



His Last Bow

Adventure XLVII – His Last Bow

I always find this story a sad and difficult one to read. First there is the tragedy of the First World War. Then there is the melancholy phrase, “Stand with me here upon the terrace, for it may be the last quiet talk that we shall ever have.” This cannot fail to remind Sherlockians of the many friends who have crossed the Reichenbach ahead of us. And then there is the annoying part: another irritating example of what apparently was – and still may be – the English attitude towards the Irish. This is made even more disturbing in its way by the Doylean connotations of the name Altamont.

But putting all that aside, the story has its good points, too. Isn't it wonderful to think of Holmes at sixty years of age, still able to outwit his adversaries in fine style with Watson at his side! So let's pack the Pack into the old Ford and follow our headlights to the discussion of “His Last Bow.”

Bringing home the bacon: Holmes suggested that Von Bork might be released after his visit to Scotland Yard. Does this make sense in the light of all that Holmes had done to pass false information through Von Bork? But even if Von Bork stayed a prisoner, wouldn't his capture itself have aroused suspicion that the information which passed through him was untrustworthy? Would there have been some other way for Holmes to get at Von Bork's papers without tipping off the Germans that the game was up?



Did Von Bork think it strange that Altamont had a chauffeur? How did Holmes usually travel to meet Von Bork, if this was the first time Watson did the driving? Had Holmes ever been to Von Bork's house before, or had they met in other places prior to that instance?

Canonical illustrations aside, who chloroformed Von Bork: Holmes or Watson?

To whom did the black cat belong? Did Martha take it with her? Did Watson adopt it?

“It is a good wine, Holmes”: Should Holmes have discussed Martha’s role at a moment when Von Bork might have awakened and overheard? Or did her disguise not matter at that point?

If Martha was Mrs. Hudson, wouldn’t you have expected Watson to register some surprise at seeing his erstwhile landlady in such an unexpected role?

How much of that Imperial Tokay did Holmes and Watson drink? Was that why Holmes was talking nonsense? Should Watson have been driving? Was that the real reason they stood upon the terrace: to clear their heads?

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