



The Return of Sherlock Holmes

Adventure XXXVII -- The Adventure of The Golden Pince-Nez

It hasn't rained this hard since "The Five Orange Pips," and there seems to be something about the "wild, tempestuous" weather that brings out the worst in Canonical people who have past connections to secret societies. Oddly enough, "The Golden Pince-Nez" has another feature in common with "The Five Orange Pips," and that is – a pair of golden pince-nez. John Openshaw wore them in "The Five Orange Pips," but the latest pair appears from the pocket of Stanley Hopkins, who prised them from the hand of the doomed Willoughby Smith, who snatched them from the face of the doomed Anna. It's quite a "spectacle" of gloom and doom, and though the trail may be as hard to follow as the writing on a palimpsest, I trust that the Hounds will swing into line and focus upon this week's story of "The Golden Pince-Nez."

The vision thing: Holmes said, "It would be difficult to name any articles which afford a finer field for inference than a pair of glasses." I believe that the Hounds have discussed bootlaces and other articles mentioned by Holmes as clues to their owners, but surely eyeglasses are in a class by themselves in this regard. What would Holmes make of our modern array of tinted lenses, designer frames, blended bifocals, etc.? Would contact lenses put a serious crimp in Holmes's style?



Holmes is so sharp-eyed that I always think of him as having 20/20 vision, yet he seemed remarkably familiar with the perils of nearsightedness.

Even granting that part of Holmes's genius lies in his ability to see the world through other people's eyes, is it just possible that Holmes did require glasses, and that Watson, Doyle, and Paget conspired to conceal this fact from the public?

Speaking of shortsighted, Stanley Hopkins mentioned that he “intended to go the round of the London opticians” in order to trace the golden pince-nez. Do you think that Hopkins might have eventually found Anna without Holmes’s help? Would everybody in the story (except for Willoughby Smith, of course, but he was already dead) have been better off if Hopkins had kept Holmes out of the case?

A simple case: Can anyone think of a plausible reason for Holmes to decipher that palimpsest? It does not seem to have been connected with any crime. Was it a hobby of his? Where does a person lay his hands upon a palimpsest? At the palimpsest shop? @Palimpsest.COM?

Why did Anna take the poison before she emerged from her hiding place? Or let me put it this way: Why did she take poison before she knew whether or not anyone was going to take those letters and the diary to the Russian embassy? Wouldn’t it have been more natural for her to want to live until that task had been carried out, or at least until she knew for certain that she had failed?

For that matter, why kill herself at all? And that leads me to another question. Was Anna’s suicide genuine, or was it a fake? Consider Holmes’s ultra-calm attitude towards the case afterward. To hear him discuss his deductions about the pince-nez, you would never imagine that a woman had just taken her own life right in front of him. Is it possible that the entire suicide scene was invented by Watson as part of a scheme to allow Anna to begin her life over again?

Rosemary Michaud