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Arthur Conan Doyle, *The Sign of the Four* (Simplified Edition by ChatGPT)

## Part 1

Sherlock Holmes took a small bottle from the corner of the fireplace and a neat case from the table beside him. Inside the case was a syringe. His long white fingers moved with calm care as he fixed the thin needle in place. Then he slowly pushed back the cuff of his shirt and showed his thin arm. I could see many small marks along the skin. He looked at them quietly, almost thoughtfully, as if they belonged to another person. After a moment he pressed the needle into his arm, pushed the handle down, and leaned back in his chair with a deep breath of relief.

I had watched this action three times every day for many months. Still, I could never grow used to it. Instead, each day it troubled me more. I often told myself that I must speak to him, that I must stop him, yet something in Holmes's calm manner made it difficult to interfere. His confidence, his sharp mind, and the many strange things I had seen him do made me hesitate. I felt like a student speaking against a master.

That afternoon, however, I could remain silent no longer.

"Which is it today?" I asked. "Morphine or cocaine?"

Holmes lifted his eyes slowly from the old book resting on his knees. "Cocaine," he replied calmly. "A seven-percent solution. Would you like to try it?"

"Certainly not," I said sharply. "My health has not fully recovered from Afghanistan. I cannot risk anything that might weaken me further."

He smiled faintly, amused by my strong tone. "Perhaps you are right, Watson.

It may not be good for the body. Still, it clears the mind wonderfully. The effect is most pleasing.”

“But think of the cost,” I said. I leaned forward, unable to hide my concern. “Your brain may feel alive for a short time, but afterward you suffer greatly. You know that yourself. Why risk your remarkable abilities for a moment of pleasure? I speak not only as your friend but also as a doctor.”

Holmes did not appear angry. Instead, he joined his fingertips together and listened with interest.

“My mind hates idleness,” he said at last. “Give me problems. Give me puzzles. Give me work that requires thought, and I need no stimulant. But when nothing happens, when life becomes dull, I feel trapped. That is why I created my profession.”

“The only consulting detective,” I said.

“Exactly,” he answered. “When the police fail—and they often do—they come to me. I examine the facts and give my opinion. I receive little public credit, but the work itself is my reward. You have seen this yourself in the Jefferson Hope case.”

“Indeed,” I said warmly. “I even wrote a small book about it.”

Holmes shook his head slightly. “Yes, I read it. You added too much feeling. Detection should be exact and cold. You turned it into something romantic.”

I felt offended, for I had written it mainly to please him, yet I held my tongue. My injured leg ached as I shifted in my chair, reminding me again of my past service in war.

After a short silence Holmes filled his pipe and spoke again.

“My work now reaches beyond England,” he said. “Last week a French detective asked for my help. He possesses quick instinct but lacks deep knowledge. Knowledge is essential.”

He handed me a letter filled with praise written in French. I returned it with a smile.

“He admires you greatly,” I said.

“Too greatly,” Holmes replied lightly. “Still, he learns quickly. He is even

translating some of my writings.”

“Your writings?” I asked in surprise.

Holmes laughed. “Yes. Small studies. For example, one describes the ashes of different types of tobacco. Another explains how a person’s work changes the shape of the hands. Such details are extremely useful.”

“You notice things others never see,” I said.

“Because they matter,” he answered. “Observation and deduction—those are the foundations.”

I considered this. “But are they not the same?”

Holmes leaned back and blew a cloud of smoke toward the ceiling. “Not at all. Observation tells me that you visited the Wigmore Street Post Office this morning. Deduction tells me you sent a telegram.”

I stared at him. “That is correct—but how could you know?”

He smiled at my surprise. “I saw red earth on your shoe. The street outside that post office is under repair, and the soil there has a special color. That is observation. Deduction follows when all other explanations are removed.”

I laughed softly. “It sounds simple when you explain it.”

“Everything is simple once understood,” he replied.

Wanting to test him, I took out a watch. “Then examine this,” I said. “Tell me about its former owner.”

Holmes studied the watch closely, first with his eyes and then with a lens. After some time he returned it.

“There are few clues,” he said. “It has been cleaned recently.”

“Yes,” I admitted, secretly pleased that I had limited his chances.

He closed his eyes for a moment. “Still, I believe it belonged to your elder brother. He inherited it from your father. He was careless, often poor, sometimes fortunate, and in the end he drank himself to death.”

I jumped to my feet in anger. “That is unfair, Holmes! You must have learned these facts elsewhere!”

