

4.4 The Sign of Four

Sir Arthur Ignatius Conan Doyle (22 May 1859 – 7 July 1930) was a British writer, who created the character Sherlock Holmes. Originally a physician, in 1887, he published *A Study in Scarlet*, the first of four novels and more than fifty short stories about Holmes and Dr. Watson. The Sherlock Holmes stories are generally considered milestones in the field of crime fiction. Doyle was a prolific writer; other than Holmes stories, his works include fantasy and science fiction stories about Professor Challenger and humorous stories about the Napoleonic soldier Brigadier Gerard, as well as plays, romances, poetry, non-fiction and historical novels. One of Doyle's early short stories, 'J. Habakuk Jephson's Statement', helped to popularise the mystery of the Mary Celeste. *The Sign of Four* is the second novel of Arthur Conan Doyle in which Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson solve the mystery of the hidden treasure and murder.



Major Characters

- ◉ Sherlock Holmes
- ◉ John Watson
- ◉ Mary Morstan
- ◉ Major Sholto
- ◉ Thaddeus Sholto
- ◉ Tonga
- ◉ Toby

Outline of the Novel

The novel begins with Holmes and Dr. Watson engaged in a discussion when Mary Morstan, a young woman, who desires Holmes' advice, soon visits the two at their place. During the meeting, Mary tells that after her father disappeared under mysterious circumstances some ten years ago; she began receiving a large pearl in

the mail on the same day of every year. She tells that she has received a letter instructing her to go, with the accompaniment of two friends, to Lyceum Theatre. The letter gives a hint that some injustice has been done to her. Holmes and Watson agree to accompany Mary. Soon Watson and Mary are attracted to one another.

When the three are heading to the Lyceum Theatre, Holmes, Watson, and Mary, they are whisked away in a darkened carriage to a strange house. Within, they find an eccentric gentleman named Thaddeus Sholto. He reveals that not only has Mary's father died, but also she is partial heir to a great hidden treasure. Thaddeus goes on to explain that his father always lived in fear of men with wooden legs, and on occasion struck out at perfect strangers who were so handicapped. On his deathbed, the elder Sholto revealed to his sons the existence of the treasure, but just before he could tell them where it was, the face of a bearded man appeared in the window, and the old man suffered a fatal heart attack.

The next morning, a note was found affixed to the body: it read "Sign of Four". Thaddeus proceeds to explain that after searching for years for the treasure, his brother Bartholomew discovered it in a hidden attack in the family house. On his deathbed, the brothers' father made them swear they would share the treasure with Mary Morstan, who has some unknown claim in the fortune. Thaddeus concludes by entreating the three to accompany him to the family estate where they will divide up the fortune.

When they arrived at the family estate, the three find a shaken housekeeper who claims that Bartholomew has not emerged from his locked room all day. Holmes and Watson peer through the keyhole of the room and find an unnatural grinning face leering at them. Breaking down the door, they find the body of Bartholomew, a poisoned thorn lodged in his neck. After investigating for some time, Holmes concludes that two persons, one of whom had a wooden leg, committed the crime. According to Holmes, the second person was an especially interesting individual. It also becomes apparent that the murderers have stolen the Agra treasure.

One of Holmes' deductions reveals that the wooden-legged man stepped in creosote during his escape. Following up on this lead, Holmes and Watson borrow a dog to follow the scent. Their search leads them to the edge of the Thames, where it is clear the two criminals hired a boat. Over the next few days, Holmes recruits his "Baker Street Irregulars," a gang of street urchins, to search the river for the boat. When these efforts fail, Holmes, in disguise, makes a search himself, and discovers that the boat—the Aurora—has been camouflaged.

That night, Holmes, Watson, and several officers pursue the Aurora in a police barge. They gradually overtake the boat, which contains a wooden-legged captain and a small pygmy native from the Andaman Islands. The native attempts to shoot Holmes with a blowpipe, and is consequently shot down by both Holmes and Watson. The Aurora runs aground and the wooden-legged man becomes entrapped in the mud; subsequently, he is captured.

The wooden-legged man, whose name is Jonathan Small, is brought back to Baker Street, along with an iron box, which was found on the boat. Captain Small proceeds to relay the story of the Agra treasure, which began when he was stationed as a fortress gatekeeper in India. Small explains that he was approached by three Arab guards and offered a share in a great fortune if he would help them murder the man who carried it. Small agreed. When the man, an emissary from a wealthy Sheik, arrived, the three Arabs murdered the man as Small blocked his escape. The four conspirators hid the treasure, but soon after, were arrested for the murder of the emissary.

