



His Last Bow

Adventure XLIV – The Adventure of the Red Circle

Mrs. Warren, a landlady, was worried by a new tenant who paid double rent so that he could stay in his rooms without emerging, and who paced ceaselessly from morning to night. She took her concerns to Sherlock Holmes, who said there was nothing to it, and that her fears were groundless. But Mrs. Warren insisted there was something amiss, and Holmes agreed reluctantly to keep tabs on the situation.

The case of the recluse lodger took a dramatic turn when Mrs. Warren's husband was abducted by two–or–three unknown assailants, bundled into a cab, and then unceremoniously dumped on Hampstead Heath after two hours. Although there was nothing in all this to connect the incident to the mysterious boarder, Mrs. Warren was sure that he was at the root of it and told Holmes that she would evict the boarder before the day was out. Holmes convinced her to be a little more patient and contrived a way in which he and Watson could get a look at the boarder.

What followed was a sequence of mysterious signals sent by the medium of passing a candle back–and–forth across a window of a tenement across the road from Mrs. Warren's house; bloody footprints on the floor of the rooms whence the signals had originated; and the discovery of an enormous man, stabbed in the throat and dead as a doornail, in an inner room. In a few minutes, the Maître de Chasse will swing the Hounds to the line on the track of this tale of an Italian secret society, unholy "love," murderous plots, and vengeance.

Reflect for a moment, if you will, on your own mental image of "Black Gorgiano." Got a picture? A giant of a man, dark complexion, with a black beard and moustache, and a fiercely forbidding aspect about him, right? Well...not quite. I feel a little disappointed every



LA MYSTÉRIEUSE PENSIONNAIRE DE BLOOMSBURY
APPARUT : « VOUS L'AVEZ TUÉ, MURMURA-T-ELLE.
OUI ! D'IO MIO ! VOUS L'AVEZ TUÉ !

time I remind myself that Gorgiano was clean-shaven and that the “good guy,” Emilio Lucca, was the one with a dark beard and moustache. But then, who could have imagined that the best of men, Dr. John H. Watson, was wearing a **white** hat? So much for stereotypes.

Was Mrs. Warren justified in being perturbed when her lodger lived up to the terms of his rental agreement and didn’t emerge for ten days? Was she hypertensive when it came to her lodger’s pacing the floor from morning to late at night? Should a normal, prudent person be alarmed by such actions?

Why didn’t Holmes try to locate the driver of the cab into which Mr. Warren was so rudely bundled? And how could Mr. Warren’s assailants mistake him, an older man, for their quarry? How did they discover that they had the wrong person without removing the coat they had thrown over his head, and if they removed it, how did it happen that Mr. Warren didn’t get a look at one or both of them? Further, how did the assailants know the address at which their quarry was supposedly staying? If they did, why didn’t they get inside on some pretext and abduct him rather than lurk outside, cab at the ready, waiting for him to emerge? And wasn’t it odd that for ten days nobody but the mysterious lodger noticed a couple of foreign-looking strangers lurking about with a cab at hand?

There has been much previous discussion of the fact that the Italian alphabet differs from the English version in that it contains fewer letters. Much has been made also about the length of time required to laboriously wave a candle back and forth in front of a window to form a word, repeat it twice, form another word, and repeat that once plus four letters. The signaler couldn’t move the candle too rapidly because the draft would cause it to go out. But I would ask why Gennaro Lucca, a native of Italy, would signal his wife Emilia, also a native Italian, in Italian but using the English alphabet, particularly at a time of great stress?

Some odds and ends: Why did Watson have to light Gregson’s lantern? Why was Gorgiano carrying a black kid glove at a time when he might need both hands free? How did Holmes know that his signal to Emilia Lucca would be obeyed; that there was no prearranged password to show that the danger had passed? Why was it necessary for the four men to return to Emilia’s room to hear her narrative, and why did it take them a half-hour to cross the street to do so?

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