Holmes looked genuinely troubled. “My dear Watson, I knew nothing of your brother until now. Please forgive me if I caused pain. I simply followed the

evidence.”

He showed me the marks inside the case, the scratches near the keyhole, and the pawnshop numbers. Step by step he explained his reasoning. As he spoke, my anger faded and admiration returned.

“It is perfectly clear,” I said quietly. “I misjudged you.”

Holmes smiled gently. “You see now why guessing is dangerous. Logic alone must guide us.”

He rose and walked toward the window. Outside, yellow fog drifted through Baker Street.

“What a dull world,” he said suddenly. “Without problems, life feels empty.”

At that moment our landlady entered carrying a card.

“A young lady wishes to see you, sir,” she said.

Holmes read the card aloud. “Miss Mary Morstan. I do not recall the name. Show her up—and please remain, Watson. Your presence may be useful.”

A moment later the young woman entered. She was simply dressed but graceful, and though not strikingly beautiful, her expression was gentle and sincere. I noticed at once that her hands trembled slightly as she sat down.

“Mr. Holmes,” she said, “you once helped my employer solve a difficulty. She advised me to come to you.”

Holmes leaned forward with sudden energy. “Please explain your problem.”

I began to rise, thinking I should leave, but she stopped me.

“Please stay,” she said. “I may need your help as well.”

I sat again, deeply interested, while she gathered her courage to speak. Her voice was calm, yet I sensed strong emotion beneath it.

“My father was an officer in India,” she began. “When I was a child he sent me to England. In 1878 he returned home and asked me to meet him in London. But when I arrived at his hotel, he had disappeared. No trace of him was ever found.”

Holmes opened his notebook at once.

“The date?” he asked.

“December third, 1878.”

She continued, describing the search, the failure of the police, and the long

silence that followed. Then her story grew stranger.

“Six years later,” she said, “an advertisement appeared asking for my address. After I replied, I received a small box containing a beautiful pearl. Each year since then another pearl has arrived—always without a message.”

She opened a case and showed us six shining pearls. Even Holmes’s eyes brightened.

“Most curious,” he said.

She then handed him a letter received that very morning. Holmes studied it carefully.

“You are asked to meet tonight,” he said. “And to bring two friends. Then we shall go together.”

She looked at me with hopeful eyes.

“I would be honored,” I said quickly.

She thanked us both warmly. After arranging the meeting time, she left the room. I watched her disappear into the fog outside, feeling strangely moved.

“What a remarkable woman,” I said.

Holmes lay back in his chair. “I did not notice,” he replied calmly. “A client is simply a problem to be solved.”

I shook my head, wondering whether his brilliant mind had cost him something deeply human.

The mystery, however, had begun—and none of us yet understood how far it would lead.

## Part 2

Holmes lit his pipe again and sat quietly for a moment after Miss Morstan left. Thin smoke rose slowly toward the ceiling while the noise of Baker Street moved faintly outside the window. I remained standing near the glass, still thinking about our visitor. Her calm courage and gentle manner had made a deep impression on me, though I tried to hide it from myself.

“You appear thoughtful, Watson,” Holmes said at last without opening his eyes.

“Her situation is deeply sad,” I answered. “To lose a father in such a strange way, and then to live for years without answers—it must be very hard.”

Holmes gave a small shrug. “Emotion clouds judgment. Facts alone matter. Still, the case is interesting. Very interesting.”

He rose suddenly, full of energy once more. The change in him was always striking. A moment earlier he had seemed bored and distant; now his eyes shone with life.

“I shall make a few inquiries,” he said, taking his hat. “You may read while I am gone. This book will occupy your mind.”

He handed me a volume and left the room quickly. I attempted to read, but my thoughts refused to remain on the page. Again and again my mind returned to Miss Morstan—her quiet strength, her troubled eyes, and the strange mystery surrounding her life. I reminded myself firmly that she was merely a client and nothing more. Yet reason did little to calm my imagination.

Nearly two hours passed before Holmes returned. The moment he entered I could see he was pleased.

“Progress, Watson,” he said, accepting the tea I poured for him. “Not a solution yet, but a useful discovery.”

“You already know something?” I asked eagerly.

“Yes. I searched old newspaper records. Major Sholto, the only friend Captain Morstan had in London, died in April of 1882.”

I frowned. “I fail to see the importance.”

Holmes smiled patiently. “Consider the facts. Captain Morstan disappears after arriving in London. The one man he might visit denies seeing him. Years later that same man dies. Within a week Miss Morstan begins receiving valuable pearls. Does that not suggest guilt—or at least knowledge?”