Small was sent to a penal colony on the Andaman Islands, where he managed to befriend a native, Tonga, who became his loyal companion. Small bribed two of the guards on the island, Sholto and Morstan

(Mary's father), into helping him escape in exchange for a share in the fortune. The two agreed, and Sholto left to bring back the treasure. After some time, it became apparent to Small that Sholto had betrayed him, and he escaped from the island with Tonga. After many years, Small had tracked down Sholto, and arrived just in time to see him die. After the death, Small affixed the note that was found on the body, as a reference to himself and his three Arab companions. When he returned to the Sholto estate, Tonga murdered Bartholomew and the two stole the treasure.

Small concludes his narrative by revealing that in the course of the chase on the Thames, he threw the treasure overboard. Small is taken to prison, and Watson, who has come to love Mary Morstan, proposes to her.

Theme of the novel : The theme of the novel revolves around the Agra treasure. Throughout the story, the appearance of the treasure leads to a direct and often tragic change in the lives of the characters. Because of this, it is important that the removal of the treasure would cause the characters to

return to their previous position. In the case of Small, a convict, the re-emergence of the treasure leads him down a path that ends in murder; with the removal of the treasure, he is a prisoner once again. Mary Morstan is a charming young woman whom Watson contemplates marrying. With the prospect of Mary becoming an heiress, however, this possibility is removed. When it is discovered that the Agra treasure is gone, Mary returns to a position in which Watson can comfortably propose marriage. The shallowness of wealth and the destruction that can come through it is also seen prevailing throughout the novel. As the Agra treasure directly and adversely affects almost everyone. In the course of the story, the Sheik's emissary and Bartholomew are both murdered for the treasure, Tonga is killed while fleeing with it, and Small is sentenced to life imprisonment. Additionally, both Thaddeus and his father spent their lives constantly paranoid about wooden legged men, and about strangers in general. The Agra treasure even provides a "romantic conflict" for Dr. Watson, who feels that he cannot marry Miss Morstan for fear that he will appear to be after her money.

Plot of the Novel

The novel has a complex plot involving service in India, the Indian Rebellion of 1857, a stolen treasure, and a secret pact among four convicts ('the Four' of the title) and two corrupt prison guards.

According to Mary, in December 1878, her father had telegraphed her upon his safe return from India and requested her to meet him at the Langham Hotel in London. When Mary arrived at the hotel, she was told that her father had gone out the previous night and not returned. Despite all efforts, no trace was ever found of him. Mary contacted her father's only friend, Major John Sholto who was in the same regiment lived in England.

But he denied knowing her father had returned. The second puzzle is that she has received six pearls in the mail from an anonymous benefactor, one per year since 1882 after answering an anonymous newspaper query inquiring for her. With the last pearl she received a letter remarking that she has been wronged and asking for a meeting. Holmes takes the case and soon discovers that Major Sholto had died in 1882 and that within a short span of time Mary began to receive the pearls, implying a connection. The only clue Mary can give Holmes is a map of a fortress found in her father's desk with the names of Jonathan Small, Mahomet Singh, Abdullah Khan and Dost Akbar.

Holmes, Watson, and Mary meet Thaddeus Sholto, the son of the late Major Sholto and the anonymous sender of the pearls. Thaddeus confirms the Major had seen Mary's father the night he died; they had arranged a meeting to divide a priceless treasure Sholto had brought home from India. While quarrelling over the treasure, Captain Morstan—long in weak health—suffered a heart attack. Not wanting to bring attention to the object of the quarrel—and also worried that circumstances would suggest that he had killed Morstan in an argument, particularly since Morstan's head struck the corner of the chest as he fell—Sholto disposed of the body and hid the treasure. However, he himself suffered from poor health and an enlarged spleen (possibly due to malaria, as a quinine bottle stands by his bed). His own health became worse when he received a letter from India in early 1882. Dying, he called his two sons and confessed to Morstan's death and was about to divulge the location of the treasure when he suddenly cried, "Keep him out!" before falling back and dying. The puzzled sons glimpsed a face in the window, but the only trace was a single footstep in the dirt. On their father's body is a note reading "The Sign of the Four". Both brothers quarrelled over whether a legacy should be left to Mary Morstan, and Thaddeus left his brother Bartholomew, taking a chaplet and sending its pearls to Mary. The reason he sent the letter is that Bartholomew has found the treasure and possibly Thaddeus and Mary might confront him for a division of it.

