



The Return of Sherlock Holmes

Adventure XXVIII -- The Adventure of the Empty House

It's back to business as Holmes returns from the dead to a very forgiving Doctor Watson, writes Charlotte Anne Walters.

If one of my very best friends had faked their own death, withheld the truth from me, and left me to mourn them for three years, I would be pretty annoyed if they suddenly turned up on my doorstep asking to renew acquaintances. But Watson is just so happy to see his friend alive that he doesn't really question Holmes' explanation that if Watson had known the truth he would surely have let it slip somehow. That's not showing much faith in the man who regularly dropped everything to accompany Holmes into dangerous and very sensitive situations without ever failing him or betraying a trust.

Add in the fact that Watson had suffered a genuine bereavement during Holmes' absence, presumably that of his first wife, and you can't help but feel sad for the doctor as he was alone during the period when he probably needed Holmes the most. The one time when Watson could have really used a friend, and the person who could have been the most comfort to him stayed away, even though he had somehow learned of the sad news.

Can we forgive Holmes for not trusting Watson? For letting him believe in a lie and mourn needlessly? Well, obviously we can because we are just so glad to have him back.

So off we go on another adventure just like old times and there is something quite satisfying and reassuring about this.



The last of Moriarty's henchman is captured in the form of Colonel Moran and Holmes cleverly uses a wax bust of himself positioned by the window of his rooms at 221B to trap him. The story is very imaginative and does neatly tie up all the loose ends.

Once again, I have used the Empty House heavily in my own novel and it's another part of my Penguin Complete Sherlock Holmes which is covered in notes and underlining. I have, once again, stuck very closely to the original but this time there has been some very significant changes in Watson's life and only he knows the truth. For once, Holmes is in the dark and this threatens to change the dynamic of their friendship forever.

Re-reading the original has reminded me of why I called the poisoner, who features in the 'Paris' part of Barefoot, Morgan. It is because when Holmes goes to his index of Biographies to look up Moran he mentions Morgan the poisoner. I do hope the Holmes fans spot that one.

And another curious thing that springs into my memory is that of the confusion over Moriarty's first name. In the Empty House he is referred to as James, but in the Final Problem his brother is called James. Can it be that both children were given the same name? That must have been confusing when they were growing up. This did cause me some angst when writing about Moriarty's childhood and I eventually decided that both boys were probably given the same name as their father but while the eldest continued to use it, the youngest was commonly known by a different name. Conan Doyle really did get mixed up over names didn't he?

Though the explanation for Holmes' reappearance feels a little hurried and unrealistic, the story that follows is enjoyable and it is great to have Holmes and Watson re-united and back on form together.

Normality is thankfully restored – 7 out of 10.

Charlotte Anne Walters

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