I thought carefully. “You believe Major Sholto knew what happened.”

“Exactly. And perhaps his heirs now attempt to repair an old wrong.”

“But why wait so many years?” I asked. “And why act in such secrecy?”

Holmes nodded. “Those questions remain. Tonight may answer them.”

Soon afterward a carriage arrived outside. Miss Morstan sat within, wrapped in

a dark cloak. Her face looked pale but determined as she greeted us.

We entered the carriage together and began our journey through the evening streets. The day had been gloomy, and a wet fog hung low over London. Gas lamps shone weakly through the mist, turning the air yellow and uncertain. The city seemed filled with shadows and half-seen figures moving silently past.

Holmes sat opposite us with his notebook open, writing small notes by the light of a pocket lamp. Miss Morstan and I spoke quietly together. She answered Holmes's questions about her father and about Major Sholto.

"They served together in India," she explained. "My father often mentioned him in letters."

Then she remembered something and produced a folded paper.

"This was found among my father's things," she said. "No one understood it."

Holmes examined the paper carefully with his lens.

"Indian paper," he murmured. "A plan of a building... passages... halls... and here—a mark in red ink. And these words: 'The Sign of the Four.' Four names follow."

He sat back thoughtfully. "This may prove important."

The carriage continued through winding streets. Outside, crowds moved under umbrellas while shop lights glowed dimly through the fog. The sound of wheels and distant voices blended into a dull, endless murmur.

Holmes alone appeared unaffected. From time to time he quietly named the streets as we passed them, never losing his sense of direction.

At last we stopped near the Lyceum Theatre, where many people gathered for the evening performance. Carriages arrived one after another, delivering elegantly dressed guests. We waited beside the third pillar as instructed.

Soon a small dark man dressed like a coachman approached us.

"Are you Miss Morstan?" he asked.

"Yes," she replied. "These gentlemen are my friends."

He studied us carefully. "You must promise neither of them is a police officer."

"I give you my word," she said firmly.

The man whistled sharply. A carriage rolled forward, and he opened the door

for us. He climbed to the driver's seat, and moments later we were racing through the streets at great speed.

The situation felt strange and uncertain. We traveled toward an unknown destination with a man we did not know, guided only by a mysterious letter. Yet Miss Morstan remained calm, and her courage strengthened my own.

I attempted to entertain her with stories from Afghanistan, though my excitement caused me to speak rather poorly. She later claimed my stories made little sense at all, and I believe she was correct.

Holmes, meanwhile, continued naming streets as we passed them.

"We cross the river," he said quietly. "Now we move south. Our destination lies outside fashionable London."

The streets grew darker and poorer. Long rows of houses stretched endlessly beside us. Bright public houses stood at corners, their loud light shining onto muddy roads. At last the carriage stopped before a new terrace of houses, most of them empty and dark.

A single light glowed in one window.

The door opened immediately when we knocked. A servant wearing Indian clothing stood before us and bowed.

"The master waits," he said.

We followed him through a narrow passage into a brightly lit room. There stood a small nervous man with red hair around a shining bald head. His face moved constantly, smiling one moment and frowning the next.

"Welcome! Welcome!" he cried in a thin voice. "I am Thaddeus Sholto. Pray come in."

The room astonished us. Though the house itself appeared ordinary, this chamber was filled with rich carpets, paintings, and objects from the East. The air smelled sweet from a large pipe standing in the corner.

Thaddeus Sholto greeted Miss Morstan eagerly and then turned to me.

"A doctor? Wonderful! Might you examine my heart? I fear something is terribly wrong with it."

I listened carefully but found nothing serious.

“You are quite healthy,” I assured him.

He sighed with relief and sat down.

“I have asked you here,” he said, “because justice must finally be done. I can explain what happened to your father.”

Miss Morstan turned pale but remained steady.

“Please tell me,” she said softly.

Sholto nodded nervously. “We must go to Norwood later tonight to meet my brother Bartholomew. But first you must understand the past.”

He began his long story. His father, Major Sholto, had returned from India wealthy but fearful. He avoided strangers and especially feared men with wooden legs. After receiving a letter from India, his health failed rapidly. On his deathbed he confessed a terrible secret.

Captain Morstan, Miss Morstan’s father, had visited him years earlier to claim part of a treasure they had obtained together. During an argument Morstan suddenly collapsed and died from heart failure. Afraid of blame, Major Sholto hid the body with the help of a servant and kept the treasure for himself.

