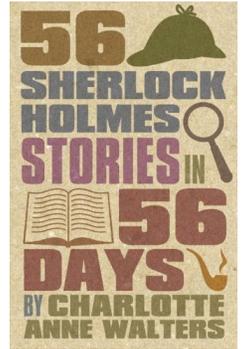


The Boscombe Valley Mystery



I'm sitting on a train travelling back home from London to the Midlands, writes Charlotte Anne Walters. My meeting ended early and I arrived back at Euston station in time to walk towards Baker Street, following the route which Red – the protagonist in my novel – would have taken during a key scene.

I had strange Goosebumps at the thought of actually being there, in situ, and imagining how she would have felt running through the streets to reach 221b one stormy early evening.

Anyway, back to the matter in hand. The train journey did give me the perfect opportunity to read the Boscombe Valley Mystery and have a think about what further insights it gives into both Holmes and his partnership with Watson. Partnership seems to be the appropriate word because in this story it is clear how much Holmes needs Watson. He even sends a telegram to Watson's house requesting his company for a few days in the West of England while he investigates this new case.

The telegram arrives as the Watsons are eating breakfast and Mrs Watson urges her husband to go adding – 'you are always so interested in Mr Sherlock Holmes' cases'. Watson replies, 'I should be ungrateful if I were not, seeing what I gained through one of them.'

This confirms that the first Mrs Watson was Mary Morstan from the Sign of Four and I can't believe how blatantly Guy Ritchie ignored this in his film – more to the point I can't believe how little this seemed to have mattered to Holmes fans as I have seen very little criticism of this error. In the first Sherlock Holmes movie, Watson is engaged to a woman who is clearly not Mary as he has to go and visit her parents (Mary's parents were both dead) and she meets Holmes for the first time in a restaurant not through bringing him the mystery of the Sign of Four. This really mattered to me and coming so early on in the film it did rather spoil my enjoyment (not that Ritchie will mind of course – "'Oh I would happily give back all the millions I made if Charlotte Anne Walters would just enjoy my film.'")



Further evidence of how much Holmes has come to rely on Watson comes later on in the story when he asks him to be a sounding board to help him think through his ideas – 'Look here Watson, just sit down in this chair and let me preach to you for a little. I don't quite know what to do, and I should value your advice. Light a cigar, and let me expound.'" What a lovely thing to say, acknowledging not only how much he needs Watson but also that he is at ease enough with him to admit not knowing what to do and to ask his advice.

The case against young James McCarthy looks so solid that as a reader it is almost impossible to see how Holmes will save the day and all the more

satisfying when he does – especially the part where he refers to Lestrade as an ‘imbecile’!

The story does follow a familiar Doyle theme of someone coming to England with ill-gotten gains from the colonies and their past finally catching up with them. I suppose this was just the topic of the age – imperial advances and people becoming more geographically mobile. Am I the only one who sometimes gets the stories muddled up because of this commonality?

Score for the Boscombe Valley Mystery = 7/10
