



The Return of Sherlock Holmes

Adventure XXVIII – The Adventure of the Empty House

For the first and last time in his life, Dr. John H. Watson had fainted. He recovered with the tingling aftertaste of a dose of brandy, administered by a man he had thought to be dead...Sherlock Holmes. Yes, Holmes was alive after all; he had not accompanied Professor Moriarty to the bottom of the Reichenbach Falls. But his physical appearance indicated to Watson's trained eye that Holmes had not been leading a healthy lifestyle of late.

The mystery that had London all abuzz was a classic: a locked room, a young man dead from a head wound inflicted by a soft-nosed revolver bullet but no weapon to be found in the room. Even though a cab stand was a few hundred feet away from the murder scene, no one had heard a shot or seen a gunman.

The young fellow was a member of the British peerage, an easygoing, likable chap with regular if unexciting habits. There was all manner of speculation: Who killed the Honorable Ronald Adair? Why was Adair murdered? What fearsome weapon could have inflicted such a wound without making a sound? Sherlock Holmes knew the answers, and he also knew that his own head was the next target for an expanding bullet.

In reading Holmes' account of his narrow escape at Reichenbach Falls, a question crossed my mind: "How on earth does one reverse one's boots?" After all, boots are made with the toes pointing one way only, and trying to put one's boots on backwards would lead to hammertoes in short order. And even if one somehow managed to cram his or her long-suffering feet backwards into a pair of boots, wouldn't the resulting tracks reveal that something was...well, afoot?



The Hon. Ronald Adair — not the List Member of that nom, thankfully — had rooms on the first floor (in America, the second floor). Wouldn't he have had to be seated fairly near the window in order to present a target to a sniper at ground level? And where would the sniper hide so as to remain not only unseen but unheard? (Remember, the airgun made a strange, loud whizzing noise.)

Holmes tells Watson, "Mycroft had preserved my rooms and my papers exactly as they always had been." But weren't those rooms set afire by Moriarty's henchmen in FINA? One would think that the bundles and stacks of paper accumulated by Holmes would have added tinder to the conflagration. And did Mycroft, on an annual salary of £450, pay Mrs. Hudson the rent during his brother's absence from London? Did he pay for restoring the rooms after they had been set afire?

On examining the wax bust after Moran had done his sharpshooting, Holmes notes that the bullet struck "plumb in the middle of the back of the head and smack through the brain." And Mrs. Hudson said the spent projectile flattened itself against the wall and came to rest on the rug. Moran was shooting at an upward angle (again); wouldn't the bullet have exited from the cranium somewhat higher and flattened itself against the ceiling?

And then there's the ultimate fate of "the second most dangerous man in London." Holmes says, "The bullets alone are enough to put [Moran's] head in a noose." How then could Holmes refer to Moran as "the living Colonel Sebastian Moran" in ILLU some eight years later?

Anyone who has ever tried to open a window that has been closed for a long time has probably experienced a great deal of noise and effort in doing so. Yet Moran opened the window "softly and noiselessly." Perhaps he had visited the scene previously and oiled the window, but then he would have left prints in the dust that thickly furred it, which would have alerted Holmes when he and Watson approached it closely to look across Baker Street. Further, if the window had that much dust on it, then surely the floor would have been dusty as well. How could the old *shikari* possibly miss the footprints that Holmes and Watson must have left in that dust?

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October 30, 1998