



## The Return of Sherlock Holmes

### Adventure XXXVIII -- The Adventure of The Missing Three-Quarter

Watson wrote, "I blessed this Mr. Overton" for bringing a case to Sherlock Holmes at a period of inactivity. The good doctor was worried that Holmes might otherwise have turned to his "drug mania." I think we can all agree with Watson that any case is preferable to the seven percent solution, but it seems to me that Holmes may have "OD'd" on this case instead, ascribing to it all manner of ominous connotations which were not supported by the facts of the case. The case reads like a "Norbury" in reverse (Does that make it a "Yrubron?") and the reader feels a genuine pain of apprehension at the possibility that Holmes is about to make a complete fool of himself.

Mr. Holmes, I thought you knew things: We smile at Holmes's ignorance of the world of amateur sport, but we are even more surprised, I think, to find that Watson seemed to be no better informed than his friend. Is that possible? Even had Watson lost touch with sports over the years, so that the names Overton and Staunton meant nothing to him, wouldn't he nevertheless have recognized the term "right wing three-quarter" and all the rest of Overton's comments on his rugby woes? Are there any reasons why Watson might have feigned ignorance even though his knowledge was actually greater than Holmes's?

Cyril Overton had already consulted the official police concerning the disappearance of his star player, but Inspector Stanley Hopkins did not take up the case, and instead sent Overton along to Sherlock Holmes.

This seems like an odd thing to do in a case of possible kidnapping. It's true that there was no ransom note, but even if Godfrey Staunton had been waylaid merely in order to affect the outcome of the rugby match, it would still be a crime to keep a man prisoner against his will. Is it possible that Overton presented the situation in a slightly more embellished light when he retold his story for Holmes?

Or is it possible that Stanley Hopkins somehow found out the truth about Staunton's whereabouts and



then deliberately sent Overton to Holmes, perhaps as a form of revenge for his mentor's sometimes harsh comments about Hopkins' detective abilities?

If Holmes was convinced that there was dirty work afoot, why didn't he go back to the official police with his theories? He mentioned that a warrant would have made it easier to obtain a copy of the telegram, and surely a police presence would have given him more leverage in his dealings with Dr. Armstrong as well. Or would the involvement of the official police have influenced the strong-willed doctor in any way? Was Holmes right to work his own line? Had Holmes made up his mind fairly early that the case was not a criminal one? If so, what was the reason for his strong suspicions against Dr. Armstrong?

Oh, the cunning rascal! It's easy to fault Holmes in this case, but certainly Dr. Leslie Armstrong has even more to be ashamed of. And I don't mean merely his attitude towards private detectives, though this certainly suggests an unpleasant incident from his own past, but also his entire involvement with the poor young woman's illness. Was there not a point at which discretion and the fear of Staunton's disinheritance should have given way to the patient's well-being? Why did a man in Armstrong's position take personal charge of her care, rather than allowing the treatment to be conducted by a doctor with more time to devote to her case? Why was there no other medical attendant or nurse in that out-of-the-way cottage? Was there a danger that Mrs. Staunton's illness would be spread to the community at large through her continual contact with her husband? Was Dr. Armstrong touchy about outside interference because he had mishandled the case? What do you think was Watson's personal opinion of the conduct of his fellow physician?

At the conclusion of the story, we can see that Dr. Armstrong most certainly had not kidnapped or murdered Godfrey Staunton. But there was apparently an air of evil about the doctor which had set off that alarm in Holmes's sensitive nature. Do you think that Holmes's instincts were true? Was there a criminal strain in Dr. Armstrong which might have eventually resulted in some serious transgression?

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