Bartholomew is found dead in his home from a poison dart and the treasure is missing. While the police wrongly take Thaddeus in as a suspect, Holmes deduces that there are two persons involved in the murder: a one-legged man, Jonathan Small, as well as another "small" accomplice. He traces them to a boat landing where Small

has hired a steam launch named the Aurora. With the help of dog Toby that he sends Watson to collect from Mr. Sherman, the Baker Street Irregulars and his own disguise, Holmes traces the steam launch. In a police steam launch Holmes and Watson chase the Aurora and capture it, but in the process end up killing the "small" companion after he attempts to kill Holmes with a poisoned dart shot from a blow-pipe. Small tries to escape but is captured. However, the iron treasure box is empty; Small claims to have dumped the treasure over the side during the chase.

Small confesses that years before he was a soldier of the Third Buffs in India and lost his right leg in a swimming accident to a crocodile. After some time, when he was an overseer on a tea plantation, the Indian Rebellion of 1857 occurred and he was forced to flee for his life to the Agra fortress. While standing guard one night he was overpowered by two Sikh troopers, who gave him a choice of being killed or being an accomplice to waylaying a disguised servant of a Rajah who sent the servant with a valuable fortune in pearls and jewels to the British for safekeeping. The robbery and murder took place and the crime was discovered, although the jewels were not. Small got penal servitude on the Andaman Islands and, after 20 years, he overheard that John Sholto had lost much money gambling and cannot even sell his commission; therefore, he will have to resign. Small saw his chance and made a deal with Sholto and Arthur Morstan: Sholto would recover the treasure and in return send a boat to pick up Small and the Sikhs. Sholto double-crossed both Morstan and Small and stole the treasure for himself—after inheriting a fortune from his uncle. Small vowed vengeance and four years later escaped the Andaman Islands with an islander named Tonga after they both killed a prison guard. It was the news of his escape that shocked

Sholto into his fatal illness. Small arrived too late to hear of the treasure's location, but left the note which referred to the name of the pact between himself and his three Sikh accomplices. When Bartholomew found the treasure, Small planned to only steal it, but claims a miscommunication led Tonga to kill Bartholomew as well. Small claims the Agra treasure brought nothing but bad luck to anyone who came in touch with it—the servant who was murdered; Sholto living with fear and guilt; and now he himself is trapped

in slavery for life—half his life building a breakwater in the Andaman Islands and the rest of his life digging drains in Dartmoor Prison.

Mary Morstan is left without the bulk of the Agra treasure, although she will apparently receive the rest of the chaplet. John Watson falls in love with Mary and it is revealed at the end that he proposed to her and she has accepted.

Synopsis of the Extract

Dr. Watson and Sherlock Holmes were discussing general issues when they were interrupted by the arrival of Ms. Mary Morstan, who has a case for Sherlock to solve. Mary tells about her father's sudden disappearance on a trip many years ago. A few years later, an advertisement was published in a newspaper asking for her address, which she gave, and ever since then, on the same day of each year, she received a rare and expensive pearl. This continued for some more years but today, she received a letter asking to meet her. The letter warned Mary not to bring the police with her. Mary requests Holmes and Watson to accompany her to place so that they can figure out the secret behind it. Both agree to accompany her. Sherlock recommends Dr. Watson to read Winwood Reade's book 'Martyrdom of Man' and leaves the room in search of some references and facts that are essential for the case. After returning from his investigation, Sherlock shares his findings with Watson. He believes that the death of Major Sholto, Mary's father's only friend in London, has

something to do with the mysterious pearls she has been receiving every year. Sherlock believed that the Sholto's heir knows that Mary has been wronged in some way, and may be seeking to rectify the problem. Later Mary arrives at Baker Street as planned. Both Sherlock and Watson accompany her to the appointment with the mysterious letter writer. Mary has brought a paper of her father's with her which she wasn't been able to decipher; she felt that the paper might be pertinent to the case in some way. It might help Holmes to decode the mystery and find the disappearance of her father. Sherlock examines the letter and puts it away for safe-keeping. He, Watson, and Mary go to the meeting; there, a person asks them any of them are police officers, which they deny. The person, who is apparently a servant of the person they are meeting, then drives them in carriage. The trio arrives at a 'less fashionable' part of London, aka a more rundown, working class neighbourhood. They are escorted inside a house by a servant.

