



The Memoirs of Sherlock Holmes

Adventure XVI -- The Adventure of the Cardboard Box

(Eeek – this is grotesque!)

First published in:

The Strand Magazine, January 1893; *Harper's Weekly*, January 14, 1893

Time frame of story (known/surmised):

A hot day in August (stated); 1888 or 1889 likely.

Holmes & Watson living arrangements:

Sharing quarters at 221B.

Opening scene:

Holmes reads Watson's mind, based on observations of Watson looking at portraits of General Gordon and Henry Ward Beecher.

Client:

Inspector Lestrade wrote Holmes requesting his assistance.

Crime or concern:

Susan Cushing, a quiet old maid of 50, got a cardboard box in the mail filled with salt and 2 human ears, not a matched pair. Susan had two younger sisters, Sara and Mary.



Villain:

The killer was Jim Browner, Mary's husband. The middle sister, Sara had made a play for Browner and was rejected. In turn she poisoned her sister's mind against the husband, Jim, who turned to drink. Sara took up with another man, Alec Fairbairn, who later switched his attentions to Mary.

Motive:

Jealous revenge.

Logic/clues used to solve:

The box and string offered some clues. The knot in the tarred string used to tie up the package was of a nautical character. From the box and its contents Holmes deduced this was a serious crime, not a dissecting-room prank. Besides, the ears were not embalmed.

Initial "S" of Sarah who had recently lived with Susan could have caused a mix-up. Sarah had moved away from Susan to the city where Mary lived, and Mary was married to a seaman. Sarah took a house just two streets off and let lodgings to sailors. (!)

Policemen:

Insp. Lestrade. A couple of river police, who were round the corner.

Holmes' fees:

No mention. Lestrade called Holmes in. We believe there was a retainer arrangement between SW and the Yard. This would help us understand how Holmes made a living, and also why he let Scotland Yard take credit for his solutions.

Transport:

Cab to the station, and a train to Croydon, where they were met by Lestrade, as wiry, as dapper, and as ferret-like as ever. Then a cab to Wallington to see the sister, with a stop at the telegraph office, and on to a decent hotel for lunch.

Food:

Lunch at the decent hotel in Wallington where Holmes & Watson had a pleasant little meal.

Drink:

They had a bottle of claret with lunch, and Holmes talked of violins and Paganini for an hour or so.

Vices:

After giving Lestrade the solution, Holmes & Watson chatted over cigars that night in their rooms at Baker Street

Other cases mentioned:

STUD & SIGN. Also Aldridge, who had helped Lestrade and Holmes in the bogus laundry affair.

Notable Quotables:

“Appreciation of nature found no place among (Holmes’) many gifts, and his only change was when he turned his mind from the evil-doer of the town to track down his brother of the country.”

Other interestings:

We don’t know Lestrade’s first name. But in this story he signs it “G. Lestrade” in his summary letter to Holmes.

The “mind-reading” incident in the opening of this story had moved around a bit.

The Reverend Henry Ward Beecher

Called the hen a most elegant creature.

The hen, pleased with that,

Laid an egg in his hat;

And thus, did the hen reward Beecher.

Holmes told the story of how he acquired his Stradivarius, which was worth at least five hundred guineas, at a Jew broker’s in Tottenham Court Road for fifty-five shillings. Note: That is the part of town where Henry Baker lost his hat & goose.

When all was said and done:

A simple case for Holmes. "I should prefer that you do not mention my name at all in connection with the case, as I choose to be only associated with those crimes which present some difficulty in their solution."

– Holmes

Browner followed his wife and her lover on a rowboat excursion in the fog, and killed them both, sliced off their ears, and thought he sent the ears to Sarah, having blamed her for the situation. Instead the ears went to the older S. Cushing, Susan, who knew nothing of it all.