



The Memoirs of Sherlock Holmes

Adventure XVII -- The Adventure of the Yellow Face

Oh what a lovely ending, how very touching, writes Charlotte Anne Walters.

I confess that I had forgotten what happened in this story and hadn't re-read it for years. So the ending came as quite a surprise and was probably a little unconventional at the time. Effie Munro is a woman with a secret and her husband goes to see Holmes in the hope that he can discover it. This is one of those rare occasions when Holmes gets things completely wrong and the truth is uncovered without his help. The only glimpse of deduction we get is when Holmes analyses Grant Munro's pipe which he leaves behind at 221B. Strangely, Mrs Munro refers to her husband as Jack, not Grant. Is Sir Arthur getting confused over names again or was Grant Munro a surname?

We know from the husband's testimony that his wife had been married before in America but her husband and child had died in a fire. She came to England with a good income and married Grant/Jack. They had been happily married for three years and suddenly she asked for a large sum of money which he happily gave but was suspicious as she wouldn't reveal what she wanted it for. Then mysterious neighbours moved into a nearby cottage and he saw a pale, rigid face at the window. His wife started to make secretive visits to the cottage and wouldn't reveal why.



Holmes concludes that the American husband must have tracked her down and is now blackmailing her. Perhaps she ran away from him for being a cruel man rather than him dying in a fire?

But this theory is so wrong and the truth came as quite a surprise. Her first husband was black and the child black also. She leaves the little girl in America because of her fragile health and travels to England alone. Upon meeting her new husband she is afraid to tell him the truth in case he leaves her and is forced to try and forget the child.

I remarked to husband that this seemed very unrealistic but he reminded me of the times in which it was set and the strength of feeling still prevalent about people of a different colour.

This makes the ending even more lovely, as the husband upon discovery of the child and his wife's secret, – 'Lifted the child, kissed her, and then, still carrying her, he held his other hand out to his wife and turned towards the door; "I am not a very good man Effie, but I think that I am a better one than you have given me credit for being." I had a lump in my throat at that point. The fact that she describes her former husband in such glowing terms is also rather lovely. I'm not a Doyleian expert and don't know what his attitudes towards race were but from this story I'm guessing he was rather ahead of his time.

Other points of interest are that Watson mentions Holmes' use of cocaine – 'As a protest against the monotony of existence when cases were scanty and the papers uninteresting'. I have argued in my novel that Watson got this wrong and Holmes actually used cocaine to relax and quieten his mind rather than stimulate it. If he did not have work to channel his over-active mind into, he would use drugs to calm it, as a control mechanism not a stimulant. Slightly controversial theory but I think it has legs all the same.

A very heart-warming story without much Holmes but with some forward-thinking attitudes which are very refreshing - 8 out of 10.

Charlotte Anne Walters

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