As Sholto described this moment, Miss Morstan sat very still, her face white but composed. I poured her water, fearing she might faint.

The dying major had wished to reveal the hiding place of the treasure, but before he could finish, a frightening face appeared at the window. The shock killed him instantly. Later someone searched the room and left a message: “The Sign of the Four.”

Sholto finished his account and looked at us anxiously.

“My brother has now found the treasure,” he said. “It is worth a great fortune. Tonight we go to claim Miss Morstan’s rightful share.”

Holmes stood at once. “Then we should waste no time.”

Sholto wrapped himself in a heavy coat despite the warm night and led us outside, where another carriage waited. As we drove toward Norwood, he spoke excitedly about how his brother had discovered a hidden room in their house containing the treasure chest.

When he mentioned its value—half a million pounds—we stared at one another

in amazement. Miss Morstan might soon become extremely wealthy.

I congratulated her, though my heart felt strangely heavy. I realized, with sudden clarity, how different our lives might become if such fortune truly belonged to her.

The carriage finally stopped before a large dark house surrounded by high walls.

“This is Pondicherry Lodge,” said Thaddeus Sholto.

The night air felt still and uneasy as we stepped out. A narrow gate opened after much knocking, and a suspicious guard admitted us only after recognizing Holmes.

Inside, the grounds appeared disturbed, as if many people had dug there searching for something. The house itself stood silent and dark except for a faint light near the entrance.

Suddenly a frightened cry echoed from within—a woman’s voice filled with terror.

Sholto trembled violently. “Something is wrong,” he whispered. “Something has happened to Bartholomew.”

Holmes lifted the lantern firmly.

“Come,” he said. “We must investigate at once.”

### Part 3

We followed Thaddeus Sholto quickly toward the house. His hands shook so badly that the lantern light jumped across the walls and ground. Miss Morstan walked beside me, and I could feel the tension in her arm as she held it close to her side. The night had grown very still, and the strange cry we had heard seemed to hang in the air even after it ended.

Inside the doorway stood an elderly woman, pale and trembling. Her eyes were red from fear, and her fingers twisted together without rest.

“Oh, Mr. Thaddeus, sir!” she cried. “I am thankful you have come! Something terrible has happened!”

“What is it, Mrs. Bernstone?” he asked anxiously.

“The master has locked himself in his room all day,” she said. “He would not answer when I called. At last I looked through the keyhole, and—oh, sir, you must see for yourself!”

Holmes took the lantern from Sholto’s hand at once.

“Show us the way,” he said calmly.

We climbed the stairs together. Thaddeus Sholto was so frightened that I supported him with my arm. Holmes moved ahead silently, stopping twice to examine small marks on the floor and wall with his lens. Even in that tense moment he missed nothing.

At the top of the stairs we reached a closed door.

“This is my brother’s room,” whispered Sholto.

Mrs. Bernstone pointed to the keyhole with shaking hands. Holmes bent and looked through it for several seconds without speaking. Then he stood upright, his face suddenly serious.

“Stand back,” he said quietly.

“Is he hurt?” Miss Morstan asked.

Holmes did not answer at once. Instead, he tested the door.

“Locked from the inside,” he said. “We must force it.”

Together we pushed hard against the wood. The first attempt failed, but on the second the lock broke with a loud crack, and the door swung open.

The sight inside froze us where we stood.

A man sat upright in a chair beside a table. His head leaned slightly to one side, and his eyes stared forward without life. His face was twisted into a terrible smile that showed his teeth. The expression was so unnatural that it seemed almost like a mask.

Miss Morstan gave a small cry, and Mrs. Bernstone covered her face.

“Bartholomew!” gasped Thaddeus Sholto. “My poor brother!”

Holmes stepped forward carefully, raising the lantern. The room was in great disorder. Papers lay scattered across the floor, and drawers stood open as if someone had searched hurriedly. On the table rested a small wooden box, its lid open and empty.

Holmes examined the dead man closely.

“He has been dead several hours,” he said quietly. “There is no sign of struggle.”

I approached and confirmed Holmes’s observation. The body was already cold.

“Poison,” Holmes added. “A very fast and powerful poison.”

He pointed to a small dark mark on the man’s neck. A thin sharp object still rested there.

“A dart,” he said. “Most unusual.”

Thaddeus Sholto sank into a chair, shaking violently. “The treasure,” he whispered. “Where is the treasure?”

Holmes turned toward the open box.

“Gone,” he said simply.

The realization struck us all at once. The fortune we had come to claim had vanished.

