of the last few days, and the reaction was coming.

"Am I not a fiend, Watson?" I asked. "Am I not a monster? Here is this man who has done me this wrong, that I should wish to do him a wrong which would cause him to curse me as he lies dying. Yet when I hear that he is trapped I am overcome with joy, and I would give my own life to make sure of his death. Is there not some evil influence which comes from these fiendish surroundings, and which has entered into my soul?"

"I should say that your feelings are entirely natural," he answered. "You have been subjected to a most cruel and unprovoked outrage, and your natural anger is increased by the fact that you are prevented from personally avenging yourself. Your self-control is admirable. Hush! I think that he is coming!"

Down the long, dimly lit street I could see a tall, loose-limbed figure approaching us. He walked slowly, peering occasionally into the doorways as if looking for some particular address. Finally he reached the door of the empty house, and we heard the click of a key as he inserted it and entered. A minute passed, then a light gleamed up in the window of the room in front of which we lay. The chink of the sash being raised was distinctly audible. Then all was silent once more, and the single light shone steadily out into the foggy night. Minute after minute passed slowly away, and we crouched motionless in the damp laurel bushes, waiting for what was to follow.

Suddenly I was aware of that which his keener senses had already distinguished. A low, stealthy sound came to my ears not from the direction of Baker street, but from the back of the very house in which we lay concealed. A door opened and shut. An instant later steps crept down the passage—steps which were meant to be silent, but which reverberated harshly through the empty house. Holmes crouched back against the wall, and I did the same, my hand closing upon the handle of my revolver. Peering through the gloom, I saw the vague outline of a man, a shade blacker than the blackness of the open door. He stood for an instant, and then he crept forward, crossing the lighted space within three yards of us, his dim figure and the deep shadow behind him made him appear like a colossal human spider. He had reached the window, opened it with the utmost caution, passed through, and closed it behind him. Every movement showed that he was perfectly familiar with the method of procedure. As the light flashed up the man's features I saw that he was a middle-aged, sunburned person, clean-shaven, with a thin, projecting nose, a high, bald forehead, and a huge gray moustache. An opera hat was pushed to the back of his head, and an evening dress shirt front gleamed out through his open overcoat. His face was grim and purposeful, accord with deep, sombre lines. In his hand he carried what appeared to be a stick, but as he laid it upon the floor it gave a metallic clink. Then from the pocket of his overcoat he drew a bulky object, and he busied himself in some task which ended with a loud, sharp click, as if a spring or bolt had fallen into its place. Still kneeling upon the floor, he bent forward and threw all his weight and strength upon some lever, with the result that there came a long, whirring, grinding noise, ending once more in a powerful click. He straightened himself then, and I saw that what he held in his hand was a sort of gun, with a curiously misshapen butt. He opened it at the breech, put something in and snapped the breech-block. Then, crouching down, he rested the end of the barrel upon the ledge of the open window, and I saw his long moustache droop over the stock and his eye gleam as it peered along the sights. I heard a little sigh of satisfaction as he nestled the butt into his shoulder and saw that amazing target, the black man on the yellow ground, standing clear at the end of his foresight. For an instant he was rigid and motionless. Then his finger tightened on the trigger. There was a strange, low whiz and a loud silvery tinkle of broken glass. At that instant Holmes sprang like a tiger on to the marksman's back and hurled him flat upon his face. He was up again in a moment, and with convulsive strength he seized Holmes by the throat, but I struck him on the head with the butt of my revolver, and he dropped again upon the floor. I fell upon him, and as I held him my comrade blew a shrill call upon a whistle. There was the clatter of running feet upon the pavement, and two policemen in uniform, with one plain clothes detective, rushed through the front entrance and into the room.

"That you, Lestrade?" said Holmes.

"Yes, Mr. Holmes. I took the job myself. It's good to see you back in London, sir."

"I think you want a little unofficial help. Three undetected murders in one year won't do, Lestrade. But you handled the Monkey mystery with less than your usual—that's to say, you handled it fairly well."

