



Arthur Conan Doyle Encyclopedia

The Memoirs of Sherlock Holmes Adventure XXV -- The Adventure of the Naval Treaty

SUMMARY (Diogenes Club)

Watson is married and in practice. He receives a letter from Phelps asking him to bring Holmes to his home to solve the theft of the Naval Treaty.

Phelps was instructed to copy the Treaty by Holdhurst. This was an involved document written in French. It took several hours to copy it. During the copying, Phelps took a coffee break. When he came back, the treaty was gone. After a frantic and futile search, Percy had a sudden attack of brain fever and was put immediately to bed in the room Joseph had been occupying, as it was the most convenient.

Percy is insensate for nine weeks, during which time the treaty is not found, but no government has claimed possession of it and there have been no repercussions. Percy writes Watson as soon as he is again in possession of his faculties.

Holmes solves the case. Joseph came to meet Percy the night of the theft. He arrived via the side door (see diagram) while Percy was taking his break with the commissionaire. Seeing the treaty and realizing it was valuable, he took it (he had lost heavily in the market) and went home. He hid the treaty beneath the carpet in an access box. Phelps was brought in shortly thereafter and displaced Joseph from his room.

Joseph could not retrieve the treaty because either a nurse or Annie was in constant attendance of Percy.



Holmes sends Percy to London in Watson's care and lies in wait for Joseph who is caught red handed when he tries to retrieve the treaty.

Since no harm was done and the treaty recovered, Holmes allows the thief to go unpunished.

SUMMARY (Wikipedia)

Dr. Watson receives a letter, which he then refers to Holmes, from an old schoolmate, Percy Phelps, now a Foreign Office employee from Woking who has had an important naval treaty stolen from his office. It disappeared while Phelps had stepped out of his office momentarily late in the evening to see about some coffee that he had ordered. His office has two entrances, each joined by a stairway to a single landing. The commissionaire kept watch at the main entrance. There was no one watching at the side entrance. Phelps also knew that his fiancée Annie Harrison's brother Joseph was in town and that he might drop by. Phelps was alone in the office.

Phelps pulled the bell cord in his office to summon the commissionaire, and to his surprise the commissionaire's wife came up instead. He worked at copying the treaty that he had been given while he waited. At last, he went to see the commissionaire when it had taken some time for the coffee to arrive. He found him asleep with the kettle boiling furiously. He did not need to wake him up, however, as just then, the bell linked to his office rang. Realizing that someone was in his office with the treaty still spread out on his desk, Phelps rushed back up and found that the document had vanished, as had the thief.

It seemed obvious that the thief had come in through the side entrance; otherwise he would have passed Phelps on the stairs at some point, and there were no hiding places in his office. No footprints were seen in the office despite its being a rainy evening. The only suspect at that point was the commissionaire's wife, who had quickly hurried out of the building at about that same time.

This was followed up, but no treaty was found with her. Other suspects were the commissionaire himself and Phelps's colleague Charles Gorot. Neither seemed a very likely suspect, but the police followed them both, and the commissionaire's wife. As expected, nothing came of it.

Phelps was driven to despair by the incident, and when he got back to Woking, he was immediately put to bed in his fiancée's brother's room. There he remained, sick with "brain fever" for more than two months, his reputation and honour apparently gone.

Holmes is quite interested in this case, and makes a number of observations that others seem to have missed. The absence of footprints, for instance, might indicate that the thief came by cab. There is also the remarkable fact that the dire consequences that ought to result from such a treaty being divulged to a foreign government have not happened in all the time that Phelps has been ill. Why was the bell rung?

Holmes gathers some useful information at Briarbrae, the Phelps house, where Phelps' fiancée and her brother have also been staying. She has been nursing him days while a hired nurse kept watch over him at night. Joseph also remains to be of service if he can.

After seeing Phelps at Woking, Holmes makes some inquiries in town. He visits Lord Holdhurst, Phelps's uncle, the Foreign Secretary, who gave his nephew his important task of copying the treaty, but Holmes dismisses him as a suspect, and is quite sure now that no one could have overheard their discussion about the task. Lord Holdhurst reveals to Holmes the potentially disastrous consequences that might occur if the treaty should fall into the hands of the French or Russian embassies. Fortunately, nothing has yet happened, despite the many weeks since the theft. Apparently, the thief has not yet sold the treaty, and Lord Holdhurst informs Holmes that the villain's time is running out, as the treaty will soon cease to be a secret. Why, then, has the thief not sold the treaty?

