

The Adventure Of The Dying Detective

Dr. Watson is called to tend Holmes, who is apparently dying of a rare tropical disease, Tapanuli fever, contracted while he was on a case. Watson is shocked, not having heard about his friend's illness. Mrs. Hudson says that Holmes has neither eaten nor drunk anything in three days.

Holmes instructs Watson not to come near him, because the illness is highly infectious. Although Watson wishes to examine Holmes himself or send for a specialist, Holmes demands that Watson wait several hours before seeking help. So, Watson is forced to wait, in extreme worry as Holmes mutters nonsense.

While Watson waits, he examines several objects in Holmes's room. Holmes grows angry when Watson touches items explaining that he does not like his things touched.

At six o'clock, Holmes tells Watson to turn the gaslight on, but only half-full. He then instructs Watson to bring Mr Culverton Smith of 13 Lower Burke Street to see Holmes, but to make sure that Watson returns to Baker Street before Smith arrives.

Watson goes to Smith's address. Although Smith refuses to see anyone, Watson forces his way in. Once Watson explains his errand on behalf of Sherlock Holmes, Smith's attitude changes drastically. Smith agrees to come to Baker Street within a half hour. Watson excuses himself, saying that he has another appointment, and returns to Baker Street before Smith's arrival.

Believing that they are alone, Smith is frank with Holmes. It soon emerges, to the hiding Watson's horror, that Holmes has been sickened by the same illness that killed Smith's nephew Victor. Smith then sees the little ivory box, which he had sent to Holmes by post, and which contains a sharp spring infected with the illness. Smith pockets it, removing the evidence of his crime. He then resolves to stay there and watch Holmes die.

Holmes asks Smith to turn the gas up full, which Smith does. Smith then asks Holmes if he would like anything else, to which Holmes replies — no longer in the voice of a man near death — "a match and a cigarette." Inspector Morton then enters — the full gaslight was the signal to move in. Holmes tells Morton to arrest Culverton Smith for the murder of his nephew, and perhaps also for the attempted murder of Sherlock Holmes. Smith, still as arrogant as ever, points out that his word is as good as Holmes's in court, but Holmes then calls for Watson to emerge from behind the screen, to present himself as another witness to the conversation.

Holmes explains his illness was feigned as a ruse to induce Smith to confess to his nephew's murder. Holmes was not infected by the little box; he has enough enemies to know that he must always examine his mail carefully before he opens it. Starving himself for three days and the claim of the "disease's" infectious nature was to keep Watson from examining him and discovering the ruse.

"The Adventure of the dying Detective" is a [Sherlock Holmes short story](#) by the British author [Sir Arthur Conan Doyle](#). It first appeared in print in the November 22, 1913 issue of *Collier's* magazine in the United States and in the December 1913 issue of *The Strand* magazine in the United Kingdom. It was published again in October 1917 as part of the anthology [His Last Bow](#).

In the story, Dr. Watson becomes convinced that his friend, the brilliant consulting detective Sherlock Holmes, is dying from a highly contagious disease which is usually found only in Asia. Holmes refuses to allow Watson to examine him. Instead, Holmes tells Watson to bring a man called Culverton Smith to see him. Culverton Smith has no professional medical training but he knows more about the disease which Holmes claims to be suffering from than anyone else in the world. Holmes admits that he and Culverton Smith are not on friendly terms because Holmes suspected that the man had some part in the death of his nephew.

It has been two years since Dr. Watson married and moved out of the apartment which he once shared with his friend Sherlock Holmes. One day in November, Holmes' landlady Mrs. Hudson goes to see Watson. She tells him that Holmes is dying. He has had nothing to eat or drink for three days. He has been getting steadily worse throughout that time but has refused to see a doctor. He has finally allowed Mrs. Hudson to fetch Watson but still refuses to see any other doctor.

Watson enters Holmes' bedroom and is struck by how ill his friend looks. He speaks in a weak and croaky voice and constantly gasps for air. While speaking, Holmes often strays off the subject and begins talking about half crown coins and oysters. According to Holmes, he is suffering from a tropical disease which is usually confined to Sumatra. Holmes says that an investigation recently took him to the docks in the East End of London and that he must have caught the disease through contact with Chinese sailors there.

Sherlock Holmes refuses to allow Dr. Watson to examine him, saying that the disease can be passed on by touch. When Watson says that would never stop him examining any patient, Holmes says that Watson is not qualified to examine him because he has no specialist knowledge of tropical diseases. Watson is hurt by the remark but offers to fetch a specialist, naming three acknowledged experts in tropical diseases who are currently in London. As Watson is about to leave and fetch a specialist in tropical medicine, Holmes suddenly springs out of bed, locks the door and takes the key. He tells Watson that he can fetch an expert in tropical diseases in two hours time, at six o'clock in the evening. However, the specialist which Watson fetches must be the man that Holmes names and nobody else.

