



The Return of Sherlock Holmes

Adventure XXIX -- The Adventure of the Norwood Builder

Sherlock Holmes is back! Better still, Holmes and Watson are back together again in Baker Street, just like the old days. And we are there too, enjoying their breakfast conversation, and enjoying still more the interruption by a desperate client, an innocent man accused of murder! It's Holmes to the rescue! The Game's afoot! (A rabbit's foot, perhaps?)

The friendship: Watson mentioned that Holmes had "bound me in the most stringent terms to say no further word of himself, his methods, or his successes" after his return. But was this a practical idea? On the one hand, how could Holmes get any clients at all if everyone thought he was dead? On the other hand, if people generally knew that Holmes was back in action anyway, and if they already knew a lot about his methods from the earlier stories, then what purpose did it serve to keep Watson from publishing more adventures?

The sentimentalist in me loves the fact that Holmes wanted Watson to give up his medical practice and come back to live in Baker Street. Since Holmes didn't seem to want Watson for the immediate public relations value of his stories, can we say with confidence that the returning Holmes was in fact admitting his need for companionship? Was there a practical side to the partnership as well? Was this Holmes's way of saying that Watson was his ideal colleague and assistant?

Having asked that question, can anyone then explain why Holmes didn't seem to want Watson to come with him to Blackheath? Since when did Watson only go along when there was danger?

It's all going wrong: Holmes seems to have taken an instant dislike to Mrs. Lexington, the housekeeper. He saw "a sort of sulky defiance in her eyes, which only goes with guilty knowledge." Holmes was right, of course. It is clear at the end of the case that she must have known a good bit of what was going on. But how much did she really know, and when did she know it? For instance, is it possible that Oldacre told her that the whole affair was a practical joke, and that he intended to reappear before things got too serious? If she did



know the whole truth of the plot, what would be her motivation for helping to get McFarlane hanged – and for taking the risk if the plot didn't come off? Would mere money be enough to get her to cooperate with her employer?

Does anyone know if the science of the day would have permitted an accurate analysis of the remains in the fire? If so, why didn't Holmes think to suggest this to the police? And a follow-up to that question: When did Holmes first realize that Oldacre was not the body in the fire?

The Granada television series beefed up "The Norwood Builder" by having Oldacre murder a passing tramp in order to get a convincing body for his fire. Setting aside the inherent sacredness of the Canon for a moment, what do you think of this change? Does it make the story better? Are there any problems with the idea of a murdered tramp?

Rosemary Michaud