



The Memoirs of Sherlock Holmes

Adventure XVII – The Adventure of the Yellow Face

Grant Munro was a happy, prosperous man. He had a good income, a nice villa in the country, and a loving devoted wife whom he loved dearly in return. Then, suddenly, his world seems to come crashing about his ears, and he found himself discussing his most private affairs with two complete strangers — Sherlock Holmes and Dr. John H. Watson.

It all started when his wife asked for £100. He was startled, for that was quite a sum of money in those days. When he asked what it was for, his wife Effie was evasive and said she couldn't tell him right then. But it was her money, even though she had given it all over to him when they married, and so he gave her the £100. Soon after, a vacant cottage across the street from his villa was occupied, and when he went over to offer neighbourly assistance he was rudely rebuffed.

That very night, he told his wife that the cottage was occupied. At three in the morning, he awakened to find his wife stealthily getting dressed. He pretended to be asleep and heard her go out the front door. When she returned some twenty minutes later, Grant Munro gave up all pretence of being asleep and asked her where she had gone. And for the first time in their married life, Effie lied to him.

The next day Grant Munro went for a walk to clear his thoughts. As he passed by the cottage he saw a strange, rigid, yellow face peering out at him from an upstairs window. And who should walk out of the cottage but Effie. It was only after she pleaded with him that he agreed not to go into the cottage to see who



was there, but he made her promise she wouldn't visit the cottage again. But he kept seeing the strange yellow face in the same window, and Effie did go back to the cottage again. This time he rushed into the cottage, but found it deserted. Her breach of faith caused him to leave her, and he found himself with Holmes and Watson, spilling out his unhappy story.

Holmes and Watson felt that blackmail was involved. But was there? Who or what was the creature in the window, and why was Effie Munro apparently shielding it? In a few minutes the Maître de Chasse will post his Comments and Questions, and send the Hounds into the cottage to sniff out the truth of the matter.

If those Hounds who use the *Doubleday Doran* version of the Canon are confused as to how this Adventure gets its name, it is understandable. In the *Doubleday* text, Grant Munro at first describes the face he sees at the cottage window as "...of a livid, chalky white." Both the *Strand* and the *Annotated* give that as "...of a livid dead yellow." Later in the Adventure Munro alludes to the face as "...that yellow livid face," with which the texts of the *Strand* and *Annotated* agree. Still further on, the *Doubleday Doran* has Munro speaking of an "unusual colour," while the other two texts have it as "unnatural colour." By the way, the word "livid" refers to any marked discoloration of the skin. It is derived from a Latin word which means, "to have a bluish color."

But for the *Annotated* fans, both the *Strand* and the *Doubleday Doran* edition have Watson referring to MUSG as an example of a case in which Holmes erred. The *Annotated* cites SECO as the example. In any event, could it be said that either MUSG or SECO could be viewed as a case in which Holmes "...erred [but] the truth was still discovered?"

There are some curious things about Effie Munro. When she decided to sneak out of her conjugal bedroom to visit the creature in the cottage, she lit a candle. Why did she do that if she wanted her husband to remain asleep? She showed her husband a copy of her late husband's death certificate, but were death certificates required in Atlanta in the early 1880's? Why would she have a copy of the certificate if she was at all inclined to remarry, since no English suitor would have known she had been married before? And if Effie loved "Jack" as much as she professed and he believed, why did she carry a portrait of her first husband around in a locket, right up to the moment her little secret was discovered?

It seems odd that Effie would have gone to the expense of bringing her daughter and the nurse over from America. Wouldn't it have been cheaper for her to concoct some excuse about a sick relative and go to America instead? Wouldn't the risk of someone discovering her secret have been minimized by that approach? And did she expect to keep the little girl cooped up inside the cottage forever?

Of course, Grant Munro does some odd things, too. Keeping one's watch under one's pillow while sleeping is a good way to get both a stiff neck and a broken watch. When he entered the suddenly-vacated cottage he saw a full-length portrait of his wife, which he had requested only three months earlier, on the mantel. Why didn't he notice its absence from his own house where, surely, it would have been displayed prominently?

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