



Arthur Conan Doyle Encyclopedia

His Last Bow

Adventure XLVI -- The Adventure of the Dying Detective

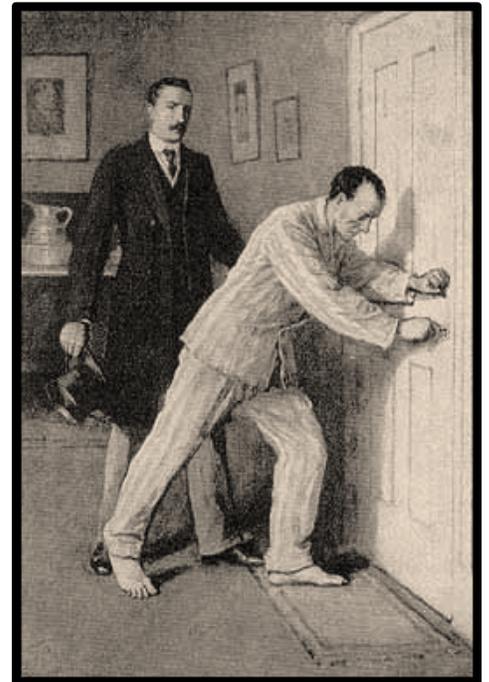
SUMMARY (Diogenes Club)

Watson has been married 2 years. Culverton Smith is a self-taught expert in tropical diseases. Culverton murdered Victor Savage by infecting him with "a coolie disease from Sumatra." His motive was to gain a reversion. Holmes knew he was guilty but could not prove it and told the police as much.

In an attempt to silence Holmes, Culverton Smith sent him a box in the mail. When the box was opened, a concealed spring caused a sharp needle to fly out and prick the finger of the opener. The needle had been inoculated with the bacteria of the Coolie disease.

Naturally, Holmes was not fooled or smitten by the lethal box but he feigned the illness and convinced Watson that Culverton Smith was the only man in London who could cure him. Watson convinced Culverton to come and see Holmes, then hid behind the bed and witnessed the confession of Smith to Holmes of the murder of Victor Savage.

Inspector Morton led the culprit off to jail and Holmes and Watson dined at Simpsons.



SUMMARY (Wikipedia)

Dr. Watson is called to tend Holmes, who is apparently dying of a rare tropical disease, Tapanuli fever, contracted while he was on a case. Watson is shocked, not having heard about his friend's illness. Mrs. Hudson says that Holmes has neither eaten nor drunk anything in three days.

Holmes instructs Watson not to come near him, because the illness is highly infectious. In fact, he scorns to be treated by Watson and insults his abilities, astonishing and hurting the doctor. Although Watson wishes to examine Holmes himself or call in a specialist, Holmes demands that Watson wait several hours before seeking help. While Watson waits, he examines several objects in Holmes's room. Holmes grows angry when Watson touches items explaining that he does not like his things touched.

At six o'clock, Holmes tells Watson to turn the gaslight on, but only half-full. He then instructs Watson to bring Mr Culverton Smith of 13 Lower Burke Street to see Holmes, but to make sure that Watson returns to Baker Street before Smith arrives.

Watson goes to Smith's address. Although Smith refuses to see anyone, Watson forces his way in. Once Watson explains his errand on behalf of Sherlock Holmes, Smith's attitude changes drastically. Smith agrees to come to Baker Street within a half hour. Watson excuses himself, saying that he has another appointment, and returns to Baker Street before Smith's arrival.

Believing that they are alone, Smith is frank with Holmes. It emerges, to the hiding Watson's horror, that Holmes has been sickened by the same illness that killed Smith's nephew Victor Savage. Smith then sees the little ivory box, which he had sent to Holmes by post, and which contains a sharp spring infected with the illness. Smith pockets it, removing the evidence of his crime. He then resolves to stay there and watch Holmes die.

Holmes asks Smith to turn the gas up full, which Smith does. Smith then asks Holmes if he would like anything else, to which Holmes replies - no longer in the voice of a man near death - "a match and a cigarette." Inspector Morton then enters - the full gaslight was the signal to move in. Holmes tells Morton to arrest Culverton Smith for the murder of his nephew, and perhaps also for the attempted murder of Sherlock Holmes. Smith points out that his word is as good as Holmes' in court, but Holmes then calls for Watson to emerge from behind the screen, to present himself as another witness to the conversation.

Holmes explains his illness was feigned as a ruse to induce Smith to confess to his nephew's murder. Holmes was not infected by the little box; he has enough enemies to know that he must always examine his mail carefully before he opens it. Starving himself for three days and the claim of the "disease's" infectious nature was to keep Watson from examining him and discovering the ruse, since, as he clarifies, he has every respect for his friend's medical skills.