The Sign of Four

Chapter II

The Statement of the Case

Miss Morstan entered the room with a firm step and an outward composure of manner. She was a young lady, small, dainty, well gloved, and dressed in the most perfect taste. There was, however, a plainness and simplicity about her costume which bore with it a suggestion of limited means. The dress was a sombre grayish beige, untrimmed and **unbraided**, and she wore a small turban of the same dull hue, relieved only by a suspicion of white feather in the side.

Her face had neither regularity of feature nor beauty of complexion, but her expression was sweet and amiable, and her large blue eyes were singularly spiritual and sympathetic. In an experience of women which extends over many nations and three separate continents, I have never looked upon a face which gave a clearer promise of a refined and sensitive nature. I could not but observe that as she took the seat which Sherlock Holmes placed for her, her lip trembled, her hand **quivered**, and she showed every sign of intense inward agitation.

"I have come to you, Mr. Holmes," she said, "because you once enabled my employer, Mrs. Cecil Forrester, to unravel a little domestic complication. She was much impressed by your kindness and skill."

"Mrs. Cecil Forrester," he repeated thoughtfully. "I believe that I was of some slight service to her. The case, however, as I remember it, was a very simple one."

"She did not think so. But at least you cannot say the same of mine. I can hardly

imagine anything more strange, more utterly inexplicable, than the situation in which I find myself."

Holmes rubbed his hands, and his eyes glistened. He leaned forward in his chair with an expression of extraordinary concentration upon his clear-cut, hawk-like features. "State your case," said he, in brisk, business tones.

I felt that my position was an embarrassing one. "You will, I am sure, excuse me," I said, rising from my chair.

To my surprise, the young lady held up her gloved hand to detain me. "If your friend," she said, "would be good enough to stop, he might be of inestimable service to me." I relapsed into my chair.

"Briefly," she continued, "the facts are these. My father was an officer in an Indian regiment who sent me home when I was quite a child. My mother was dead, and I had no relative in England. I was placed, however, in a comfortable boarding establishment at Edinburgh, and there I remained until I was seventeen years of age. In the year 1878 my father, who was senior captain of his regiment, obtained twelve months' leave and came home. He telegraphed to me from London that he had arrived all safe, and directed me to come down at once, giving the Langham Hotel as his address. His message, as I remember, was full of kindness and love. On reaching London I drove to the Langham, and was informed that Captain Morstan was staying there, but that he had gone out the night before and had not yet returned. I waited all day without news of him. That night, on the advice of the manager of the hotel, I communicated with the police, and next morning we advertised in all the papers.

Our inquiries led to no result; and from that day to this no word has ever been heard of my unfortunate father. He came home with his heart full of hope, to find some peace, some comfort, and instead—"She put her hand to her throat, and a choking sob cut short the sentence.

"The date?" asked Holmes, opening his note-book. "He disappeared upon the 3rd of December, 1878. —nearly ten years ago. "His luggage?" "Remained at the hotel. There was nothing in it to suggest a clue,—some clothes, some books, and a considerable number of curiosities from the Andaman Islands. He had been one of the officers in charge of the convict-guard there."

"Had he any friends in town?"

"Only one that we know of,—Major Sholto, of his own regiment, the 34th Bombay Infantry. The major had retired some little time before, and lived at Upper Norwood. We communicated with him, of course, but he did not even know that his brother officer was in England."

"A singular case," remarked Holmes.

"I have not yet described to you the most singular part. About six years ago—to be exact, upon the 4th of May, 1882—an advertisement appeared in the Times asking for the address of Miss Mary Morstan and stating that it would be to her advantage to come forward. There was no name or address appended. I had at that time just entered the family of Mrs. Cecil Forrester in the capacity of governess. By her advice I published my address in the advertisement column. The same day there arrived through the post a small card-board box addressed to me, which I found to contain a very large and **lustrous** pearl. No word of writing was

enclosed. Since then every year upon the same date there has always appeared a similar box, containing a similar pearl, without any clue as to the sender. They have been pronounced by an expert to be of a rare variety and of considerable value. You can see for yourselves that they are very handsome." She opened a flat box as she spoke, and showed me six of the finest pearls that I had ever seen.

"Your statement is most interesting," said Sherlock Holmes. "Has anything else occurred to you?"

"Yes and no later than to-day. That is why I have come to you. This morning I received this letter, which you will perhaps read for yourself."

"Thank you," said Holmes. "The envelope too, please. Postmark, London, S.W. Date, July 7. Hum! Man's thumb-mark on corner—probably postman. Best quality paper. Envelopes at six pence a packet. Particular man in his stationery. No address. 'Be at the third pillar from the left outside the Lyceum Theatre to-night at seven o'clock. If you are distrustful, bring two friends. You are a wronged woman, and shall have justice. Do not bring police. If you do, all will be in vain. Your unknown friend.' Well, really, this is a very pretty little mystery. What do you intend to do, Miss Morstan?"

