

Z przygód Sherlocka Holmesa

Panowie z Reigate



WYDANIE DWUJĘZYCZNE

Arthur Conan Doyle

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The Reigate Puzzle



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Wydawnictwo Wymownia

Polska wersja językowa w tłumaczeniu anonimowym
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Kup książkę

The Reigate Puzzle

It was some time before the health of my friend Mr. Sherlock Holmes recovered from the strain caused by his immense exertions in the spring of '87. The whole question of the Netherland-Sumatra Company and of the colossal schemes of Baron Maupertuis are too recent in the minds of the public, and are too intimately concerned with politics and finance to be fitting subjects for this series of sketches. They led, however, in an indirect fashion to a singular and complex problem which gave my friend an opportunity of demonstrating the value of a fresh weapon among the many with which he waged his life-long battle against crime.

On referring to my notes I see that it was upon the 14th of April that I received a telegram from Lyons which informed me that Holmes was lying ill in the Hotel Dulong. Within twenty-four hours I was in his sick-room, and was relieved to find that there was nothing formidable in his symptoms. Even his iron constitution, however, had broken down under the strain of an investigation which had extended over two months, during which period he had never worked less than fifteen hours a day, and had more than once, as he assured me, kept to his task for five days at a stretch. Even the triumphant issue of his labors could not save him from reaction after so terrible an exertion, and at a time when Europe was ringing with his name and when his room was literally ankle-deep with congratulatory telegrams I found him a prey to the blackest depression. Even the knowledge that he had succeeded where the police of three countries had failed, and that he had outmanoeuvred at every point the most accomplished swindler in Europe, was insufficient to rouse him from his nervous prostration.

Three days later we were back in Baker Street together; but it was evident that my friend would be much the better for a change, and the thought of a week of spring time in the country was full of attractions to me also. My old friend, Colonel Hayter, who had come under my professional care in Afghanistan, had now taken a house near Reigate in Surrey, and had frequently asked me to come down to him upon a visit. On the last occasion he had remarked that if my friend would only come with me he would be glad to extend his hospitality to him also. A little diplomacy was needed, but when Holmes understood that the establishment was a bachelor one, and that he would be allowed the fullest freedom, he fell in with my plans and a week after our return from Lyons we were under the Colonel's roof. Hayter was a fine old soldier who had seen much of the world, and he soon found, as I had expected, that Holmes and he had much in common.

On the evening of our arrival we were sitting in the Colonel's gun-room after dinner, Holmes stretched upon the sofa, while Hayter and I looked over his little armory of Eastern weapons.

"By the way," said he suddenly, "I think I'll take one of these pistols upstairs with me in case we have an alarm."

"An alarm!" said I.

"Yes, we've had a scare in this part lately. Old Acton, who is one of our county magnates, had his house broken into last Monday. No great damage done, but the fellows are still at large."

“No clue?” asked Holmes, cocking his eye at the Colonel.

“None as yet. But the affair is a petty one, one of our little country crimes, which must seem too small for your attention, Mr. Holmes, after this great international affair.”

Holmes waved away the compliment, though his smile showed that it had pleased him.

“Was there any feature of interest?”

“I fancy not. The thieves ransacked the library and got very little for their pains. The whole place was turned upside down, drawers burst open, and presses ransacked, with the result that an odd volume of Pope’s “Homer,” two plated candlesticks, an ivory letter-weight, a small oak barometer, and a ball of twine are all that have vanished.”

“What an extraordinary assortment!” I exclaimed.

“Oh, the fellows evidently grabbed hold of everything they could get.”

Holmes grunted from the sofa.

“The county police ought to make something of that,” said he; “why, it is surely obvious that—”

But I held up a warning finger.

“You are here for a rest, my dear fellow. For Heaven’s sake don’t get started on a new problem when your nerves are all in shreds.”

Holmes shrugged his shoulders with a glance of comic resignation towards the Colonel, and the talk drifted away into less dangerous channels.

It was destined, however, that all my professional caution should be wasted, for next morning the problem obtruded itself upon us in such a way that it was impossible to ignore it, and our country visit took a turn which neither of us could have anticipated. We were at breakfast when the Colonel’s butler rushed in with all his propriety shaken out of him.

“Have you heard the news, sir?” he gasped. “At the Cunningham’s sir!”

“Burglary!” cried the Colonel, with his coffee-cup in mid-air.

“Murder!”

The Colonel whistled. “By Jove!” said he. “Who’s killed, then? The J.P. or his son?”

“Neither, sir. It was William the coachman. Shot through the heart, sir, and never spoke again.”

“Who shot him, then?”