

MACMILLAN READERS

INTERMEDIATE LEVEL

SIR ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE

The Sign of Four

Retold by Anne Collins



MACMILLAN

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A Visitor for Sherlock Holmes

For many years, I shared an apartment in London with my friend, Sherlock Holmes.

My name is Doctor Watson. I worked as a doctor in the British Army for several years. While I was in the army, I travelled to many strange and interesting places. I had many exciting adventures.

Then one day, in Afghanistan, I was shot in the shoulder. My wound was deep and took many months to heal. I nearly died from pain and fever. At last I got better, but I could not work in the army any more. I retired from the army and came back to England.

That is why I was living in London with Sherlock Holmes. I had known my friend for many years. Our address was 221B Baker Street, in the centre of the city.

I enjoyed sharing an apartment with Holmes. My friend was a very clever man. He was the most famous private detective¹ in London. He helped to solve crimes and catch criminals.

When people were in trouble or needed help, they came to Holmes. Sometimes the police came to Holmes and asked for help in catching a criminal.

Sherlock Holmes did not care if his clients² were rich or poor. He enjoyed solving their interesting problems. He was very happy when he was working. It was the most important thing in his life.

One afternoon, I was reading a book and Holmes was standing by the window in our sitting-room. Usually he was very busy and active. But this afternoon he did not seem very happy. I was worried about my friend.

‘What’s the matter with you today, Holmes?’ I asked.

‘Come and stand at the window, Watson,’ Holmes said. Look out into the street. See how uninteresting London is today.’

It was winter. The street outside was almost empty. Everyone was at home in front of their warm fires.

‘I need some work, Watson,’ said Holmes impatiently³. ‘I cannot live without interesting problems and mysteries. That’s why I became a private detective. I love my work. It keeps my brain active. But when there are no crimes and no mysteries to solve – ah, then life becomes very boring for me.’

He turned sadly away from the window.

At that moment, there was a knock at the door. Our house-keeper⁴ came into the room. She was carrying a small white card on a silver tray⁵. Holmes picked up the card.

‘Miss Mary Morstan,’ he read aloud. ‘I don’t know anyone of that name. Please ask the lady to come in. Perhaps it is a new client.’

A few moments later, Miss Morstan entered the room. She was young and not very tall, with blonde hair and blue eyes. Her clothes were not fashionable, but they were clean and tidy. She had a lovely face. I noticed at once that she looked worried and unhappy.

‘Please sit down, Miss Morstan,’ said Holmes kindly. ‘I am Sherlock Holmes and this is my good friend, Doctor Watson. Doctor Watson and I have worked together many times.’

‘I’m very pleased to meet you both,’ said the young lady. Then she turned to Holmes and looked at him with her lovely blue eyes.

‘Mr Holmes, I’ve heard that you give people good advice. I’m not a rich woman but I hope you can help me too. Something very strange has happened. Mr Holmes, I need your help!’



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Miss Morstan's Story

Holmes rubbed his hands together excitedly. His eyes shone and he leant forward in his chair.

'Tell us your story,' he said.

Miss Morstan began her story and we listened.

'My father,' she began, 'was a captain in the army. When I was very young, he was sent to India. My mother was dead and I had no other relatives in England. So, while my father was away, I was sent to school.

'When I was seventeen, I received a letter from my father. He said that he was leaving India and coming back to England. He