"That is exactly what I want to ask you." "Then we shall most certainly go. You and I and—yes, why, Dr. Watson is the very man. Your correspondent says two friends. He and I have worked together before."

"But would he come?" she asked, with something appealing in her voice and expression. "I should be proud and happy," said I, fervently, "if I can be of

any service.” “You are both very kind,” she answered. “I have led a retired life, and have no friends whom I could appeal to. If I am here at six it will do, I suppose?”

“You must not be later,” said Holmes. “There is one other point, however. Is this handwriting the same as that upon the pearl-box addresses?”

“I have them here,” she answered, producing half a dozen pieces of paper.

“You are certainly a model client. You have the correct intuition. Let us see, now.” He spread out the papers upon the table, and gave little darting glances from one to the other. “They are disguised hands, except the letter,” he said, presently, “but there can be no question as to the authorship. See how the irrepressible Greeke will break out, and see the twirl of the finals. They are undoubtedly by the same person. I should not like to suggest false hopes, Miss Morstan, but is there any resemblance between this hand and that of your father?”

“Nothing could be more unlike.”

“I expected to hear you say so. We shall look out for you, then, at six. Please allow me to keep the papers. I may look into the matter before then. It is only half-past three. *Au revoir*, then.”

“*Au revoir*,” said our visitor, and, with a bright, kindly glance from one to the other of us, she replaced her pearl-box in her bosom and hurried away. Standing at the window, I watched her walking briskly down the street, until the gray turban and white feather were but a speck in the sombre crowd.

“What a very attractive woman!” I exclaimed, turning to my companion. He had lit his pipe again, and was leaning

back with drooping eyelids. “Is she?” he said, languidly. “I did not observe.”

“You really are an automaton,—a calculating-machine!” I cried. “There is something positively inhuman in you at times.” He smiled gently. “It is of the first importance,” he said, “not to allow your judgment to be biased by personal qualities. A client is to me a mere unit,—a factor in a problem. The emotional qualities are antagonistic to clear reasoning. I assure you that the most winning woman I ever knew was hanged for poisoning three little children for their insurance-money, and the most repellant man of my acquaintance is a philanthropist who has spent nearly a quarter of a million upon the London poor.”

“In this case, however—”

“I never make exceptions. An exception disproves the rule. Have you ever had occasion to study character in handwriting? What do you make of this fellow’s scribble?”

“It is legible and regular,” I answered. “A man of business habits and some force of character.”

Holmes shook his head. “Look at his long letters,” he said. “They hardly rise above the common herd. That *d* might be an *a*, and that *l* an *e*. Men of character always differentiate their long letters, however illegibly they may write. There is vacillation in his *k*’s and self-esteem in his capitals. I am going out now. I have some few references to make. Let me recommend this book, one of the most remarkable ever penned. It is Winwood Reade’s ‘Martyrdom of Man.’ I shall be back in an hour.”

I sat in the window with the volume in my hand, but my thoughts were far

from the daring speculations of the writer. My mind ran upon our late visitor, —her smiles, the deep rich tones of her voice, the strange mystery which overhung her life. If she were seventeen at the time of her father's disappearance she must be seven-and-twenty now,—a sweet age, when youth has lost its self-consciousness and become a little sobered by experience. So I sat and mused, until such dangerous thoughts came into my head that I hurried away to my desk and plunged furiously into the latest treatise upon pathology.

What was I, an army surgeon with a weak leg and a weaker banking-account that I should dare to think of such things? She was a unit, a factor,—nothing more. If my future were black, it was better surely to face it like a man than to attempt to brighten it by mere will-o'-the-wisps of the imagination.

Chapter III

In Quest of a Solution

It was half-past five before Holmes returned. He was bright, eager, and in excellent spirits,—a mood which in his case alternated with fits of the blackest depression.

"There is no great mystery in this matter," he said, taking the cup of tea which I had poured out for him. "The facts appear to admit of only one explanation."

"What! you have solved it already?"

"Well, that would be too much to say. I have discovered a suggestive fact, that is all. It is, however, very suggestive. The details are still to be added. I have just found, on consulting the back files of the Times, that Major Sholto, of Upper Norwood, late of the 34th Bombay Infantry, died upon the 28th of April, 1882."

"I may be very **obtuse**, Holmes, but I fail to see what this suggests."

