



Arthur Conan Doyle Encyclopedia

The Return of Sherlock Holmes Adventure XXXII -- The Adventure of the Priory School

SUMMARY (Diogenes Club)

The Duke loved a woman in his youth who refused to marry him "for noble reasons." They had an illegitimate son, James. The lady died. The Duke kept James at his side and eventually married and had a second son, Arthur. Since James was illegitimate, he was ineligible to inherit the dukedom so Arthur became the Duke's heir.

James resented Arthur (Saltire) and his presence in the household placed such a severe strain upon the duke's marriage that he and the duchess separated. When the story begins, the duchess is living in France. Although Arthur would have preferred to be with his mother, he had no say in the matter.

Because of the intense animosity James had for Arthur, the duke sent the boy to the Priory School for his own safety.

James became friends with Reuben Hayes, proprietor of the Game Cock Inn. Hayes had at one time been a coachman for the Duke but was sacked. James plotted with Hayes to kidnap Arthur and hold him until the Duke made James his legal heir.

James inserted a note into a letter the Duke had written to Arthur at the Priory School. The note purported to be from his mother and told him to meet Hayes in the woods near the school that night and Hayes would take Arthur to her.



As Arthur was leaving via his room window, he was seen by Heidegger who followed him on his bicycle. Heidegger overtook Arthur and Hayes, and was murdered by Hayes who then continued on to the Game cock Inn where he kept Arthur confined.

After following bicycle tracks and animal tracks, Holmes unravels the matter. Hayes is apprehended, the Duke and his wife are reunited, Saltire returns to school and James goes to Australia to seek his fortune.

SUMMARY (ACD Encyclopedia)

Thornecroft Huxtable, the founder and director of the very select Priory School, contacts Holmes for help: One of his students, the young Lord Saltire, son of the very rich and powerful Duke of Holderness, is missing.

The child, who had been living with his father, hadn't been happy. He had been longing for his mother, who had left home. He had received a letter from his father the day before his disappearance that he took with him. The boys in the next room hadn't heard any noise, and the young Lord's window had been found open.

Kidnapping suspicions have focused on Herr Heidegger, the German master, who disappeared from the school, along with his bicycle, on the same day.

Holmes and Watson head to the Duke's castle in Mackleton, and learn that the Duke's secretary, James Wilder, had posted the letter. As he examines a map, the detective also deduces the child and his kidnapper must have fled through the moor. Inspecting the marsh, Holmes and Watson find two sets of tire prints in two different places, one set of which was made by Heidegger's bicycle. They also discover the teacher's body, killed by a blow to the head.

They reach an isolated inn, run by Reuben Hayes, and Holmes figures out that the child has been taken and kept here. His deduction is reinforced when he sees Wilder rushing to this inn on a bike.

The detective then visits the Duke and accuses him of having planned his own child's abduction. But Holderness denies that, confessing that he only covered Wilder's misdeeds, because the secretary is actually his illegitimate son. The young man is doing everything he can to ruin his father's life and blackmail the Duke into leaving him the fortune. He trapped his hated half-brother by slipping a note in the letter he posted, asking him to meet his mother outside the school. When he saw the boy leave, Heidegger rushed behind to protect him, but was killed by Hayes who was here, engaged by Wilder, to kidnap the child.

SUMMARY (Wikipedia)

Holmes receives a visit from Dr. Thorneycroft Huxtable, the founder and principal of a preparatory school called Priory School in Northern England. He beseeches Holmes to come back to Mackleton with him to look into the disappearance of one of his pupils, the ten-year-old Lord Saltire, whose father is the very rich and famous Duke of Holderness. Huxtable explains that not only the boy has disappeared, but also the German master, Heidegger, along with his bicycle.

Once in the North, the Duke says to Holmes that he does not think that his estranged wife has anything to do with his son's disappearance, nor has there been a ransom demand. Holmes establishes that the boy and his kidnapers could not have used the nearby road without being seen, suggesting that they went cross-country. As if to confirm this, the police find the boy's school cap in some gypsies' possession. They swear that they simply found it on the moor, but the police lock them up.

Holmes and Dr. Watson go hunting for clues. They find a bicycle track, but it is not Heidegger's; it does not match his tyres. Holmes observes that one tyre has a patch on it. Almost everything observable has been obliterated by cow tracks (which are the only marks on the ground anywhere). Eventually, Heidegger's bicycle tracks are found, and they end where he lies, dead. After that, Holmes and Watson arrive at the Fighting Cock Inn, and meet the innkeeper, Reuben Hayes, who seems startled indeed to hear that Holmes wants to go to Holderness Hall, the Duke's nearby house, to tell him news of his son. The two men have lunch there, and Holmes suddenly realises that he and Watson saw many cow tracks out on the moor, but never at any time did they see any cows. Furthermore, the patterns of the hoof prints were quite unusual, suggesting that the cow in question trotted, cantered, and galloped. Holmes and Watson sneak out to Hayes's stable and examine the horse's hooves. As Holmes has expected, there is evidence of recent shoeing, but with old shoes and new nails. Examining the nearby smithy, Holmes and Watson are rather belligerently asked to leave by Mr. Hayes.

Shortly afterwards, the two men hide as a cyclist comes along the road from the direction of the Duke's. It is James Wilder, the Duke's personal secretary, and he looks agitated. He arrives at the inn. Soon afterwards, a trap pulls out of the stable yard and goes along the road towards Chesterfield. A while later, someone else – it is getting dark and only a fleeting glimpse of the new visitor is caught – arrives at the inn. Coming closer, Holmes observes Wilder's bicycle tyres and notes that they are the same make as the first ones encountered on the moor.

The next morning, they go to Holderness Hall, where they find that the Duke is not well. Nevertheless, Holmes demands from him a cheque for £6000 (equivalent to £692,992 in 2021^[2]^[3]), saying that he has earned the reward. His son is at the Fighting Cock, and the accused is the Duke himself, but the actual mastermind of this crime is James Wilder, who has a terrible secret: He is the illegitimate son of the Duke. He

conceived a plan to kidnap Lord Saltire to force the Duke to change his will, knowing very well that his father would not call the police on him, as he abhorred the very idea of scandal. The plan began to unravel when Wilder hired Hayes – who has now fled, but been caught on Holmes's information – to do the actual kidnapping. Hayes killed Heidegger, and when Wilder heard the news, he confessed all to his father. So anxious was the Duke to avoid scandal, he agreed to let his younger son stay at the inn for another three days, and to keep quiet, so that Hayes could flee justice.

All ends well, except for Hayes, who faces the gallows. Lord Saltire is brought home from the inn and the Duke writes to his estranged wife asking her to reconcile with him. This he feels she will be willing to do, for the source of the friction between them is going away: James Wilder is being packed off to Australia to seek his fortune. As for the cow tracks, they were accomplished by shoeing the horses with special shoes shaped like cow's hooves. The shoes were from the Duke's collection of family memorabilia.