Holmes moved quickly around the room, examining every corner. His energy returned fully now that the mystery deepened. He studied footprints near the window, the position of furniture, and even the dust along the wall.

“Look here,” he said suddenly.

On the wall above the dead man hung a small piece of paper fixed with a thorn. Written upon it were the words:

THE SIGN OF THE FOUR.

Miss Morstan clasped her hands tightly. “The same message,” she whispered.

Holmes nodded. “Yes. Whoever visited Major Sholto has returned.”

He crossed to the window. It stood open, though the night air outside was still.

“Interesting,” he murmured. “The murderer did not leave by the door.”

We followed his gaze downward. Outside lay the dark garden, filled with holes and uneven ground from past digging.

Holmes leaned out slightly, holding the lantern low.

“There are marks here,” he said. “Very curious marks.”

He turned back toward us, excitement shining in his eyes.

“Watson, observe this. One set of footprints belongs to a man with a wooden leg.”

Thaddeus Sholto cried out in terror. “The same fear my father had!”

Holmes continued calmly. “Yes—but there is another set as well. Smaller. Bare feet, yet not entirely human in shape.”

I felt a chill run through me. “What do you mean?”

Holmes spoke slowly. “The second visitor moved lightly, almost like an animal. The toes spread widely. I have never seen such tracks before.”

The mystery had grown darker and stranger than before.

Holmes returned to the body once more, studying the dart carefully.

“An exotic weapon,” he said. “Likely from the East. The poison acted instantly. Our victim had no chance.”

Mrs. Bernstone began to sob quietly, and Miss Morstan gently comforted her while Holmes continued his examination.

“The treasure chest was here,” Holmes said, pointing to marks on the floor. “It was heavy and recently moved. The criminals knew exactly where to find it.”

“But how could they enter?” I asked. “The door was locked.”

Holmes smiled faintly. “That is precisely the question.”

He walked slowly around the room again, then suddenly stopped beneath the ceiling.

“Ah,” he said softly.

Above us was a small opening leading to a hidden space. A rope still hung down through it.

“They came from above,” Holmes explained. “Through the hidden room where the treasure was found.”

The plan became clear. Someone had entered secretly, killed Bartholomew Sholto, taken the treasure, and escaped through the window.

Holmes closed his notebook with satisfaction.

“The case grows more interesting with every moment,” he said. “We now know our enemies—at least in part.”

Thaddeus Sholto looked helplessly from one face to another.

“What shall we do?” he asked weakly.

Holmes’s expression became firm and focused.

“We begin the hunt immediately,” he said. “The Sign of the Four has acted again—and we must learn who they are.”

Outside, the wind moved softly through the dark garden, and the empty window stared into the night like an open eye watching us all.

#### Part 4

Holmes wasted no time. The moment his first examination ended, he moved again around the room with renewed energy. The fear that had filled the house seemed not to touch him. Instead, the deeper the mystery became, the calmer and more alive he appeared. He held the lantern close to the floor and studied every mark with intense care.

“No one must disturb anything,” he said firmly. “Every detail may matter.”

Thaddeus Sholto nodded weakly, still pale with shock. Miss Morstan remained near Mrs. Bernstone, speaking gently to calm the frightened woman. I watched Holmes as he worked, amazed once again by the sharpness of his attention. Where I saw only disorder, he saw meaning.

He crouched beside the window and pointed outside.

“Observe, Watson,” he said. “The sill is marked. Something heavy passed over it. The rope shows friction here. The criminals lowered the treasure from above.”

I bent closer. Now that he explained it, the signs became clear even to me.

“Two men, then?” I asked.

“At least two,” Holmes replied. “One with a wooden leg. The other small and light, moving with great speed.”

He stepped into the garden through the window. I followed him while the others remained inside. The ground below was soft from recent rain, and the lantern revealed several footprints.

Holmes examined them silently for several minutes.

“Remarkable,” he murmured. “The wooden leg leaves deep round marks. The other prints are bare feet—very small. The toes spread wide apart. Not European.”

“From India?” I suggested.

“Possibly,” he said. “Or from the islands nearby. Whoever it is, he moves with unusual balance.”

Holmes followed the trail across the disturbed garden. The ground was full of old holes from earlier searches for the treasure, which made the path difficult to read, yet Holmes advanced slowly and surely, like a hunter tracking unseen prey.

The prints led toward the outer wall.

“Here,” Holmes said, raising the lantern higher.

Against the wall leaned a rope ladder.

“Their escape route,” he explained. “One climbed easily. The wooden-legged man must have needed assistance.”