"No? You surprise me. Look at it in this way, then. Captain Morstan disappears. The only person in London whom he could have visited is Major Sholto. Major Sholto denies having heard that he was in London. Four years later Sholto dies. Within a week of his death Captain Morstan's daughter receives a valuable present, which is repeated from year to year, and now culminates in a letter which describes her as a wronged woman. What wrong can it refer to except this deprivation of her father? And why should the presents begin immediately after Sholto's death, unless it is that Sholto's heir knows something of the mystery and desires to make compensation? Have you any alternative theory which will meet the facts?"

"But what a strange compensation! And how strangely made! Why, too, should he write a letter now, rather than six years ago? Again, the letter speaks of giving her justice. What justice can she have? It is too much to suppose that her father is still alive. There is no other injustice in her case that you know of."

"There are difficulties; there are certainly difficulties," said Sherlock Holmes, **pensively**. "But our expedition of to-night will solve them all. Ah, here is a four-wheeler, and Miss Morstan is inside. Are you all ready? Then we had better go down, for it is a little past the hour."

I picked up my hat and my heaviest stick, but I observed that Holmes took his revolver from his drawer and slipped it into his pocket. It was clear that he thought that our night's work might be a

serious one.

Miss Morstan was muffled in a dark cloak, and her sensitive face was composed, but pale. She must have been more than woman if she did not feel some uneasiness at the strange enterprise upon which we were embarking, yet her self-control was perfect, and she readily answered the few additional questions which Sherlock Holmes put to her.

“Major Sholto was a very particular friend of papa’s,” she said. “His letters were full of allusions to the major. He and papa were in command of the troops at the Andaman Islands, so they were thrown a great deal together. By the way, a curious paper was found in papa’s desk which no one could understand. I don’t suppose that it is of the slightest importance, but I thought you might care to see it, so I brought it with me. It is here.”

Holmes unfolded the paper carefully and smoothed it out upon his knee. He then very methodically examined it all over with his double lens.

“It is paper of native Indian manufacture,” he remarked. “It has at some time been pinned to a board. The diagram upon it appears to be a plan of part of a large building with numerous halls, corridors, and passages. At one point is a small cross done in red ink, and above it is ‘3.37 from left,’ in faded pencil-writing. In the left-hand corner is a curious **hieroglyphic** like four crosses in a line with their arms touching.

Beside it is written, in very rough and coarse characters, ‘The sign of the four,—Jonathan Small, Mahomet Singh, Abdullah Khan, Dost Akbar.’ No, I confess that I do not see how this bears upon the matter. Yet it is evidently a document of

importance. It has been kept carefully in a pocket-book; for the one side is as clean as the other.”

“It was in his pocket-book that we found it.”

“Preserve it carefully, then, Miss Morstan, for it may prove to be of use to us. I begin to suspect that this matter may turn out to be much deeper and more subtle than I at first supposed. I must reconsider my ideas.” He leaned back in the cab, and I could see by his drawn brow and his vacant eye that he was thinking intently. Miss Morstan and I chatted in an undertone about our present expedition and its possible outcome, but our companion maintained his impenetrable reserve until the end of our journey.

It was a September evening, and not yet seven o’clock, but the day had been a dreary one, and a dense drizzly fog lay low upon the great city. Mud-coloured clouds drooped sadly over the muddy streets. Down the Strand the lamps were but misty splotches of diffused light which threw a feeble circular glimmer upon the slimy pavement. The yellow glare from the shop-windows streamed out into the steamy, vaporous air, and threw a murky, shifting radiance across the crowded thoroughfare. There was, to my mind, something **eerie** and ghost-like in the endless procession of faces which flitted across these narrow bars of light,—sad faces and glad, haggard and merry. Like all human kind, they flitted from the gloom into the light, and so back into the gloom once more. I am not subject to impressions, but the dull, heavy evening, with the strange business upon which we were engaged, combined to make me nervous and depressed. I could see from Miss Morstan’s manner that

she was suffering from the same feeling. Holmes alone could rise superior to petty influences.

He held his open note-book upon his knee, and from time to time he jotted down figures and memoranda in the light of his pocket-lantern.

At the Lyceum Theatre the crowds were already thick at the side-entrances. In front a continuous stream of **hansoms** and four-wheelers were rattling up, discharging their cargoes of shirt-fronted men and beshawled, bediamonded women. We had hardly reached the third pillar, which was our **rendezvous**, before a small, dark, brisk man in the dress of a coachman accosted us.

“Are you the parties who come with Miss Morstan?” he asked.

