

TOP READERS

ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE

The Creeping Man

Adapted by H.Q. Mitchell

level
5


mmpublications

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CHAPTER 1

IT WAS A COLD SUNDAY EVENING IN SEPTEMBER, WHEN I RECEIVED an urgent message from my friend and associate, Sherlock Holmes, asking me to come to his house immediately. He didn't say why he wanted me to come, but I presumed that he needed my assistance with a new case. So, I put on my coat and gloves and, with a mixture of curiosity and anticipation, headed off to 221B Baker Street.

When I arrived, I rang the doorbell several times before Holmes's housekeeper, Mrs Hudson, finally let me in.

"Good evening, Dr Watson!" she said with a warm smile. "I'm so sorry to have kept you waiting."

"That's all right, Mrs Hudson," I said. "Is Holmes out?"

"No, he's here," she replied. "He's been in his study all day, reading. He hasn't come out once, not even for lunch."

I nodded. It was not uncommon for the detective to spend hours in his study researching cases.

"Typical Holmes," I said to myself as I made my way to the study and tapped lightly on the door. There was no response. I pushed the door open and found the detective sitting at his desk, smoking a pipe. He seemed to be deeply absorbed in a very thick book, so I sat down in the armchair opposite him and waited quietly, reading a paper.

"Forgive me, Watson," said Holmes after several minutes had passed. "I don't wish to appear rude, but I've just been asked to take on a new case and I'm doing some research."

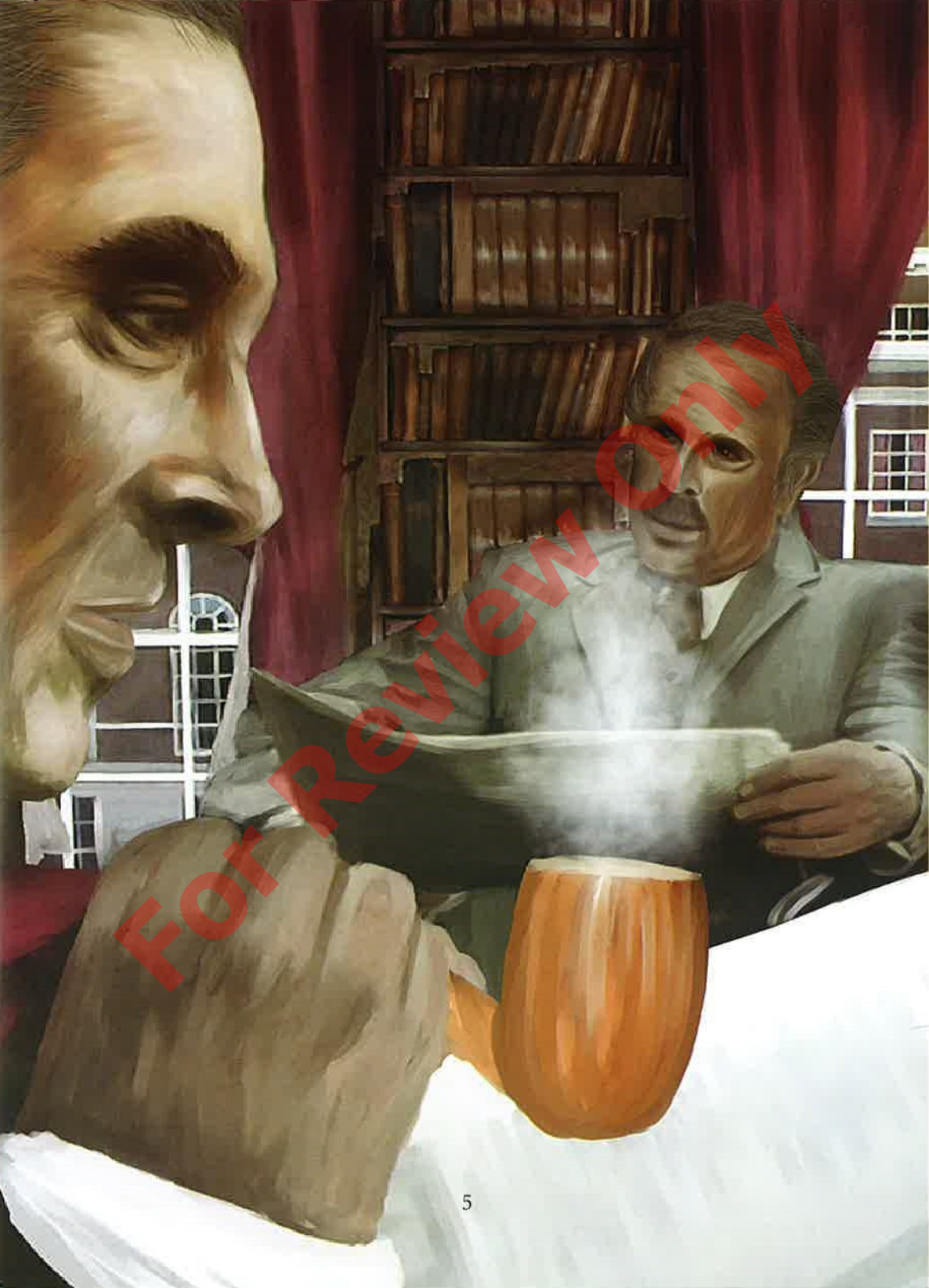
"I guessed as much," I said. "What are you researching?"

