



THE SIGN OF FOUR

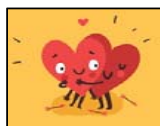


Plot

1. Miss Mary Morstan arrives and asks for help with a mystery.
2. Holmes and Watson accompany her to Thaddeus Sholto's house and learn about the Agra treasure.
3. Bartholomew Sholto is found dead at Pondicherry Lodge.
4. Holmes investigates the clues and calls the police. Athelney Jones arrests Thaddeus Sholto. Holmes sends Watson to borrow Toby, the dog.
5. Holmes employs the Baker Street Irregulars as spies and eventually puts on a disguise to track down the Aurora launch.
6. Watson, Holmes and Inspector Jones pursue the villains along the River Thames and catch up with them. The treasure chest is empty.
7. Jonathan Small is arrested and confesses his whole story. Watson and Mary Morstan are engaged to be married.

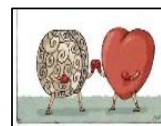
Characters

- **Sherlock Holmes:** The novel's protagonist, a genius detective who hates the "dull routine of existence" and loves to be challenged.
- **Dr. John Watson:** The novel's narrator, an ex-army surgeon and Sherlock Holmes's close friend colleague.
- **Mary Morstan:** She is a 'damsel in distress' character who brings the case of the Sign of the Four to Holmes and Watson.
- **Thaddeus Sholto:** An eccentric art collector and son of Major Sholto. He leads Holmes on the first steps to finding the treasure.
- **Athelney Jones:** The incompetent detective who needs Sherlock Holmes' help to solve the case.
- **Jonathan Small:** The antagonist of the novel. One of the original 'four'.
- **Tonga:** Jonathan Small's sidekick, who represents savagery.



Themes

- Evil and justice
- Victorian fear
- British Empire
- Love and romance
- Reason and logic



Context

London: London in the 19th century was a place of great wealth and great poverty. Doyle shows both sides of the city in the novel. Throughout the novel Doyle describes the dense fog of the city.

Crime and the police: In 1829, the Metropolitan Police force was established. Because the police force was newly organised, it was incredibly disorganised. Londoners had little faith in the police force and found them to be somewhat incompetent.

Women: Women were seen to be beneath men in status and had restricted rights. When a woman married, all that she owned, and anything she earned after the marriage, became the property of her husband.

The British Empire: At the time the book was first published Britain had a huge empire. The British people were interested in these foreign countries and wanted to know more about them.

Class: There was a clear class divide in Victorian England. Marriage between the classes would have been uncommon and frowned upon by society.





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Sherlock Holmes: A sharp-witted man with a reputation for his excellent powers of deduction. A highly rational person who does not approve of emotions.



Dr John Watson: The narrator of the story, he adds human feelings to the events. He falls in love with Mary and asks her to marry him.



Points (words to describe Holmes)

- | | |
|---------------|-------------|
| • Brilliant | Intelligent |
| • Inquisitive | Theorist |
| • Enigmatic | Uncaring |
| • Logical | Emotionless |
| • Perceptive | Astute |

Points (words to describe Watson)

- | | |
|--------------|---------------|
| • Loyal | Compassionate |
| • Romantic | Brave |
| • Supportive | Traditional |
| • Caring | Selfless |
| • Obedient | Subservient |

Top 10 quotations

1. *"I abhor the dull routine of existence"* (ch.1)
2. *"Eliminate all other factors, and the one which remains must be the truth."* (ch.1)
3. *"Give me problems, give me work"* (ch.1)
4. *"My mind rebels at stagnation"* (ch.1)
5. *"You really are an automaton – a calculating machine."* (ch.1)
6. *"clear-cut, hawk-like features"* (ch.2)
7. *"Holmes rubbed his hands and his eyes glistened"* (ch.2)
8. *"Holmes whipped his lens out of his pocket and carefully examined marks."* (ch.5)
9. *"So swift, silent and furtive were his movements, like those of a trained bloodhound"* (ch.6)
10. *"For me there still remains the cocaine bottle"* (ch.12)

Top 10 quotations

1. *"an army surgeon with a weak leg and a weaker banking account"*
2. *"What a very attractive woman!" I exclaimed."* (ch.2)
3. *"I am ashamed to say that selfishness took me by the soul"* (ch.4)
4. *"my heart turned as heavy as lead within me."* (ch.4)
5. *"Miss Morstan seized my wrist, and we all stood with thumping hearts"* (ch.5)
6. *"her hand was in mine... our hands instinctively sought for each other"* (ch.5)
7. *"We stood hand in hand, like two children, and there was a peace in our hearts for all the dark things that surrounded us"* (ch.5)
8. *"A wondrous subtle thing is love"* (ch.5)
9. *"It sent a little thrill of joy to my heart to notice that she showed no sign of elation at the prospect [of having the treasure]"* (ch.9)
10. *"this treasure, these riches, sealed my lips. Now that they are gone I can tell you how I love you."* (ch.12)



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Mary Morstan: Well dressed but of limited financial means, she has a refined and sensitive nature. She is realistic about her possible inheritance.



Athelney Jones: The incompetent detective. He dismisses Holmes' methods yet he relies on him to solve the case. At the end of the novel he takes credit for Holmes' work.



