

His Last Bow

Adventure XLIV -- The Adventure of the Red Circle

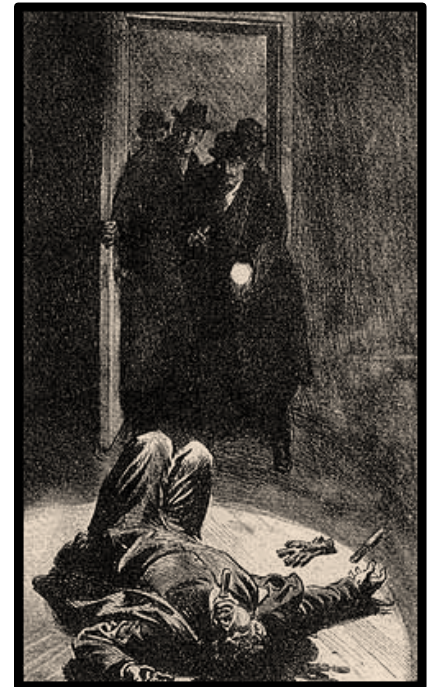
This is another complicated story, but unlike Wisteria Lodge, I think it hangs together really well, writes Charlotte Anne Walters.

Landlady Mrs Warren comes to see Holmes regarding her unusual lodger. This strange man took the room, paid above the odds on the condition she left him completely alone, and he hasn't left the room or been seen for the last ten days – except going out on the evening he arrived and returning after everyone had gone to bed.

Holmes is busy at the time when she calls, sticking things in his scrap book, and is initially rather rude and dismissive towards her. Mrs Warren persists and persuades him with a little flattery. Watson tells us – ‘Holmes was accessible upon the side of flattery, and also, to do him justice, upon the side of kindness’. It is something that this bogging project has reminded me of – that Holmes was capable of much kindness, sensitivity, even emotion at times and the stereotype of a cold, clinical thinking machine is far too simplistic.

The lodger who stays in the room is not actually the person who engaged it. There was a switch and the person occupying the room is actually an Italian woman who is hiding from the leader of The Red Circle – an Italian mafia-style gang of which her husband (who took the rooms initially) was a member. The couple fled to London in order to escape the gang because the leader, Gorgiano, made a pass at the wife then ordered her husband to murder a close family friend.

Once in London, the husband hides his wife at Mrs Warren's for safety – that is why she hasn't seen her lodger leave the room for ten days.



The police are already investigating the situation with help from an American detective from Pinkerton's agency. Holmes' investigation interweaves with the official one and ultimately the woman's husband kills Gorgiano. Upon hearing the wife's story, all decide that he should not be punished as he was justified in bumping off such a notorious murderer and all-round nasty villain. So all's well that ends well and a complicated tale draws to a close.

Generally, I do prefer the more small-scale stories to these complicated international sagas, but there is a subtlety to this one which I enjoyed.

7 out of 10.

Charlotte Anne Walters

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