"The habits of dogs," he answered.

"The habits of dogs?" I repeated. "And what have you discovered?"

"Well," said Holmes as he took a puff on his pipe, "I have come to the conclusion that a dog's character reflects that of his owner's. I mean, you never see happy dogs with sad families, or sad dogs with happy families, now do you?"

I shrugged. "I don't know," I said. "You may have a point, but it's hardly a proven fact."



Holmes ignored my comment and closed the book.

"The reason I'm telling you this, Watson, is because I think it's relevant to the case I'm investigating. What I'm trying to figure out is why Professor Presbury's dog, Roy, has tried to attack him three times in the last few weeks."

I sat back in my chair and sighed. "Is that why you called me here, Holmes?" I asked. "To discuss people's pets?"

Holmes smiled enigmatically. "No, not exactly. But you have to admit, it is rather strange that Professor Presbury's dog - a dog he has had for years, I might add - would suddenly attack him for no reason at all."

"It's really not that strange, Holmes," I said. "The dog is probably ill. And anyway, who is this Professor Presbury?"

"Professor Harold Presbury is a well-known physiologist," Holmes replied. "He lives in Camford and lectures at the university there... Ah, there's the doorbell; young Mr Bennett has arrived. I should go let him in."

Holmes went to answer the door and, moments later, returned with a young man at his side. The man was about thirty years old, tall and well-dressed. He looked rather surprised to see me.

"Oh, you have a visitor," he said to Holmes. "Perhaps I should come back another time, when we can talk in private...."

"Don't worry, Mr Bennett," said Holmes. "Dr Watson is a trusted friend and he will be assisting me with your case."

"I see..." said the young man.

Holmes turned to look at me. "Watson, this is Trevor Bennett. He's Professor Presbury's assistant. He lives at the Professor's house and is engaged to the Professor's daughter, Edith."

"How do you do?" I said as I shook his hand.

"A pleasure to meet you, sir," said Bennett.

"Have a seat, Mr Bennett," said Holmes, "and I will explain to Watson why you have asked for my help."

Bennett nodded and sat down on the sofa while Holmes looked through some papers on his desk.

"First," the detective began, "some background information. Professor Presbury is a widower and has one daughter, Edith, whom I mentioned earlier. He is sixty-one years of age and one of the most



respected lecturers in his field. A few months ago, the Professor was introduced to Alice Morphy, the daughter of one of his colleagues. He fell in love with Alice the moment he laid eyes on her, despite the fact that she is considerably younger than him. Needless to say, his family did not approve—

“We thought it was a little inappropriate,” Bennett interrupted.

“Yes,” Holmes continued, “but, because Professor Presbury is a wealthy and influential man, Alice’s family did not object to the relationship. The young lady seemed quite fond of the Professor and the two became engaged. It was around this time that the Professor’s behaviour began to change...”

“Change?” I said. “How?”

“Well, about two months ago, the Professor left to go on a trip and didn’t tell anyone where he was going. He was away for two weeks and when he returned, he refused to tell Mr Bennett or his daughter, where he’d been. Shortly after that, Mr Bennett received a letter from a friend of his in Prague who mentioned that he’d bumped into the Professor there. That was how Mr Bennett and Edith found out where the Professor had been.”

Holmes sat down at his desk and continued: “Now, after that trip to Prague, something peculiar came over the Professor. He became distant and moody; he ignored his friends and practically stopped talking to his family.

However, despite this sudden change in personality, the Professor continued to give brilliant lectures at the university. His mind remained as sharp as ever, but there was definitely something very different about him. Am I correct so far, Mr Bennett?”

Bennett nodded. “Yes, Mr Holmes, that is exactly what happened.”

I considered this for a moment and then asked: “What about Professor Presbury’s fiancée, Mr Bennett? What has her reaction been to all of this?”

Bennett sighed deeply before answering. “Alice doesn’t know about any of this. She’s travelling through Europe with her father and isn’t expected back for another couple of weeks at least.”

“Has she been corresponding with the Professor?” I asked.

“Yes, they write to each other regularly,” Bennett replied.