We had all risen to our feet, our prisoner breathing hard, with a stalwart constable on each side of him. Already a few loiterers had begun to collect in the street. Holmes stepped up to the window, closed it and dropped the blinds. Lestrade had produced two candles, and the policemen had uncovered their lanterns. I was able at last to have a good look at our prisoner.

It was a tremendously virile and yet sinister face which was turned toward us. With the brow of a philosopher above and the jaw of a sensualist below, the man must have started with great capacities for good or for evil. But one could not look upon his cruel blue eyes, with their drooping, evilly lids, or upon the fierce, aggressive nose and the threatening, deep lined brow without reading nature's plainest danger signals. He took no heed of any of us, but his eyes were fixed upon Holmes' face with an expression in which hatred and amazement were equally blended. "You fiend," he kept on muttering—"you clever, clever fiend!"

"Ah, colonel," said Holmes, arranging his rumpled collar, "journeys end in lovers' meetings, as the old play says. I don't think I have had the pleasure of seeing you since you favored me with those attentions as I lay on the floor above the Bedford's Hotel."

The colonel glared at my friend like a wild beast at bay. "You cunning devil!" was all that he could say.

"I owe you an apology for not taking you into my confidence, colonel," said Holmes, "but the fact is that I was not sure till the very end which way my game lay, and I had no wish to put a premature check upon your movements. You were endeavoring to murder the Honorable Ronald Adair when I had the pleasure of first making your acquaintance, were you not?"

Colonel Moran sprang forward with a snarl of rage, but the constables dragged him back. The fury upon his face was terrible to look at.

"I confess that you had one small surprise for me," said Holmes. "I did not anticipate that you would yourself make use of this empty house and this convenient front window. I had imagined you as operating from the street, where my friend Lestrade and his merry men were awaiting you. With that exception all has gone as I expected."

Colonel Moran turned to the official detective.

"You may or may not have just cause for arresting me," said he, "but at least there can be no reason why I should submit to the gibes of this person. If I am in the hands of the law let things be done in a legal way."

"Well, that's reasonable enough," said Lestrade. "Nothing further you have to say, Mr. Holmes, before we go?"

Holmes had picked up the powerful air gun from the floor and was examining its mechanism.

"An admirable and unique weapon," he said, "noiseless and of tremendous power. I know Von Herder, the blind German mechanic, who constructed it to the order of the late Professor Moriarty. For years I have been aware of its existence, though I have never before had the opportunity of handling it. I commend it very specially to your attention, Lestrade, and also the bullets which fit it."

"You can trust us to look after that, Mr. Holmes," said Lestrade as the whole party moved toward the door. "Anything further to say?"

"Only to ask what charge you intend to prefer?"

"What charge, sir? Why, of course the attempted murder of Mr. Sherlock Holmes."

"Not so, Lestrade. I do not propose to appear in the matter at all. To you and to you only belongs the credit of the remarkable arrest which you have effected. Yes, Lestrade, I congratulate you! With your usual happy mixture of cunning and audacity, you have got him."

"Got him! Got whom, Mr. Holmes?"

"The man that the whole force has been seeking in vain—Colonel Sebastian Moran, who shot the Hon. Ronald Adair with an expanding bullet from an air gun through the open window of the second floor front of 427 Park lane upon the 30th of last month. That's the charge, Lestrade. And now, Watson, if you can endure the draft from a broken window I think that half an hour in my study over a cigar may afford you some profitable amusement."

Our old chambers had been left unchanged through the supervision of Mycroft Holmes and the immediate care of Mrs. Hudson. As I entered I saw, it is true, an unwonted tidiness, but the old landmarks were all in their place. There was the chemical corner and the acid stained, deal topped table. There upon a shelf was the row of formidable scrapbooks and books of reference which many of our fellow citizens would have been so glad to burn. The diagrams, the violin case and the pipe rack—even the Persian slipper which contained the tobacco—all met my eyes as I glanced round me. There were two occupants of the room—one, Mrs. Hudson, who beamed upon us both as we entered; the other the strange dummy which had played so important a part in the evening's adventures. It was a wax colored model of my friend so admirably done that it was a perfect facsimile. It stood on a small pedestal table with an old dressing gown of Holmes' so draped round it that the illusion from the street was absolutely perfect.

