

MACMILLAN READERS

INTERMEDIATE LEVEL

SIR ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE

The Norwood Builder
and Other Stories

Retold by F H Cornish



MACMILLAN

THE NORWOOD BUILDER

1

The Most Unhappy Man

The case which I call 'The Norwood Builder' began for us in a very dramatic way. Holmes and I had just finished a late breakfast one morning, and we were talking in our sitting room in Baker Street. Holmes was about to open his morning newspaper, when we heard a lot of noise outside. A moment later, someone was knocking at the door, very hard. Then the door opened and a young man rushed¹⁶ in. His face was pale and his fair hair and his clothes were untidy. His blue eyes were frightened. He had obviously been running, and he was breathing heavily.

'You've got to help me, Mr Holmes,' he said desperately¹⁷. 'The police are following me! Oh, the scandal¹⁸ will break my poor mother's heart^p.'

'Sit down, please,' Holmes said. 'This is my friend and helper, Dr Watson. Please tell us who *you* are.'

'I'm that most unhappy man, John Hector McFarlane,' he replied. He obviously thought that we would recognize the name, but we did not.

'Mr Holmes, if the police arrive, please make them wait,' the young man went on. 'Don't let them arrest me until I've told you my story.'

'Why do they want to arrest you?' asked Holmes in surprise. 'What crime will they charge¹⁹ you with?'

'They'll charge me with murder, Mr Holmes, but I haven't killed anyone,' he replied. 'But I will be happy to go to prison if I know that Sherlock Holmes is investigating my case!'

Holmes is a tall, thin man with long fingers and a long

neck. His eyes are like a fierce²⁰ bird's eyes. Now he looked very carefully at our visitor.

'I know that you're not married and that you're a lawyer,' said Holmes. 'I know that your lungs²¹ are not good. But I know nothing else about you, and I do *not* recognize your name.'

I knew my friend's methods, and I could understand what he was thinking. The man's clothes were untidy, so he was probably unmarried. We could see that there were legal papers in his pockets, so he was certainly a lawyer. We could hear his heavy breathing, so it was obvious that he had an illness of the lungs. Everything that Holmes had said was obvious, but the young man seemed surprised.

'That's amazing,' he said. 'But if you'd opened your newspaper this morning, you would have recognized my name.'

The man opened the newspaper which Holmes had put on the table and pointed dramatically to a headline. Then he held the paper up so we could both see it.

**MYSTERIOUS CRIME COMMITTED IN
NORWOOD! A WELL-KNOWN BUILDER IS
MISSING. THE POLICE THINK THAT HE HAS
BEEN MURDERED AND THEY ARE
SEARCHING²² FOR A SUSPECT²³.**

'And I *am* the suspect,' our visitor said.

'Your case sounds interesting,' said Holmes, looking very pleased. 'Watson, please read the newspaper article.'

I read what was in front of me.

Mr Jonas Oldacre, from the district²⁴ of Norwood, has disappeared. The police suspect that he has been murdered. Mr Oldacre is a man in his fifties who has lived in Norwood, on the southern edge of London, for many years. He owns a building firm²⁵ there. Recently he seems to have stopped working as a builder and he rarely meets anyone. Mr Oldacre lives alone except for²⁶

an elderly woman who is his housekeeper²⁷. Yesterday evening, he was visited at home by Mr John Hector McFarlane, a lawyer who works in central London. Then, very early this morning, a fire was discovered in a timber store²⁸ behind Mr Oldacre's house. All the wood in the store was burnt. But when the firemen had put out the flames, no one could find Mr Oldacre. He had not slept in his bed, and a safe²⁹ which he kept in his bedroom had been opened. The police found some blood in the bedroom and they also found a heavy walking stick, which belongs to Mr McFarlane. There was some blood on the walking stick too.

A door leading from Mr Oldacre's bedroom to the garden was open. There were some marks³⁰ on the ground outside it which led towards the timber store. The police think that something heavy was pulled across the garden towards the store. This morning, some strange pieces of burnt flesh³¹ were found among the burnt wood. The police do not know if the flesh is human, but they fear the worst^p. They are searching for Mr McFarlane. They believe that he killed Mr Oldacre and started the fire to burn his body. Inspector Lestrade of Scotland Yard is the policeman investigating the case.

'I'm surprised that you haven't been arrested already, Mr McFarlane,' said Holmes, when I had finished reading.

'I haven't been to my office this morning,' our visitor replied. 'And I haven't been to my home. It was very late when I left Mr Oldacre last night. I live in Blackheath, on the eastern edge of London, with my parents. I wasn't able to get back there, so I stayed at a hotel in Norwood. This morning, I saw the newspaper and I read about Mr Oldacre's disappearance. And I read that the police were searching for me. I decided to come straight here to consult you. I think that the police were following me when I turned into Baker Street.'

He stopped for a moment, then he added, 'Please help me, Mr Holmes. I need to protect³² my mother from a scandal.'

At that moment there was more noise on the stairs outside and our sitting room door was thrown open. Inspector Lestrade rushed into the room. There were two more policemen behind him.

'Mr John Hector McFarlane, I arrest you for the murder of Mr Jonas Oldacre,' Lestrade said.