



The Adventure of the Three Students

B1 Version

Part 1: An Uncomfortable Problem

Holmes and Watson were staying for several weeks in a university town — one of those ancient English cities where scholars have studied for centuries — while Holmes conducted research in a library. One evening a tutor named Hilton Soames came to their lodgings in great agitation. He lectured in Greek at St. Luke's College, and he had a most delicate problem.

The following day was the first day of examinations for a prestigious scholarship — a competition that would provide the winner with financial support for their studies. The scholarship examination paper consisted of a long passage of Greek to be translated. Soames had received the printed proofs — test copies from the printer — that afternoon, and had been carefully reading through them at his desk. He had stepped out for about an hour to take tea with a friend.

When he returned, he found clear signs that someone had been through his papers. The three proof slips had been moved — one was on the floor, one on the side table, one still in its original place. On the desk were pencil shavings and a broken pencil tip, suggesting someone had been copying the text in great haste. There was also a small

pyramid of black clay on the desk, and a fresh cut in the red leather surface of the desk itself.

Most alarmingly, his servant Bannister had left a key in the outer door — the heavy oak outer door that gave onto the stone staircase — when he came to check whether Soames wanted tea. This meant the room had been unlocked and accessible for up to an hour. Three students lived on the staircase above: Gilchrist on the ground floor, Daulat Ras the Indian student on the second floor, and Miles McLaren on the top floor. Any of them could have entered. The examination had to proceed the next morning, but Soames could not allow it if one candidate already had the questions.

Part 2: Holmes Investigates

Holmes visited the rooms and made a careful examination. He stood on tiptoe at the window and looked in, and immediately understood something important: the desk was visible from the window, but only to a tall person. He then visited all three students under the pretext of admiring the medieval architecture of the old college rooms. During each visit he managed to break his pencil and borrow the student's own — examining it carefully before returning it. He also looked discreetly around each room.

In Gilchrist's room he noticed nothing suspicious. In Daulat Ras's room, again nothing definite. When they knocked on McLaren's door, the student shouted rudely through it that he would not be disturbed the night before an examination and refused to let them in. Holmes asked Soames how tall McLaren was, and on being told he was about five foot six, Holmes made no further comment.

Back in the corridor, Holmes also examined the bedroom adjoining Soames's study. Behind the curtain where clothes were hung, he found a second small pyramid of black clay — identical to the one on the desk. Someone had hidden there.

Holmes told Soames to let the examination proceed as normal, and said he would return early the next morning with a solution. That night he rose at dawn and walked to the university athletics ground, where he collected three small samples of the distinctive black clay used in the long-jump pit — a track-and-field event where athletes sprint and leap as far as possible into a sandpit. The pit at this college was lined with tenacious black clay mixed with sawdust, which exactly matched the material found on Soames's desk.

Part 3: The Truth

The next morning Holmes assembled Soames, Watson, and Bannister, and asked Bannister directly whether he had sat down in the chair near the window in order to conceal something beneath him. Bannister was shaken but denied it. Holmes pressed him: he knew that a man had hidden in the bedroom, and that Bannister had released him after Soames went to fetch Holmes. Bannister broke down.

Holmes then asked Soames to invite Gilchrist to come downstairs. The moment the tall, athletic young man saw Bannister's face, he understood that his secret was known. He dropped to his knees, buried his face in his hands, and wept. Holmes reconstructed what had happened with great gentleness.

Gilchrist had been practising the long jump at the athletics ground and was returning with his spiked jumping shoes when he passed Soames's window. Being tall enough to see over the sill, he noticed the examination proofs on the desk. He saw Bannister's key in the open door. It was an impulse — a sudden temptation he should have resisted. He went in, put his jumping shoes and gloves on the chair and table, and began copying the proofs. When he heard Soames's step on the stair, he seized his shoes, fled into the bedroom, and hid behind the curtain. He had left his gloves on the chair.

Bannister, who had served Gilchrist's father as a butler years earlier and was deeply loyal to the family, came in and saw the gloves. He understood at once what had happened. He sat on the chair to cover them until Soames left the room, then let Gilchrist out and urged him to confess everything.

Gilchrist had already made his decision. Before coming downstairs he had given Soames a letter saying he was withdrawing from the examination and accepting a commission — an officer's position — in the Rhodesian Police, and would be leaving for South Africa immediately. Holmes shook his hand and wished him well: he had fallen once, but had the courage to do the right thing. The scholarship would be offered to another candidate, and the reputation of the college was saved.