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The Valley of Fear

Arthur Conan Doyle (1859 - 1930)

Read by: David Clarke Length: 6 hours and 5 minutes
 Language: English Style: Solo
 Genre: Detective Fiction

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The Valley of Fear is the fourth and final novel featuring Sherlock Holmes. The story opens with Holmes receiving an encrypted message from an agent of his arch enemy Moriarty, who then loses heart and informs Holmes of its source. Holmes deduces the key is a book cipher based on an almanac and learns a country gentleman named Douglas is in danger. A few minutes later Inspector MacDonald arrives with news of the murder of a Mr. John Douglas of Birlstone Manor, and they travel to investigate. A guest at the house, Barker, describes finding Douglas in a room by the front door just before midnight with his face blown off, a sawed-off shotgun across his chest, and his wedding ring missing. Muddy boot prints are on the floor and blood stains are on the window sill. He speculates that the murderer entered the house before the drawbridge over the moat was raised at 6:00 pm and fled after the murder. He mentions that a secret society

may be after Douglas and that that was why he had settled in rural England. Mrs. Douglas corroborates the story and seems oddly less than distraught. A bicycle belonging to an American staying at the guest house is discovered, but the guest, possibly the murderer, has vanished. Holmes quickly perceives key discrepancies that show the two to be lying, and sets a trap by ordering the moat drained. When Barker is caught in the act of fishing a bundle out of the moat, we suspect the culprit has been found, but the plot twists and turns a bit more before we are done.

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle was a Scottish writer and physician best known for his novels and stories featuring consulting detective Sherlock Holmes. He was born in Edinburgh to a family of Irish Catholic descent that struggled with poverty and alcoholism. Arthur was supported by wealthy uncles and educated at Jesuit schools before attending the University of Edinburgh Medical School, where he began writing and submitting both fiction and non-fiction to periodicals. The character of Sherlock Holmes is partly modeled on university instructor Joseph Bell. He served as a ship's doctor on two voyages before establishing private practices in Plymouth and then Portsmouth. The first Sherlock Holmes novel, *A Study In Scarlet*, appeared in 1886 and was followed by *The Sign of Four* in 1890, establishing his literary career. Seeking to pursue more serious work, he famously attempted to end the Holmes series in 1893 with his death in "The Final Problem", but was summoned back by public acclaim. Doyle was an active sportsman, fathered five children in two marriages, and was known for his work in attempting to correct injustices and for his lively interest in spiritualism.