He studied the top of the wall carefully. Broken glass covered its edge, yet a piece had been removed.

“Prepared in advance,” Holmes said. “This was no sudden crime. They planned every step.”

We returned inside, where Thaddeus Sholto waited anxiously.

“You see?” Holmes said. “Your brother was murdered by men who came specifically for the treasure. They knew where it was hidden.”

“But who could know?” Sholto cried. “Only my brother and I!”

Holmes gave him a thoughtful look. “Perhaps someone learned the secret long ago.”

He turned again toward the body.

“Watson, please examine the dart more closely.”

I removed it carefully. The tip was stained dark.

“A powerful poison,” I said. “It must act almost instantly.”

Holmes nodded. “Exactly. The victim had no chance to cry out. That explains the silence.”

He then examined the empty treasure box.

“Heavy marks,” he said. “The chest was recently moved. They removed the contents quickly.”

Miss Morstan approached quietly. Though shaken, she remained brave.

“Does this mean the treasure is lost?” she asked.

Holmes looked at her kindly but directly. "Not lost. Taken. And anything taken can be found again."

His confidence seemed to steady her.

At that moment footsteps sounded below. The guard McMurdo entered, followed by two policemen. Mrs. Bernstone had sent for them earlier in her fear.

The officers stared in shock at the scene.

"Murder!" one exclaimed.

Holmes spoke calmly. "Yes. But if you allow me, I believe I can guide the investigation."

The inspector, a serious man named Athelney Jones, arrived soon afterward. He listened impatiently as Holmes explained his observations.

"You mean to say," Jones said, "that a man with a wooden leg and a strange companion climbed through the roof, killed Mr. Sholto, and escaped with half a million pounds?"

"That is precisely what I suggest," Holmes answered.

Jones frowned. "Sounds unlikely."

Holmes smiled slightly. "Facts often do."

The inspector began questioning everyone loudly and confidently, yet it was clear he understood little of what had happened. Holmes watched quietly, making notes while allowing the official investigation to proceed.

After some time Jones announced his conclusion.

"The crime must involve someone inside the house," he declared. "Servants often know more than they admit."

Holmes said nothing, though I could see from his expression that he strongly disagreed.

When the police finished their first examination, Holmes drew me aside.

"We must act quickly, Watson," he said softly. "The criminals cannot move far with such treasure. The trail is still fresh."

"What is our next step?" I asked.

His eyes shone with excitement.

"We shall employ a special group of assistants," he replied. "The Baker Street

Irregulars.”

I smiled despite the grim situation. Holmes often relied on a group of street boys who moved unnoticed through London and gathered information better than any officer.

Miss Morstan joined us.

“What will happen now?” she asked.

“You must return home and rest,” Holmes said gently. “Dr. Watson will accompany you. I shall begin the pursuit at once.”

I agreed immediately. Though eager to remain with Holmes, I felt responsible for her safety.

As we prepared to leave Pondicherry Lodge, I glanced once more at the silent room where Bartholomew Sholto sat lifeless beneath the strange message of the Sign of the Four. The mystery had deepened beyond anything we imagined at the beginning of the evening.

Outside, the night air felt colder. The moon slipped behind clouds, and the house stood dark and silent behind us.

I sensed that we had only reached the beginning of a far greater story—one that stretched back across oceans and years, bound by greed, fear, and a hidden treasure that had already cost several lives.

## Part 5

Miss Morstan and I left Pondicherry Lodge together in a hired carriage while Holmes remained behind to continue his investigation. The night felt quieter now, yet my thoughts were far from calm. The events we had witnessed—the strange death, the missing treasure, and the mysterious message—turned endlessly in my mind.

Miss Morstan sat beside me in silence for some time. At last she spoke.

“Dr. Watson,” she said softly, “this night has changed everything. I do not know whether I should feel hope or fear.”

“Both are natural,” I replied. “But you have shown remarkable courage.”

She gave a small smile. “I think courage comes only because there is no other choice.”

The carriage wheels rolled steadily through the dark streets. I wished to comfort her further, yet I struggled with my own thoughts. If the treasure truly belonged partly to her, she might soon become extremely wealthy. I felt ashamed to notice how this possibility created distance between us in my imagination.

We soon reached her home. I walked her to the door, and she thanked me warmly.

“You and Mr. Holmes have been very kind,” she said. “I feel safer knowing you are helping me.”

I bowed slightly, unable to trust my voice fully. After she entered, I returned to Baker Street alone.

