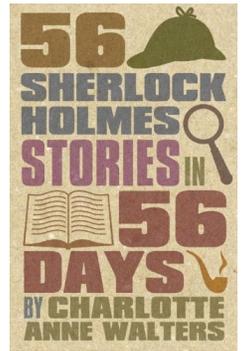


A Case of Identity



There have certainly been times over the many years it has taken me to write my novel when I have worried about the story being a bit too far-fetched at times, writes Charlotte Anne Walters.

Overall, I don't think it is but, well, I suppose some parts do stretch the imagination somewhat. But clearly I needn't have worried because in A Case of Identity reality is suspended as we are asked to believe this very far-fetched tale of a girl and her evil step father.

Poor Miss Mary Sutherland has been duped into believing that someone wishes to marry her and when he disappears she resolved to keep her pledge until he returns, just as he begged her to do should anything happen to him. This mysterious Mr Hosmer Angel however, is actually her greedy stepfather in disguise. He doesn't want her to leave home and take her £100 a year allowance with her; therefore he concocts this whole saga so that she will resist all suitors for a good few years to come.



Personally, I love this story. I think it is great fun even though impossible to believe. Despite the stepfather's disguise of beard, side-whiskers, tinted glasses and whispery voice surely the girl would recognise the man she lives with every day? The girl tells her story to Holmes in a clear, intelligent way so is obviously not stupid enough to fall for such a callous trick? Holmes even says to her upon hearing her story – 'You have made your statement very clearly'.

But then, fiction doesn't have to be completely believable does it? Are books not meant to be our escape from the all-to-believable realities of modern life?

I really like the line Holmes says to Watson at the start – 'Life is infinitely stranger than anything which the mind of man could invent.' I think this may have inspired my opening line in Barefoot but actually didn't realise this until reading the story again today – :

'Life in all its complexities is stranger than any fiction and full of so many intricate twists and turns that we sometimes lose track of ourselves, of who we really are.'

Isn't it strange how lines from Holmes stories become so familiar to us that they just become part of our everyday phraseology without us even realising? Or am I just strange like that?

Anyway, other points of interest about this story are that the reader is left in no doubt as to the extent of Holmes' success both in England and internationally. Watson remarks early on how Holmes is a 'Helper to everybody who is absolutely puzzled, through three continents'. Holmes then talks of his work with the King

of Bohemia and the reigning family of Holland. Holmes also tells Watson that he has twelve cases on the go – so clearly business is booming!

Quite unusually I think, Holmes is so enraged by the stepfather's behaviour and the lack of official action which can be taken as no actual law has been broken, that he goes to whip him with his hunting crop. This seems to be an uncharacteristically emotive action from such a cold and reasoned man. Holmes does have hidden depths of emotion and exploring those in my own novel was an absorbing task.

My only problem with the story however, is that Holmes doesn't tell poor Mary the truth and I imagine that she carried on staying true to the non-existent Mr Angel into her old age. How strange that Holmes cared enough to want to whip the man who duped her, but not enough to tell her truth?

For this reason, I can't give the story any higher than a 6 out of 10 despite enjoying it very much until the last page.