Points (words to describe Mary Morstan)

- | | |
|---------------|-------------|
| • Anxious | Confused |
| • Intelligent | Confident |
| • Poised | Grateful |
| • Saddened | Distressed |
| • Romantic | Traditional |

Points (words to describe Athelney Jones)

- | | |
|---------------------|----------------|
| • Incompetent | Confused |
| • Idiotic | Self-confident |
| • Reliant on others | Pompous |
| • Bumbling | Inadequate |
| • Lazy | Defensive |

Top 10 quotations

1. "What a very attractive woman!" I exclaimed." (ch.2)
2. "her expression was sweet and amiable... her large blue eyes were spiritual and sympathetic." (ch.2)
3. "her lip trembled, her hand quivered, and she showed every sign of intense inward agitation." (ch.2)
4. "her sensitive face was composed...her self-control was perfect" (ch.3)
5. "demeanor was as resolute and collective as ever" (ch.3)
6. "Miss Morstan seized my wrist, and we all stood with thumping hearts" (ch.5)
7. "her hand was in mine... our hands instinctively sought for each other" (ch.5)
8. "A wondrous subtle thing is love" (ch.5)
9. "a peace in our hearts for all the dark things that surrounded us" (ch.5)
10. "It sent a little thrill of joy to my heart to notice that she showed no sign of elation at the prospect [of having the treasure]" (ch.9)

Top 10 quotations

1. "very stout, portly man in a gray suit strode heavily into the room" (ch.6)
2. "he wheezed. It's Mr Sherlock Holmes, the theorist" (ch.6)
3. "Stern facts here, - no room for theories" (ch.6)
4. "He can find something," remarked Holmes, shrugging his shoulders" (ch.6)
5. "Don't promise too much, Mr theorist, - don't promise too much!" Snapped the detective." (ch.6)
6. "No. I shall probably call Athelney Jones in at the last moment" (ch.8)
7. "Very different... from the brusque and masterful professor of common sense who had taken over the case so confidently." (ch.9)
8. "His expression was downcast, and his bearing meek and even apologetic." (ch.9)
9. "I had my net drawn tightly round Mr. Sholto, sir, when pop he went through a hole in the middle of it." (ch.9)
10. "You have done all the work in this business... Jones gets the credit" (ch.12)



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Jonathan Small: A poorly-educated convict, who recognises at the end of the novella that his greed has always brought him bad luck.



Tonga: A native of the Andaman Islands. He swears loyalty to Small after he nurses him back to health. Kills Bartholomew Sholto and is shot himself at the end of the novel.



Points (words to describe Jonathan Small)

- | | |
|---------------|-------------|
| • Calculating | Betrayed |
| • Loyal | Just |
| • Aggressive | Frightening |
| • Spiteful | Antagonist |
| • Obsessed | Driven |

Points (words to describe Tonga)

- | | |
|---------------|--------------------|
| • Loyal | Devoted |
| • Fierce | Evil |
| • Savage | Violent |
| • Animalistic | Prejudiced against |
| • Antagonist | Diminutive |

Top 10 quotations

1. "I was half mad when you came up with us." (ch.12)
2. "I've had ups in my life, and I've had downs, but I've learned not to cry over spilled milk." (ch.12)
3. "Justice!" snarled the ex-convict. "A pretty justice!" (ch.12)
4. "Twenty long years in that fever-ridden swamp... all night chained up." (ch.12)
5. "you talk to me of justice" (ch.12)
6. "his eyes blazed." (ch.12)
7. "I saw the fury and the passion of the man." (ch.12)
8. "the money should be mine" (ch.12)
9. "reckless eyed fellow" (ch.12)
10. "I was a useless cripple" (ch.12)

Top 10 quotations

1. "small, fierce eyes, and distorted features. These massacres are invariably concluded by a cannibal feast." (ch.8)
2. a little black man — the smallest I have ever seen" (ch.11)
3. with a great, misshapen head and a shock of tangled, dishevelled hair" (ch.11)
4. "face was enough to give a man a sleepless night." (ch.11)
5. "features so deeply marked with all bestiality and cruelty." (ch.11)
6. "His small eyes glowed and burned with a sombre light, (ch.11)
7. "grinned and chattered at us with a half animal fury." (ch.11)
8. "venomous, menacing eyes" (ch.11)
9. "Little black devils" (ch.12)
10. "when I found that he was devoted to me and would do anything to serve me, I saw my chance of escape" (ch.12)



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Justice:

- Lots of characters search for justice.
- Justice is sought on behalf of Miss Mary Morstan by Thaddeus Sholto who believes she deserves her share of the treasure..
- Jonathan Small is angered by the injustice that he will never enjoy the treasure that he believes is rightly his.

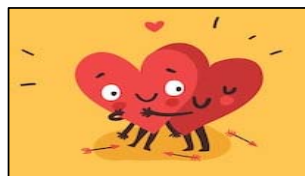


Crime and the police:

- In 1829, the Metropolitan Police force was established.
- Because the police force was newly organised, it was incredibly disorganised. Londoners had little faith in the police force and found them to be somewhat incompetent.

Love and romance:

- Doyle highlights love and romance through the characters of Watson and Morstan.
- Watson shows affection towards Mary throughout.
- At the end of the novel they declare their love for each other.



Themes

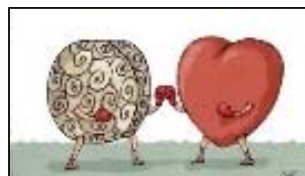


The British Empire:

- At the time the book was published Britain had a huge empire. The British people were interested in these foreign countries and wanted to know more about them.
- Through the treasure, Conan Doyle associates luxury with the empire.

Reason and Logic:

- Holmes is able to work out unsolvable mysteries through reason and logic.
- Holmes and Watson's characters are contrasted throughout.
- Whereas Holmes uses theories and calculations, Watson sees the romantic nature of life.



Class:

- There was a clear class divide in Victorian England.
- Marriage between the classes would have been uncommon and frowned upon by society.
- Watson fears that he will not be able to marry Mary once she has the treasure.