



His Last Bow

Adventure XLVI -- The Adventure of the Dying Detective

First published in:

The Strand Magazine, December 1913; *Collier's Weekly*, November 22, 1913.

Time frame of story (known/surmised):

No clear indication. Probably late 1880's.

Holmes & Watson living arrangements:

Holmes at 221B, Watson was living elsewhere in the second year of his married life.

Opening scene:

Mrs. Hudson, Holmes' and (formerly) Watson's landlady at 221B came to see Watson at his rooms, and told him of the sad condition to which Holmes had been reduced. She said he was dying, and unlikely to last the day.

Client:

No client. Watson went to see Holmes after hearing of his condition.



Crime or concern:

Watson's concern was with Holmes' evident condition and dangerous disease. Real concern and crime was the killing of Victor Savage by his uncle, who intentionally caused him to contract a rare and fatal tropical disease, even though in the heart of London.

Villain:

Culverton Smith, the victim's uncle, a planter from Sumatra. Smith was small and frail, twisted in the shoulders and back like one who has suffered from rickets as a youth. But he had a great yellow face, coarse-grained and greasy, a heavy double-chin, and two sullen, menacing gray eyes under tufted brows. Not only that, he had a high bald head and an enormous skull, and wore a jaunty smoking-cap.

Motive:

Smith on Savage: Savage stood between Smith and a reversion (inheritance). Smith on Holmes: to protect the secret of his crime.

Method used to solve:

Holmes got Watson to summon Smith, who was an amateur expert on rare tropical diseases. He maintained shelves of gelatine cultivations of their microbes. Smith had sent Holmes a small ivory box with a spring-loaded microbe-tipped blade meant to infect whomever opened the box, but Holmes was not fooled. After Smith arrived, Holmes got him to gloat over the success of infecting Holmes, but Watson was hidden in the room and heard it all. In reality, Holmes was faking the disease. That is why he would not let Watson get too close to him.

Policemen:

Inspector Morton, of Scotland Yard, dressed in unofficial tweeds.

Holmes' fees:

None.

Transport:

Watson took a cab to consult Culverton Smith.

Food:

After revealing himself and having Smith arrested, Holmes ate some biscuits (cookies, to modern Americans). After the wrap-up, Holmes announced “when we have finished at the police-station I think that something nutritious at Simpson’s would not be out of place.”

Drink:

With the biscuits, he had a glass of claret (Bordeaux wine). Probably a little at Simpsons, too.

Vices:

No mention.

Other cases mentioned:

None

Notable Quotables:

“You can forget it or remember it, just as you like. I don’t see you in the witness-box. Quite another shaped box, my good Holmes, I assure you. It matters nothing to me that you should know how my nephew died.

Other interestings:

When Watson called upon Culverton Smith, he was greeted by a solemn butler who appeared framed in the pink radiance of a tinted electric light behind him. There was also a pink electric light featured in 3GAB.

McMurdo’s Camp