



The Return of Sherlock Holmes

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

First published in:

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Time frame of story (known/surmised):

Late November 1894, stated. Exact date not given.

Holmes & Watson living arrangements:

Together at 221B.

Opening scene:

It was a dark and stormy night. Watson was reading a surgical treatise, and Holmes was engaged with a powerful lens deciphering the remains of the original inscription upon a palimpsest. Then, amid the droning of the wind there came the stamping of a horse's hoofs, and the long grind of a wheel of a cab as it rasped against the curb. It was young Stanley Hopkins, a promising detective from Scotland Yard, in whose career Holmes had several times shown a very practical interest. Holmes invited Hopkins to draw up and warm his toes.



Client:

Hopkins the detective.

Crime or concern:

Murder of Willoughby Smith, assistant to professor Coram, an elderly scholar. Smith had been stabbed in the underside of his neck, pierced with a very small but deep wound, which had divided the carotid artery. The instrument with which the injury had been inflicted was one of those small sealing-wax knives to be found on old-fashioned writing-tables, with an ivory handle and a stiff blade. It was part of the fittings of the professor's own desk.

Villain:

Professor Coram himself, whose treachery set it all in motion. The killer was his wife, who had been double-crossed by the professor years before.

Motive:

Anna, the wife, came back to steal papers that would exonerate her companion (or lover). She had not planned murder, but stabbed the victim with the sealing-wax knife when he interrupted her and grabbed her.

Logic/clues used to solve:

Weapon used was not brought from outside. The hallway to the professor's room had cocoanut matting just like the entry and the hall to the office where the killing took place.

The victim's last words, "The professor, it was she."

Found by the victim was a golden pince-nez, with two broken ends of black silk cord dangling from the end of it. It was sized for a person with narrowly-set eyes.

Information from the housekeeper that the professor seemed to be a big eater at times.

During his interview with the professor, Holmes smoked cigarettes profusely. He later observed traces of the ashes on the carpet that indicated someone else was present, and was hiding in the bookcases.

Policemen:

Stanley Hopkins, who brought Holmes in. The chief constable, who sent for Hopkins. Another constable met the three at the garden gate of Yoxley Old Place, the crime scene.

A Russian policeman was killed in a time of trouble by the Nihilists.

Holmes' fees:

No mention. Likely another case where Holmes was consulted (and presumably paid) by the Yard.

Transport:

Holmes & Watson and Hopkins took train from Charing Cross to Chatham at six in the morning, and got to Yoxley Old Place between eight and nine.

Food:

The three (Hopkins, Holmes & Watson) had coffee early in the morning, and then snatched a hurried breakfast after arriving in Chatham, while a horse was being put into a trap at the local inn.

The professor was a “big eater”. He was feeding his hidden wife/conspirator.

Drink:

No mention

Vices:

Professor Coram was a 3 ½ pack-a-day cigarette smoker!

Other cases mentioned:

SIGN. The repulsive story of the red leech and the terrible death of Crosby, the banker; the Addleton tragedy, and the singular contents of the ancient British barrow, the famous Smith-Mortimer succession case, and the tracking and arrest of Huret, the Boulevard assassin — an exploit which won for Holmes an autographed letter of thanks from the French President and the Order of the Legion of Honour.

Notable Quotables:

“By George, it’s marvellous!” cried Hopkins, in an ecstasy of admiration, upon having a clue explained to him by Holmes.

Watson, describing how Holmes dealt with women: “I may have remarked before that Holmes had, when he liked, a peculiarly ingratiating way with women, and that he very readily established terms of confidence with them. He (soon) captured the housekeeper’s goodwill and was chatting with her as if he had known her for years.

“I have forged and tested every link of my chain, Professor Coram, and I am sure that it is sound. What your motives are, or what exact part you play in this strange business, I am not yet able to say. In a few minutes I shall probably hear it from your own lips.” – Holmes, just before pronouncing his solution.

Other interesting:

Pince-nez: A type of spectacles which are supported by pinching the wearer's nose instead of held up by bows over the ears. They were popular in the late 1800's. By the late 1930's, they were mostly used by the elderly and are rarely seen in modern times. Famous wearers of pince-nez were Theodore Roosevelt and Anton Chekhov. French, nose-pinch. Often provided with a loop of cord or fine chain to prevent loss or breakage.

Holmes tells us he had a very narrow face, but not as narrow as the owner of the pince-nez.

The professor had been analyzing documents found in the Coptic monasteries of Syria and Egypt, a work which would cut deep at the very foundation of revealed religion.

When all was said and done:

The killer was Professor Coram's wife. They had been Russian nihilists, and the professor had turned his wife and her companions in to the authorities. After serving a prison term, Anna, the wife, came after the professor to steal some papers she believed would free her companions. Willoughby Smith, the assistant, came onto Anna going through the professor's papers and got stabbed, and Anna lost her pince-nez. After the nearsighted Anna took the wrong corridor and ended up in the professor's room, he hid her, and covered for her. Holmes discovered the truth, and Anna poisoned herself, but gave Holmes some papers to take to the Russian embassy, which she hoped would free her companions. In the end, Holmes allows Hopkins to take credit for the solution, and takes the papers to the Russian embassy.

McMurdo's Camp