



The Return of Sherlock Holmes

Adventure XXXI – The Adventure of the Solitary Cyclist

Sherlock Holmes was deeply engaged in an investigation of the peculiar persecution of John Vincent Harden, a tobacco millionaire, when Miss Violet Smith appeared at 221B Baker Street to request his assistance. Despite Holmes' protests that he was very busy, Miss Smith prevailed upon him to listen to her story.

Violet Smith was a young lady from impoverished circumstances, who had been engaged as a tutor for the daughter of a Mr. Carruthers, who claimed to have known her Uncle Ralph Smith while the latter was in Africa. The pay was munificent; double the amount that was usually paid for such services, and the situation was pleasant enough...until a thoroughly despicable ruffian named Woodley came into the picture. Woodley lost no time in making himself thoroughly unwanted by "romancing" Miss Smith, who was already engaged to someone else. Shortly after Woodley had been ousted by Carruthers, she noticed that every time she went bicycling, a bearded cyclist followed her. She did not recognize the man, nor did he ever approach close enough for her to get a good look at him. She was at a loss to understand what was going on and sought Holmes' advice.

The matter sounded superficial enough, but Holmes suspected something more sinister was afoot. Upon investigating, he and Watson found themselves battling a plot involving Miss Smith, Woodley, Carruthers, and a sinister former clergyman named Williamson. Matters came to a head when Holmes and Watson found the horse-drawn cart, in which Miss Smith had been riding, empty of driver and passenger, and the driver knocked unconscious in the bushes alongside the road. Miss Smith was nowhere to be seen.



In a few minutes, the Maître de Chasse will loose the Hounds on a scent of African gold, intrigue, forced marriage, and a shooting. The Hounds must hasten if they are to save the lovely Miss Violet Smith from a fate worse than death.

One of my favorite quotes from the Canon is Holmes' remark, "I emerged as you see me. Mr. Woodley went home in a cart." We see mention of only a few instances of Holmes' prowess in pugilism (McMurdo in SIGN and Mathews in EMPT come to mind), and SOLI contains the best example: "...a straight left against a slogging ruffian."

The donnybrook between Holmes and Woodley took place when the latter overheard Holmes questioning the bartender. Holmes had a fairly good description of Woodley from Violet Smith, and should have anticipated that Woodley might be downing a few pints at the local watering hole, so why didn't Holmes "case the joint" before initiating his interrogation?

When Violet Smith came to see Holmes in London, she took a train. What did she do with her bicycle when she was traveling by rail? Did railroad depots provide some storage space for such occasions?

As the driverless horse, pulling an empty cart, approached Holmes and (belatedly) Watson, why did Holmes order the panting Watson to stop it? This is not the only instance of Holmes asking Watson to undertake a task Holmes could have performed for himself, but it is a lot more dangerous than looking up something or reading something aloud. Holmes was at the roadside first; why didn't he block the horse's path and grab the reins?

Violet Smith, and not her mother, was cited as Ralph Smith's next-of-kin. What was the probate law in 1895? Was a niece more closely related than a sister-in-law?

Watson was quite specific in detailing the justice that was meted out to Woodley and Williamson. Why didn't he keep a record of Carruthers' fate? What testimony could Holmes have provided that mitigated Carruthers' jail term? And what became of Carruthers' 10-year-old daughter while her father was in jail?

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November 20, 1998