
THE ADVENTURE OF THE RED LENS

a Sherlock Holmes Story

by

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"**I WON'T DENY IT, WATSON.** My exploits frequently require acts which are less than socially acceptable; nay, some of which one might deem criminal," Holmes, bitterly introspective, told me one evening. "Yet I have always set my sights on that elusive target called justice. The affair of which you remind me is the sole deed that I unconditionally deplore. I agree with you. I behaved despicably."

We were seated on opposite sides of the dying fire. I had been reading Mr. Stevenson's odd story *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* when Holmes, pacing like a caged beast and muttering to himself about boredom, reached for the hypodermic needle. He saw my look of indignation and offered the needle to me, a macabre grin twisting his lips. "Care for a touch of forgetfulness, old friend?" he said.

I thoughtlessly replied, "You would crave that more than would I."

His smile faded. For several minutes we both sulked. Then Holmes ended our silence with his self-deprecating remark.

"It was not your fault," I said, for now I believed that.

"No." He shook his head sadly. His voice was distant, preoccupied, mired in self-pity. "My conscience will not accept that salve. I am at fault. I may not have tied the knot, but I tightened the noose."

"The poor woman was mad. You are too severe with yourself, Holmes."

"Am I?" he asked, fixing me with his fierce gaze. Hardened criminals had flinched from its intensity. I locked onto his eyes and refused to capitulate.

"As I recall," The Adventure of the Red Lens he said, not kindly, The Adventure of the Red Lens "you were my most fervent accuser."

"I was swept away by the tide of emotion," I said, lowering my eyes. I considered Holmes my greatest friend, but I had been blind to the suffering he had endured. I closed the covers on Dr. Jekyll and his partner Mr. Hyde, and let my mind drift back to that hideous case...

MRS. HUDSON HAD OUTDONE HERSELF. I stretched contentedly and yawned. My body begged for a nap, but my waistline scolded, "exercise." A quick glance at the window showed the sun still hearty, but soon, I knew, the chill night air would sweep in, making one long for the crackling fire or the eiderdown comforter.

Holmes, in his favorite chair, held a letter in his steady hand, reading with fanatical precision. I said, "Would you care to take some air?"

It is quite possible he heard me, but his attention was directed elsewhere and he ignored me.

"Holmes?"

He looked up, startled. "What? Oh, forgive me, Watson. I was preoccupied." The Adventure of the Red Lens He rose from his chair and went to the mantle where he kept his unanswered correspondence. "Let me file this... Blast it all, Watson! Is nothing safe here? This is the fourth The Adventure of the Red Lens disappearance this week."

"What's missing now, Holmes?" I asked.

"My jackknife. It was there yesterday and it's gone now. Damnation. What am I to do with this unanswered correspondence?" He raised a handful of letters, all of them begging replies from him and which, until the mood struck him, would be kept affixed to the mantle The Adventure of the Red Lens with his wicked jackknife, a weapon, he once confided to me, with which an American gambler had attempted to cut his throat after Holmes had exposed his ingenious cheating techniques.

"Perhaps it has been mislaid..."

He fixed me a withering stare. Sympathizing with my friend his need for order and consistency, I nevertheless found it difficult not to betray my amusement with a smile. To tell the pale truth, I felt the missing items were buried under the rising mound of newspapers, which threatened daily to engulf us and to which Holmes had promised he would soon attend. For a man who practiced such a minute The Adventure of the Red Lens and exacting science, he was abominable in his personal habits.

"My second favorite pipe, my journal, my Persian slipper and shag, and, now, my jackknife. Where does it end, Watson?" He went to the chemist's table, rummaged in a drawer and returned to the mantle, jabbing a scalpel through the envelopes, deep into the scarred wood. "A poor substitute, I agree," he said to my look of barely controlled mirth. "Trust me, Watson, I will get to the bottom of this. And heaven help the culprit..."

He was completely serious.

The Adventure Of The Red Lens

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