

The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes

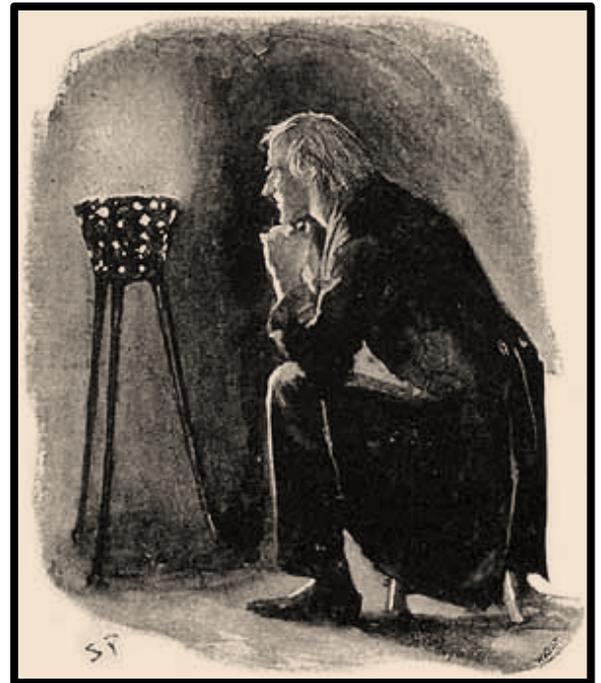
Adventure VIII -- The Man with the Twisted Lip

I have used the story of Mr Neville St. Clair, the faux beggar, extensively in my own novel, writes Charlotte Anne Walters.

And I can remember exactly the moment at which the idea came to me to intertwine the two tales. I was on my honeymoon sitting by the beautiful infinity pool at a lovely hotel on a tranquil Greek Island, writing pad in hand as always. Without giving away too much about the plot, I was basically playing around with the idea of Professor Moriarty ordering his henchmen to snatch beggars from the city streets. Who would miss a lonely old beggar? Who would even notice he had gone? But then the idea struck me, what if the person wasn't really a beggar at all but actually in disguise? What if he did have a concerned family who would contact Holmes for help – drawing him into the crime which would ultimately put him onto a collision course with my protagonist? Perfect.

I reached into my beach-bag for the ever present Penguin Complete Sherlock Holmes and re-read The Man with The Twisted Lip then celebrated my brainwave with a lovely Greek salad while looking out to sea.

Upon re-reading the story today it's hard to put my own story aside and just comment on the original. It's just that it proved to be so pivotal in my own tale and such a perfect example of what I wanted to do with Barefoot – intertwine the original stories with my own in a sensitive and imaginative way without simply trying to re-create Doyle's style but instead using this as inspiration to create something which both new and existing Holmes fans would love.



It seems like such a long time ago (I've been married four years now) when I had that moment of inspiration beside the infinity pool (incidentally it was the best hotel pool I've ever had the pleasure to lie next to). I had no idea how much hard work lay ahead to actually finish my novel but was full of hope and optimism that I could change my life and achieve my dream of becoming a bestselling author.

Anyway, apologies for the serious digression and back to the story.

What is going on between Sherlock Holmes and Mrs Neville St. Clair? There is something very odd about this one. When Watson goes to rescue his patient from the opium den and finds Holmes inside, they leave together and Holmes asks Watson to accompany him as he investigates his latest case, casually pointing out that his room 'at the Cedars is a double-bedded one'. 'The Cedars?' asks Watson, perplexed. 'Yes; that is Mr St Clair's house. I am staying there while I conduct the inquiry'. This presents various points of interest from the casual way he refers to her home to the issue of why he needs to be there in the first place.

The Cedars is in Lee, Kent, and perfectly commutable from London. Mrs St Claire isn't in any danger, the house is not the scene of the crime, the man disappeared in the city not at home, so why on earth is Holmes staying there in a double bedded room – and why does Mrs St Clair answer the door to him wearing a 'mousseline-de-soie with a touch of fluffy pink chiffon at her neck and wrists'? Good God it's like 'Carry on Detecting'.

Other points of interest are the fact that Holmes is more than happy to share his room with Watson (though not the bed) and this shows the extent to which he feels comfortable with him. This is also the story in which he talks of Watson's 'Grand gift of silence' which makes him 'Quite invaluable as a companion'. The Man with the Twisted Lip clearly, and rather touchingly, demonstrates the depth of their friendship.

Fluffy pink chiffon aside, the most unusual thing about this tale is the fact that Dr John H Watson suddenly becomes James – according to his wife.

I really enjoyed re-reading this story – as much for the comedic value and personal memories as anything – and will happily score it a hilarious 8 out of 10.

Charlotte Anne Walters

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