Holmes returns to Woking, not having given up, but having to report that no treaty has turned up yet. Meanwhile, something interesting has happened at Briarbrae: someone tried to break in during the night, into Phelps's sick-room, no less. Phelps surprised him at the window but could not see his face through the hooded cloak that he was wearing. He did, however, see the interloper's knife as he dashed away. This happened the very first night that Phelps felt he could do without the nurse.

Unknown to anyone else at this point—although Watson infers it from his friend's taciturnity—Holmes knows what is going on. He orders Annie to stay in her fiancé's sick room all day, and then to leave it and lock it from the outside when she finally goes to bed. This she does.

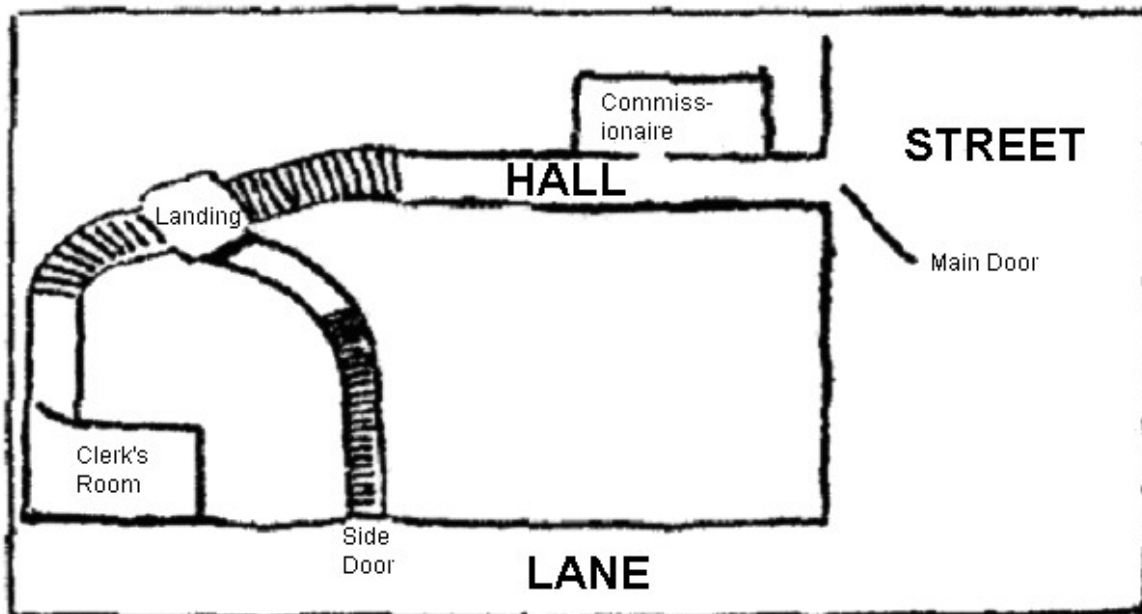
Holmes finds a hiding place near Briarbrae to keep watch after having sent Watson and Phelps to London on the train, and also letting the occupants at Briarbrae believe that he intended to go with them, ostensibly to keep Phelps out of harm's way should the interloper come back.

Holmes waits until about two o'clock in the morning, when the interloper appears—out of the house's tradesman's entrance. He goes to the window, gets it open as before, opens a hidden hatch in the floor, and pulls out the treaty. He then steps straight back out the window and Holmes intercepts him after which they fight, with Holmes emerging victorious but having suffered minor injuries.

The treaty has been in Phelps's sick room all the time, while the thief, Joseph, who usually slept in that room, could not get to it. He rang the bell in Phelps's office after dropping by to visit and finding him not there, but then he saw the treaty and at once realized its potential value. His inability to reach the treaty explains why there have been no dire political consequences. Holmes explains that Joseph had lost a great deal of money on the stock market, which explains his need for money. Being a very desperate and selfish man, he cared nothing for the consequences Phelps might suffer from the document's loss.

Always one with a flair for the dramatic, Holmes has the treaty literally served up to Phelps as breakfast the next morning at 221B Baker Street, London, where he has spent the night under Watson's watchful eyes (although there has been no danger). Phelps is ecstatic, Holmes is quietly triumphant, and once again, Watson is dumbfounded.

Holmes explains that several clues all pointed to Joseph: the thief knew the ways of the office well, given that he had rung the bell just before seeing the treaty; Phelps had shown his relatives around the office; Joseph had dined in London that evening, and took the 11:00 PM train to Woking; Phelps expected to meet him for the train; the theft happened at about 9:40 PM; it was a rainy night, but there were no wet footprints in the passage or office, so the thief had come in a cab; and the burglar who tried to break into Phelps' room was familiar with the layout of the house and the habits of those who lived there.



“ HERE IS A ROUGH CHART OF THE PLACE.”