"I hope you preserved all precautions, Mrs. Hudson?" said Holmes.

"I went to it on my knees, sir, just as you told me."

"Excellent. You carried the thing out well. Did you observe where the bullet went?"

"Yes, sir. I'm afraid it has spoilt your beautiful bust, for it passed right through the head and flattened itself on the wall. I picked it up from the carpet. Here it is!"

Holmes held it out to me. "A soft nosed bullet, as you perceive, Watson. There's genius in that, for who would expect to find such a thing fired from an air gun. All right, Mrs. Hudson! I am much obliged for your assistance. And now, Watson, let me see your head and arm once more, for I hope you have not lost your interest in our little problems."

He had thrown off the rough frock coat and here he was the Holmes of old in the mouse colored dressing gown which he took from his effigy.

"The old shikari's nerves have not lost their steadiness nor his eyes their keenness," said he, with a laugh, as he inspected the shattered forehead of his bust.

"Pistol in the middle of the back of the head and smack through the brain.

(Continued on next page.)

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TIMBER LAND NOTICE

United States Land Office Lakeview, Oregon, July 3d, 1905. Notice is hereby given that in compliance with the provisions of the Act of June 3, 1878, entitled "An act for the sale of timber lands in the States of California, Oregon, Nevada and Washington Territory," as extended to all the Public Land States by act of August 4, 1892, the following persons have this day filed in this office their sworn statements, to-wit:

Mrs. Lizzie Mayer, of Portland, county of Multnomah, state of Oregon, Sworn Statement No. 2956, for the S½ SW¼, Sec. 27, and W½ NW¼, SE¼ NW¼ Sec. 34, Tp. 35, S., R. 17 E.

Margaret Ryan, of Marquet, state of Michigan, Sworn statement No. 2957, for the purchase of the NW¼ Sec. 28, Tp. 35, S., R 17 E.

Martin Ryan, of Marquet, state of Mich. Sworn statement No. 2958, for the purchase of the E½ NE¼, SW¼ NE¼, NW¼ SE¼, Sec. 27, Tp. 35 S., R. 17 E.

That they will offer proof to show that the land sought is more valuable for its timber or stone than for agricultural purposes and to establish their claim to said land before Geo. T. Baldwin, Co. Judge, at his office at Klamath Falls, on Tuesday the 12th day of Sept. 1905. They name as witnesses: Margaret Ryan, of Marquet, Mich., Oliver Slifer, of Woodland, Wash., Martin Ryan, of Marquet, Mich., C. W. Embody, of Portland, Oregon, C. E. Peterson, of Stevenson, Wash., and Albert Peterson, of Stevenson, Wash.

Any and all persons claiming adversely the aloved-described lands are requested to file their claims in this office on or before said 12th day of Sept., 1905.

27-36 J. N. Watson, Register.

Final Proof

Land Office at Lakeview, Oregon, July 3d, 1905. Notice is hereby given that the following named settler has filed notice of his intention to make final proof in support of his claim, and that said proof will be made before the Register and Receiver at Lakeview, Oregon, on the 14th day of August, 1905 viz: Anna M. Whetstone, widow of Amos Whetstone Hd No. 2185 for the NE¼ SE¼ and Lots 1 and 2 Sec 33 Tp 39 S., R 20 E w M. He names the following witnesses to prove his continuous residence upon and cultivation of said land, viz: F. M. Duke, Hurley Vernon, A. S. Down and Chas. Eccleston all of Lakeview, Oregon.

27-31 J. N. Watson, Register.

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