Holmes did not come back until early morning. I had fallen asleep in my chair when the sound of the door woke me. He entered quickly, still energetic despite the long night.

“Excellent progress!” he said. “The case moves forward.”

I rose at once. “What have you learned?”

Holmes removed his coat and sat down.

“Inspector Jones has arrested the wrong man,” he said calmly. “He suspects Thaddeus Sholto. A foolish conclusion.”

“Arrested him?” I exclaimed.

“Yes. The police prefer simple answers. But the real criminals are already far away—or so they believe.”

Holmes explained what he had discovered. The footprints confirmed two attackers: Jonathan Small, a man with a wooden leg, and a small companion from the Andaman Islands. Holmes believed the second man used the poisoned dart.

“But how do you know their names?” I asked.

Holmes tapped the paper bearing the strange message.

“‘The Sign of the Four’ lists them,” he said. “Jonathan Small is one of the names. Everything connects.”

He then described his plan.

“The treasure is heavy. The criminals must transport it by boat along the river. We must find that boat.”

Holmes rang the bell sharply. Soon a group of dirty but cheerful boys crowded into the room. These were the Baker Street Irregulars, led by a sharp-eyed youth named Wiggins.

“You know the river well,” Holmes told them. “Search every dock and boatyard. Look for a steam launch recently hired by a man with a wooden leg. Report back at once.”

The boys vanished instantly, eager for the task.

Holmes leaned back with satisfaction. “No one gathers information faster than children whom no one notices.”

The day passed slowly as we waited for news. Holmes paced the room restlessly, sometimes playing his violin, sometimes studying maps of the Thames. His energy seemed endless.

Late in the afternoon the Irregulars returned, excited and breathless.

“We found it, sir!” Wiggins cried. “A steam launch called the Aurora. Hired by a wooden-legged man.”

Holmes sprang to his feet. “Excellent! Where is it now?”

“Gone from the dock this morning,” the boy answered. “But the owner expects it back tonight.”

Holmes turned to me with shining eyes. “Watson, prepare yourself. Tonight we hunt.”

He sent a message to Inspector Jones, inviting him to join the pursuit. Though Holmes disliked the inspector’s methods, official authority would be necessary for an arrest.

As evening fell, we traveled to the river police station. A fast steam launch awaited us there. The air smelled of water and smoke, and lights reflected across the dark surface of the Thames.

Inspector Jones greeted us with forced confidence.

“So this is your grand theory, Mr. Holmes?” he said. “We chase thieves by boat now?”

Holmes merely smiled. “You will soon see.”

We boarded the police launch and waited. The engine vibrated beneath our feet while officers watched the river carefully.

Suddenly a shout came from the dock.

“There! A launch approaching!”

Through the darkness we saw a fast vessel moving along the river. Smoke poured from its funnel as it sped toward us.

Holmes raised his hand. “That must be the Aurora.”

The chase began instantly. Our engine roared to life, and we rushed forward across the water. Cold wind struck our faces as the distance between the boats slowly closed.

The fleeing launch moved quickly, but our vessel gained ground little by little.

“They know we follow them,” Jones shouted.

Indeed, the men aboard the Aurora increased speed desperately. Sparks flew from the funnel as the engine strained.

Holmes watched silently, focused entirely on the pursuit.

At last we drew close enough to see two figures aboard—the tall outline of a man and a smaller dark shape beside him.

“Jonathan Small,” Holmes said quietly.

The smaller figure suddenly turned and raised something toward us.

“Down!” Holmes cried.

A dart flew through the air and struck the side of our boat. The poison weapon had nearly reached us.

Officers fired warning shots. The criminals attempted to escape again, but their engine began to fail under the strain.

Slowly, inevitably, we came alongside them.

Police leapt across, and within moments Jonathan Small was captured. His companion attempted to flee but slipped into the river during the struggle and disappeared beneath the dark water.

The chase was over.

Jonathan Small sat exhausted and defeated while officers secured him. Near his

feet lay the treasure chest—the long-sought Agra treasure at last recovered.

Holmes turned toward me with quiet satisfaction.

“The chain is complete,” he said. “Now we shall learn the full truth of the Sign of the Four.”

## Part 6

Jonathan Small sat under guard as our launch turned back toward the city. The excitement of the chase slowly faded, replaced by the steady sound of the engine and the dark movement of the river beneath us. The treasure chest rested near the center of the boat, heavy and silent, as if the long history behind it still clung to its wooden sides.

Inspector Jones appeared extremely pleased with himself.

“A fine capture,” he declared loudly. “Another success for the police.”

