



Arthur Conan Doyle Encyclopedia

The Return of Sherlock Holmes Adventure XXXVI -- The Adventure of the Three Students

SUMMARY (Diogenes Club)

Holmes is doing research in English charters at a "University town." Watson is intentionally vague as to which town to avoid any possibility of scandal.

Soames comes in and begs him to aid in solving a mystery: someone has copied part of an examination for the Fortescue scholarship. It was obviously one of the three students who occupy the same building as Soames. Holmes solves the mystery.

Gilchrist was the guilty party. Bannister had known young Gilchrist since infancy (he buttled for Jabez prior to Jabez' downfall) and tried to shield him.

Young Gilchrist had already written a letter to Soames, withdrawing from the examination. He leaves immediately to accept a commission with the Rhodesian police.

SUMMARY (ACD Encyclopedia)

Holmes and Watson are staying in a university town where Holmes is doing research into early English charters, when Professor Hilton Soames, a lecturer at the College of St Luke's, brings a case to the detective, relying on his discretion.

Soames had been reviewing galleys of a passage of Greek that was to be translated during an examination for the important Fortescue Scholarship. He left his study and when he returned he found that Bannister, his servant, had left the keys in the lock, and that the papers had disturbed in such a way as to



make it clear that the passage had been at least partially copied. The thief left clues such as shavings from a pencil, a cut in the leather surface of the desk, and a small ball of black stuff. Inspecting the lecturer's bedroom, Holmes finds another ball of dough, and deduces that that is where the thief hid when he heard Soames coming back.

Three students, scheduled to take the examination, live above the study, and any of them could have seen the keys when using the staircase and be tempted to copy the galleys. Gilchrist is an excellent student and an athlete, Ras is a serious and peaceful Indian fellow, and McLaren is brilliant, but lazy and dissipated. Holmes visits them to check their pencils and their heights.

The next day, as they head back to the college, the detective tells Watson he has solved the mystery. He asks Soames to fetch Gilchrist and accuses him in Bannister's presence. The young man falls apart as Holmes explain what happened. He is tall enough to have seen the papers on the desk as he passed the window when coming back from athletic training holding his muddy shoes. Climbing the stairs, he saw the keys in the lock and couldn't resist the temptation to enter and copy the translation. When he heard Soames come back, he hid in the bedroom. Then Bannister, who had known Gilchrist since his childhood, helped him to escape, convinced the young man that he could not benefit from his actions. Gilchrist had already decided not to take part in the examination and to leave to take a commission in the Rhodesian Police.

SUMMARY (Wikipedia)

Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson find themselves in a university town when a tutor and lecturer of St Luke's College, Mr. Hilton Soames, brings him an interesting problem. Soames had been reviewing the galley proofs of an exam he was going to give when he left his office for an hour. When he returned, he found that his servant, Bannister, had entered the room but accidentally left his key in the lock when he left, and someone had disturbed the exam papers on his desk and left traces that show it had been partially copied. Bannister is devastated and collapses on a chair, but swears that he did not touch the papers. Soames found other clues in his office: pencil shavings, a broken pencil lead, a fresh cut in his desk surface, and a small blob of black clay speckled with sawdust.

Soames wants to uncover the cheater and prevent him from taking the exam, since it is for a sizeable scholarship. Three students who will take the exam live above him in the same building.

The first, Gilchrist, is athletic, being a hurdler and a long-jumper, and industrious (in contrast to his father who squandered his fortune in horse racing); the second, Daulat Ras, is described as quiet and methodical; the third is Miles McLaren, a gifted man but thoroughly dissolute and given to gambling.

Holmes examines the office. The cheater obviously took the papers over to the window one by one while he copied them so that he could see Soames returning, but as it happens, Soames did not come back the usual way. A nearby door leads to Soames's bedroom. Upon examining that, Holmes finds another, similar, sawdust-speckled blob of clay. He stuns Soames by telling him that the cheater, upon hearing his approach, hid in Soames's bedroom. He was there, hiding behind a curtain, all the time that Soames was questioning Bannister.

The next morning, Holmes and Watson return to Soames's office. Holmes confronts Bannister who he believes is not telling all he knows. Bannister will not own up to anything, and insists that there was no one in Soames's office while he was there. Holmes, however, sends for Gilchrist, and proceeds to lay out his results.

The cheater was someone who knew the exam proofs were there. This could only be Gilchrist because the proofs' whereabouts had been kept secret, and Gilchrist was the only one tall enough to look in through Soames's window to see his desk. Holmes has also identified the blobs as the special clay found in the long-jump pit, further implicating Gilchrist. Gilchrist reveals his guilt by reproaching Bannister for his apparent treachery. Bannister was indeed the one who covered for Gilchrist. He felt that he had to, for old times' sake: Bannister was once Gilchrist's father's butler.

Holmes then explains the remaining clues. The scratch on the desk was caused by Gilchrist's spiked jumping shoes as he grabbed them in his haste, and the clay blobs fell from his shoes. Bannister had collapsed in the chair to hide Gilchrist's gloves, which he saw had been left on the chair. For his part, Gilchrist credits Bannister with convincing him not to profit from his misdeed, and presents Soames with a letter stating his wish not to sit the exam, but to instead accept an offer to work for the Rhodesian Police.