“I am Miss Morstan, and these two gentlemen are my friends,” said she.

He bent a pair of wonderfully penetrating and questioning eyes upon us. “You will excuse me, miss,” he said with a certain dogged manner, “but I was to ask you to give me your word that neither of your companions is a police-officer.”

“I give you my word on that,” she answered.

He gave a shrill whistle, on which a street Arab led across a four-wheeler and opened the door. The man who had addressed us mounted to the box, while we took our places inside. We had hardly done so before the driver whipped up his horse, and we plunged away at a furious pace through the foggy streets.

The situation was a curious one. We were driving to an unknown place, on an unknown errand. Yet our invitation was either a complete hoax,—which was an

inconceivable hypothesis,—or else we had good reason to think that important issues might hang upon our journey. Miss Morstan’s demeanour was as resolute and collected as ever. I endeavoured to cheer and amuse her by **reminiscences** of my adventures in Afghanistan; but, to tell the truth, I was myself so excited at our situation and so curious as to our destination that my stories were slightly involved. To this day she declares that I told her one moving anecdote as to how a musket looked into my tent at the dead of night, and how I fired a double-barrelled tiger cub at it. At first I had some idea as to the direction in which we were driving; but soon, what with our pace, the fog, and my own limited knowledge of London, I lost my bearings, and knew nothing, save that we seemed to be going a very long way. Sherlock Holmes was never at fault, however, and he muttered the names as the cab rattled through squares and in and out by tortuous by-streets.

“Rochester Row,” said he. “Now Vincent Square. Now we come out on the Vauxhall Bridge Road. We are making for the Surrey side, apparently. Yes, I thought so. Now we are on the bridge. You can catch glimpses of the river.”

We did indeed get a fleeting view of a stretch of the Thames with the lamps shining upon the broad, silent water; but our cab dashed on, and was soon involved in a **labyrinth** of streets upon the other side.

“Wordsworth Road,” said my companion. “Priory Road. Lark Hall Lane. Stockwell Place. Robert Street. Cold Harbor Lane. Our quest does not appear to take us to very fashionable regions.”

We had, indeed, reached a questionable and forbidding neighbourhood. Long lines of dull brick houses were only relieved by the coarse glare and tawdry brilliancy of public houses at the corner. Then came rows of two-storied villas each with a fronting of miniature garden, and then again interminable lines of new staring brick buildings,—the monster tentacles which the giant city was throwing out into the country. At last the cab drew up at the third house in a new terrace. None of the other houses were inhabited, and that at which we stopped was as dark as its neighbours, save for a single glimmer in the kitchen window. On our knocking,

however, the door was instantly thrown open by a servant clad in a yellow turban, white loose-fitting clothes, and a yellow sash. There was something strangely incongruous in this Oriental figure framed in the commonplace door-way of a third-rate suburban dwelling-house.

“The Sahib awaits you,” said he, and even as he spoke there came a high piping voice from some inner room. “Show them in to me, **khitmutgar**,” it cried. “Show them straight in to me.”