Holmes only smiled faintly and said nothing. He seemed less interested in praise than in understanding the full story.

Jonathan Small was a strong man despite his wooden leg. His face was weathered by sun and hardship, and though tired, his eyes remained sharp and watchful.

“You have chased me well,” he said at last, looking toward Holmes. “I expected no less from you.”

Holmes inclined his head politely. “You know my name?”

“I have heard of you,” Small replied. “And I guessed you would come once the treasure was taken.”

Holmes sat opposite him. “Then perhaps you will now explain everything. Miss Morstan deserves the truth.”

Small nodded slowly. “Yes,” he said. “The time for hiding is finished.”

The officers listened as he began his story.

Many years earlier, while serving in India, Small had been a soldier stationed near a great treasure hidden during a rebellion. He and three others—Mahomet Singh, Abdullah Khan, and Dost Akbar—had discovered the treasure together.

They agreed to share it equally and marked their agreement with the name “The Sign of the Four.”

However, fate changed everything. Small was captured and sent to prison on the Andaman Islands. There he met Major Sholto and Captain Morstan, who served as officers guarding the prisoners.

“We made a bargain,” Small explained. “I told them where the treasure was hidden. In return they promised freedom and a fair share.”

Holmes listened carefully. “But they betrayed you.”

Small’s expression hardened. “Yes. They took the treasure for themselves and left me in prison.”

Years passed before Small escaped with help from a native islander named Tonga—the small companion we had seen during the chase.

“We came to England to claim what was ours,” Small continued. “We watched Major Sholto for years. He feared me, and he had reason.”

According to Small, he had only wished to recover the treasure, not to kill. The death of Bartholomew Sholto had been Tonga’s action. The islander used poisoned darts instinctively when threatened.

Holmes nodded thoughtfully. “And the pearls sent to Miss Morstan?”

“That was not my doing,” Small said. “I knew nothing of them.”

This confirmed Holmes’s earlier theory that Thaddeus Sholto had sent the pearls secretly.

Small lowered his voice as he finished.

“All I wanted was justice. Half the treasure was mine by right. Instead I lost my life chasing it.”

The boat reached the dock soon afterward, and Small was taken into custody. The treasure chest was carried carefully ashore under police guard.

Holmes and I returned to Baker Street as dawn approached. The sky had begun to grow pale, and the city slowly awakened around us.

Holmes stretched comfortably in his chair.

“A satisfying conclusion,” he said.

“For you, perhaps,” I replied. “But what of Miss Morstan?”

Holmes looked at me with interest. "You are concerned for her."

I hesitated. "She has suffered much. I hope at least she receives the treasure promised to her."

Holmes gave a small smile. "We shall soon learn."

Later that day we met Miss Morstan again. She listened quietly as Holmes explained Jonathan Small's confession and the recovery of the treasure chest.

Her expression showed relief rather than excitement.

"At last I know what happened to my father," she said softly. "That matters more than wealth."

The chest was opened before officials shortly afterward. Everyone leaned forward in expectation.

Inside lay nothing.

The treasure was gone.

Inspector Jones stared in disbelief. "Impossible!"

Holmes examined the empty chest calmly.

"Not impossible," he said. "Jonathan Small has had years to consider revenge."

When questioned again, Small admitted the truth. During his escape along the river, he had thrown the jewels into the Thames rather than allow anyone else to possess them.

"If I could not have it," he said, "no one would."

The great Agra treasure, worth a fortune, now lay forever lost beneath the river.

I glanced at Miss Morstan, fearing disappointment. Instead she appeared peaceful.

"Perhaps it is better so," she said gently. "Too much suffering has already come from it."

Holmes later remarked that the loss simplified many legal difficulties. For me, however, the moment brought unexpected relief. The barrier I had imagined between us disappeared.

Some days later, walking together in a quiet park, I gathered my courage at last.

"Miss Morstan," I said, my voice unsteady, "these events have changed many things for me. I hope you will forgive my boldness, but I must tell you that I have

come to care deeply for you.”

She looked at me with warm understanding.

“Dr. Watson,” she replied softly, “I believe I have trusted you from the very beginning.”

Her answer filled me with happiness greater than any treasure could bring.

When I later told Holmes of our engagement, he congratulated me kindly, though his manner remained thoughtful.

“Love,” he said, returning to his violin, “is a distraction from reason—but I wish you both well.”

Thus ended the strange affair of the Sign of the Four, a case that began with mystery and greed but concluded with truth revealed and justice, imperfect though it was, finally achieved.