Holmes appears to fall asleep. Watson grows restless and begins to look around Holmes' bedroom. Among the clutter on the mantelpiece, he notices a small black and white ivory box with a sliding lid. Holmes suddenly shouts at Watson not to touch the box, claiming that he cannot bear to have other people handle his possessions.

Just before six o'clock, Holmes tells Watson to turn on the gas lights but to make sure they remain only half lit. Watson is told not to draw the blind. Holmes tells Watson to move some objects onto the bedside table, including the ivory box. Watson is told to use some sugar tongs to pick up the box.

Watson is then given the name and address of the man Holmes wishes to treat him, Mr. Culverton Smith. Watson says that he has never heard of Culverton Smith. Holmes is not surprised to hear this because Culverton Smith has no professional medical training. However, he knows more about the disease which Holmes claims to be suffering from than any doctor in the world. Culverton Smith is currently visiting London but is a resident of Sumatra where he owns a plantation. The plantation is in a remote location and it is difficult for aid to reach it. When there was an outbreak of the disease on his plantation, Culverton Smith was forced to study it himself and became an expert on it. Culverton Smith has precise habits and Holmes knew that he would not be in his study before six o'clock. Holmes acknowledges that Culverton Smith may refuse to treat him. Holmes suspected Culverton Smith of causing the death of his

nephew Victor Savage. Consequently, Smith bears a grudge against Holmes. However, Watson is told to persuade Smith to see Holmes, not to force him. Watson is also told that he and Smith should not travel back to Holmes' apartment together and that Watson should make some excuse to avoid that if necessary.

On the street outside Holmes' apartment, Dr. Watson sees Inspector Morton of Scotland Yard. Inspector Morton asks Watson how Holmes is. When Watson says that Holmes is very sick, it briefly seems to Watson that Morton is happy to hear that.

Culverton Smith instructs his butler to tell Watson that he will not see anybody that evening. Watson, however, bursts into Smith's house uninvited. Watson persuades Smith to come to see the dying Holmes. As Holmes had instructed, Watson makes an excuse when Culverton Smith suggests that they go to Holmes' apartment together.

Watson arrives back at Holmes' apartment before Culverton Smith. Holmes tells Watson to hide behind the headboard of his bed and not to move, regardless of what happens.

Culverton Smith arrives. Holmes tells him that he is suffering from the same disease which killed Smith's nephew Victor Savage. Culverton Smith says that it was "uncharitable" of Holmes to point out that he was an expert in the same disease from which his nephew died, a disease usually only found in Sumatra but which Victor Savage caught in London. However, believing that Holmes is dying, Culverton Smith admits that he did kill Victor Savage. He also says that Holmes is wrong to think that he caught the disease from Chinese sailors. Smith reminds Holmes that he recently received an ivory box in the mail. Holmes says that, when he opened the box, a metal spring came out which pricked him and made him draw blood. Culverton Smith sees the box and puts it in his pocket to remove any evidence that can tie him to the death of Holmes. When Holmes asks Culverton Smith to turn up the gas lights, Smith happily obliges, happy to be able to see Holmes die more clearly.

Sherlock Holmes suddenly appears to recover. Inspector Morton and some other police officers come into the room. The turning up of the gas lights is revealed to have been a prearranged signal between Holmes and Morton. Culverton Smith is arrested for the murder of Victor Savage and the attempted murder of Sherlock Holmes. The police are told to be careful of the box which they will find in Smith's pocket. Smith is confident that he will not be convicted, saying that there is no real evidence against him and that it is simply Holmes' word against his. Holmes tells Watson to come out of hiding. Watson heard everything that Culverton Smith said and can testify against him.

Later, Holmes reveals that he was never really ill. He believes that Culverton Smith used a trick box to infect Victor Savage with the disease. Holmes was not infected because he has learned to be cautious of all packages which he receives in the mail. However, Holmes realized that Culverton Smith could be fooled into making a confession if he believed that the detective was dying. Holmes says that it was necessary to fool Mrs. Hudson in order to fool Watson. It was necessary to fool Watson because Watson is not a convincing liar. He never could have persuaded Culverton Smith that Holmes was dying if he did not believe it himself. Holmes appeared to be seriously ill largely because he had not eaten or had anything to drink for three days. His look was accentuated by some improvised make up. Holmes did not allow Watson to examine him because, as a competent doctor, Watson would soon realize that the detective was not sick at all.