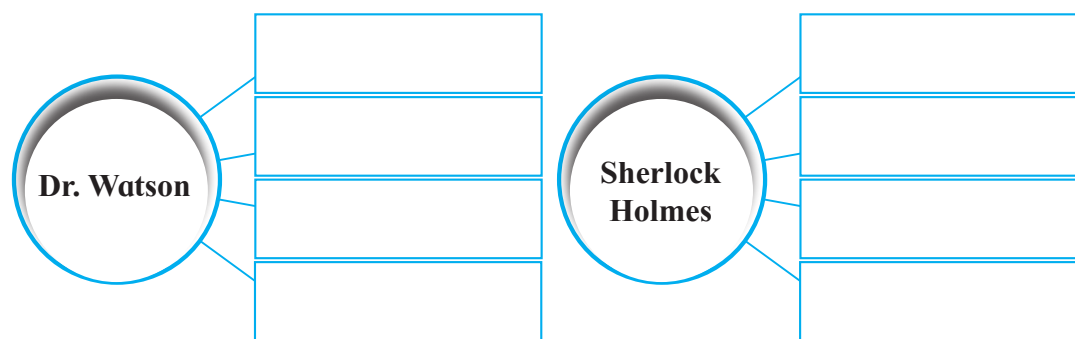
- Sir Arthur Ignatius Conan Doyle

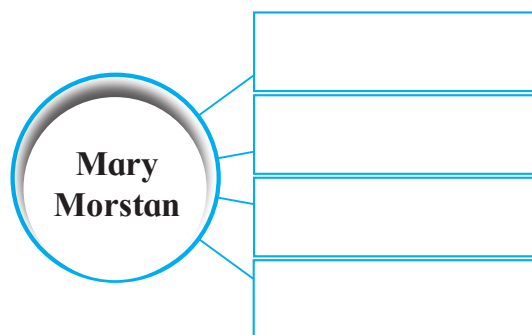
unbraided: untied	hansoms: a horse-drawn cabs
quivered: trembled or shook	rendezvous: a meeting at an agreed time and place (in French)
lustrous: shining	reminiscences: a story told about past event remembered by the narrator
Au revoir: good bye (in French)	labyrinth: a maze, a complicated irregular network of passages or paths in which it is difficult to find one's way
obtuse: slow to understand	khitmutgar: a male servant
pensively: reflecting deeply	
hieroglyphic: incomprehensible or difficult to understand	
eerie: strange and frightening	

BRAINSTORMING

CHARACTER

(A1) (i) Read the extract again and complete the web by highlighting the qualities of the following characters:





- (ii) Describe the character of Mary Morstan from Dr. Watson's point of view.
- (iii) Sherlock Holmes is the leading character in the extract. Explain.
- (iv) Dr. Watson, the narrator, is one of the major characters in the novel. Illustrate.
- (v) Holmes is always one step ahead of Dr. Watson in solving cases. Elucidate.

PLOT

- (A2) (i) Arrange the sentences in correct sequence as per their occurrence in the extract.

Jumbled Incidents	Correct Sequence
(1) Holmes put a revolver in his pocket.	(a)
(2) Holmes gave Winwood's book 'Martyrdom of Man' to Dr. Watson.	(b)
(3) Mary received a large and lustrous pearl through the post.	(c)
(4) Mary's father was an officer in an Indian regiment.	(d)
(5) Mary Morstan was a well-dressed young lady.	(e)

- (ii) Discuss the importance of the following statements from the light of the extract.

- a. The trio—Holmes, Dr. Watson and Mary decides to visit Lyceum Theatre.
- b. Mary received Pearls every year on the same day.
- c. Holmes carefully examined the paper given by Mary.

SETTING

- (A3) (i) Cite various references (lines) from the extract that tell us about the time and period of the events.

Lines	Time and Period

- (ii) How does the series of actions go from London to India? Explain by citing references from the extract.
- (iii) The extract begins when Mary Morstan meets Sherlock Holmes at his house. After that Holmes, Dr. Watson and Mary visit some places in London. Explain in detail the various places mentioned in the extract.
- (iv) Basically the setting of the extract is in London but it has some references of India, too. Explain how the settings of the extract contribute to the theme of the novel.
- (v) Describe in brief the importance of the following places in the extract.
- (a) London (d) Agra
(b) Lyceum Theatre (e) Andaman Islands
(c) Edinburgh
- (vi) Complete:

Which places/cities in India and England are mentioned/have appeared in the extract? Also write about their importance.

India	Importance	London	Importance

THEME

- (A4) (i) Write in brief the theme of the extract.
- (ii) Write 4-5 sentences about the meeting of Miss Morstan with Holmes.
- (iii) Write the central idea of the given extract of the novel, “The Sign of Four”.
- (iv) Give reasons :

Statement	Reason/s
(a) Miss Morstan plans to meet Sherlock Holmes	
(b) Miss Morstan gives the reference of Mrs. Cecil Forrester	
(c) It's a singular case	
(d) Holmes needed some references	
(e) Miss Morstan received a pearl every year	
(f) The coachman confirmed that neither of Miss Morstan's companion was a police officer	

LANGUAGE

(A5) (i) Elaborate the following lines in the light of the novel/extract, “The Sign of Four”–

- (a) “You really are an automation– a calculating machine”
- (b) “The letter speaks of giving her justice. What justice can she have?”
- (c) “Our quest does not appear to take us to very fashionable regions.”

(ii) Following are some dialogues of the major characters in the extract. Find out who the speaker is, his/her tone, style, significance, etc. of the dialogue.

Dialogue	Speaker	To whom it is said	Tone, Style, Significance etc.
“....you have once enabled my employer, Mrs. Cecil Forrester, to unravel a little domestic complication. She was much impressed by your kindness and skill.”			
“You will, I am sure, excuse me.”			
“Your statement is most interesting. Has anything else occurred to you?”			
“Are you the parties who come with Miss Morstan?”			
“The Sahib awaits you.”			

