Sherlock Holmes and the Mystery of Boscombe Pool

SIR ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE

Level 3

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Introduction

'Everything points to the fact that the young man is guilty, does it not?' I said.

'The facts are not always what they seem,' answered Holmes. 'If we look at them in another way, they can tell quite a different story.'

Sherlock Holmes has asked his friend, Dr Watson, to go with him by train to the west of England. Holmes has to study another crime, and only Watson can help him. As usual, it is Dr Watson who tells the story.

A rich man, Charles McCarthy, is dead. He died near Boscombe Pool. He was hit on the head with something heavy. Who killed him? The police are sure that they know. Young Patience Moran saw Mr McCarthy and his son, James, by the lake. They were both shouting. James was very angry. He lifted up his arm. Did he hit his father? Patience was afraid so she ran home.

The facts are clear to Detective Lestrade of Scotland Yard. But Miss Turner does not believe that James killed his father. She loves James and she wants Sherlock Holmes to find the guilty man. Holmes works from the point of view that the young man is innocent. But the police have taken James to prison. There, he waits for the case to come to court. Holmes works carefully and he listens to everyone's story. His job is to find the real murderer. Lestrade can not understand why Holmes is spending so much time on this 'easy' case.

Arthur Conan Doyle was born in 1859 in Edinburgh, Scotland. He was one of seven children. He was a clever boy, who loved reading. His father, Charles Altamont Doyle, drank too much and in his later life had a serious illness of the mind. Arthur's mother, Mary Foley, loved books and was a very good story-teller. Arthur

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loved his mother's stories. He was very sad when he was sent to England to study at the age of nine. But he enjoyed writing letters to his mother, which he did often. Like his mother, he was a very good story-teller and the younger boys at school loved his stories.

After he finished school, he studied medicine at Edinburgh University. One of the teachers there was a doctor called Joseph Bell. Bell could guess a person's job correctly by looking at him. He had a scientific way of studying people's faces, movements, and clothes. When Conan Doyle was writing about his great detective, he remembered Joseph Bell. Like Bell, Sherlock Holmes was also tall and thin.

After Conan Doyle finished his studies, he first worked as a ship's doctor. Then he went to work in the south-west of England, near Portsmouth. He lived there for eight years. His medical work was successful but he was able to find time for writing too. In August 1885, he married Louisa Hawkins. A few years later, they had a daughter and in 1892, a son was born.

His first book about Sherlock Holmes was *A Study in Scarlet*, which he wrote in 1887. He sent it to two book companies but they sent the book back. A third company accepted it but they paid Conan Doyle only £25. *The Sign of Four* came out three years later, making Sherlock Holmes a famous name.

Conan Doyle's real success with Sherlock Holmes began in 1891 when he started to write short stories for the *Strand Magazine*. Later, these stories came out as complete books: first, *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* (1892) and then *The Memoirs of Sherlock Holmes* (1894). In May 1891, Conan Doyle was very ill for some days. When he felt better, he made an important decision. He gave up his work as a doctor and he became a full-time writer.

Conan Doyle began to get tired of his detective and he wanted to 'kill' him. In one story, Holmes had a fight with his

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greatest enemy, Professor Moriarty, and he fell to his death in the Swiss mountains. Conan Doyle was unhappy that readers didn't show the same interest in his historical books like *The White Company* (1891) or his scientific adventure stories like *The Lost World* (1912). Everybody still preferred Sherlock Holmes and Dr Watson. Conan Doyle found that he had to bring Holmes back to life. So he wrote five more books about him. Each of these was an immediate success.

In 1900, he wanted to help with the war in Africa. He offered to work as a doctor without pay for a few months. When he returned to England, he wanted to become a politician. But he did not win a seat so he returned to London. There, he wrote his very famous Sherlock Holmes story *The Hound of the Baskervilles* (1901).

Conan Doyle's wife died in his arms on 4 July 1906. On 18 September 1907 he married Jean Leckie and they had two sons and a daughter. He died in 1930 at the age of 71.

Conan Doyle was not the first person to write detective stories. He got the idea from one of his favourite writers, the American Edgar Allan Poe. But Poe's French detective, Dupin, is not as famous as Sherlock Holmes because Poe wrote only two short stories about him. Sherlock Holmes, on the other hand, is in over a hundred stories. Today, Holmes is still the world's most famous fictional detective in English literature. The stories are read by people all round the world in many different languages. There have been many plays, films, and television programmes about Holmes. Everyone recognizes his long, unsmiling face, his special hat, and his special pipe. 'He is all mind and no heart,' Conan Doyle once said. But for many readers Sherlock Holmes is like a real person.

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'Will you go?' said my wife, looking across at me.

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Sherlock Holmes and the Mystery of Boscombe Pool

One morning, I was having breakfast with my wife when a telegram arrived. It was from Sherlock Holmes. It read:

Are you free for a day or two? Must go to the west of England to help with the Boscombe Pool murder. Shall be glad if you can come with me. The change will be good for us. Leaving Paddington station on the 11.15 train.

'Will you go?' said my wife, looking across at me.

'I really don't know what to say,' I answered. 'I have a lot of sick people to visit.'

'Anstruther can do your work for you. You are looking tired and I think a change from your work will be good for you. You are always so interested in Mr Holmes's cases.'

'As always, you are right, my dear. But if I do go, I must get ready immediately, because the train leaves in half an hour.'

My early life as a soldier taught me to travel with very few things. In a few minutes, I was on my way to Paddington station. There I found my old friend in his long grey coat and his favourite hat. He was walking up and down the platform.

'It is really very good of you to come, Watson,' he said. 'I need a friend like you at times like this. No one can help me as you can. Please keep two corner places and I shall buy the tickets.'

We were alone during the train journey. Holmes had a large number of newspapers with him and for much of the time he wrote and thought. Finally, he made the papers

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'Have you heard anything about this case?' he asked.

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into a very large ball and threw them away, keeping only one.

'Have you heard anything about this case?' he asked.

'No, nothing. I have not seen a newspaper for some days.'

'The London papers have not written much about it. I have read them all because I need to know all the facts. It seems to be one of those cases which looks very clear. That is why I think it will be difficult.'

'Isn't that strange?'

'Oh no. Cases which seem very easy like this one are often the hardest, I find. But just now, things look very serious for the son of the murdered man.'

'So you are sure that it is a murder?'

'Not yet. It seems to be. But I must believe nothing until I have studied all the facts. Now I shall explain in a few words what I have read.

'Boscombe Valley is near Ross in Herefordshire. A large part of the land there belongs to a Mr John Turner. He made a lot of money in Australia and returned to live in England some years ago. His neighbour, Mr Charles McCarthy, was also in Australia and lives at Hatherley, a farm which belongs to Turner. The two men first met in Australia and it is natural that they have chosen to live in the same neighbourhood. Turner is the richer man and it seems that McCarthy pays him for the use of his farm. They seem to be good friends and spend quite a lot of their time together. McCarthy has one son, who is eighteen years old, and Turner has a daughter who is about the same age. The wives of both men are dead. The two families lived quietly and did not mix much with other people. McCarthy had two servants but Turner in his big house has several more – about six. That is all I have been able to find out about these families.'

'What about the murder, then?' I asked.

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