



The Return of Sherlock Holmes

Adventure XXVIII -- The Adventure of the Empty House

I know it seems like a long time ago that we bade a temporary farewell to Sherlock Holmes when he appeared to buy the farm in “The Final Problem.” But now it’s time to resurrect the Great Detective once more. Holmes usually gets quite a bit of grief over this story, mainly from friends of Doctor Watson’s, but let’s see what we can do to show the Master that we’re glad he’s back. And please, no fainting! In a moment, a few comments and questions about “The Adventure of the Empty House.”

I never was in it: Some variation on this question would come up even if I didn’t say a word about it, so let’s just put it on the table straightaway: If Moran and “at least three others” of Moriarty’s gang knew that Holmes was still alive, then what good did it do him to disappear for three years, allowing the non-criminal world, including his best friend, to think that he was dead? And whatever Holmes’s purpose, was it absolutely necessary for him to deceive poor Watson?

Mycroft Holmes knew of his brother’s ruse, but was there anyone else who was in on the secret? Mrs. Hudson, for instance? Inspector Lestrade? Or what about Inspector Patterson, who seems to have worked with Holmes in his battle with the Moriarty organization?

And whatever happened to Inspector Patterson, for that matter? I don’t recall that we ever heard from him again. Hmm...

Unusual and inexplicable: That is the phrase Watson used to describe the murder of Ronald Adair, though of course he might well have been describing Holmes’s absence and sudden return as well. But about the Adair crime: Watson mentioned that the “case for the prosecution was so overwhelmingly strong that it was not necessary to bring forward all the facts,” which presumably meant that Holmes’s involvement was not revealed. But was the case against Moran so strong?



Was Holmes right when he said “The bullets alone are enough to put his head in a noose?” Or was this just tough talk? After all, don’t we find in a later story that Colonel Moran is still alive? How did he escape that noose?

If Moran was shooting at a silhouette on the blind, wouldn’t he have to allow for the angle of the light behind it in order to actually hit the bust? How would he go about adjusting for the angle, since the light source itself was not visible behind the blind?

Watson mentioned his own efforts to solve the murder, including his attempt “to find that line of least resistance which my poor friend had declared to be the starting point of any investigation.” I don’t seem to recall any other instance where Watson directly quoted Holmes as saying anything like this. Does the “line of least resistance” idea strike the Hounds as a genuine method employed by Holmes, or does it seem to be Watson’s faulty memory at work?

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