



# The Casebook of Sherlock Holmes

## Adventure L – The Problem of Thor Bridge

### Publishing History

# 50 of the 60 stories

First published in *The Strand Magazine*, February & March, 1922

In the US *Hearst's International*, February & March, 1922

Part of *The Case Book of Sherlock Holmes* collection by

John Murray, London, 1927

George D. Doran, New York, 1927

British illustrator – A. Gilbert



### Chronology

Baring-Gould places the dating of the story at Thursday, October 4 to Friday, October 5, 1900 making it 48<sup>th</sup> of the 60. This means that Holmes is 46 and Watson 50.

### Christopher Morley Says

“Though late in the long series, this case ranks with the best. The introduction, though brief, is packed with valuable illusions, tells us of Dr. Watson’s dispatch box in Cox’s bank vault (crammed with the records of untold stories), and mentions the solitary plane tree in the back yard of Baker Street. In America we would call it a sycamore or buttonwood. Holmes shows himself a match for the world-famous American senator, J. Neil Gibson, who looked like a debased Abraham Lincoln; and Watson again met and admired a magnificent governess.”

## **Dummies Short Summary**

“Holmes makes a fine recovery in one of the best stories in the canon. It’s another locked-room mystery, except this time the room is a bridge over a pond. There’s a body with a bullet in the brain, but is it murder? Or suicide? If so, where’s the weapon?”

## **How Many Words**

At 9,666 words THOR has the 44<sup>th</sup> most words (#1 is VEIL – 4,499, #56 if NAVL – 12,701)

## **Classifying This Case**

This case is one of 2 where Holmes saves a person from a false murder charge. The other was NORW.

## **The Best Of Sherlock Holmes**

This story’s rating has risen considerably over time.

- 1944 – The Baker Street Irregulars voted it #11 on their worst list.
- 1999 – The Baker Street Irregulars voted it 14th of 56 short stories.
- 1999 – The Sherlock Holmes Society of London voted it 18<sup>th</sup> of the 56 short stories.

## **What Else Happened That Year (1900)**

- Roberts replaces Buller in South Africa; relief of Ladysmith, Mafeking, Kimberly; Boer leader Kronje surrenders at Paardeberg; Transvaal and Orange Free State annexed by Britain.
- Royal Niger Company's territories are taken over by the British government.
- Central London Railway (Central Line) opens; London's tubes electrified.
- Labour Representation Committee, beginning of the Labour Party.
- School made obligatory until age 14.
- Birmingham University founded.
- Davis Cup presented for men's international lawn tennis.
- Boxer Rebellion ended by military relief of besieged foreign legations.
- Franco-Italian Treaty concerning North African colonies.
- Tirpitz induces German Reichstag to pass Navy Act, to double the navy by 1920.
- Assassination of King Humberto of Italy, accessions of Victor Emmanuel III.

- Socialist Revolutionary Party formed in Russia, advocates terrorism.
  - Russia occupies Manchuria, massacres 45,000 Chinese.
  - Working day in France is limited to 10 hours.
  - Conrad publishes *Lord Jim*.
  - Theodore Dreiser publishes *Sister Carrie*.
  - Puccini debuts *La Tosca*.
  - Max Planck proposed Quantum theory.
  - J.E. Brandenburger invents cellophane.
  - First Zeppelin is built.
  - Escalator, invented in the U.S.A., exhibited in Paris Exhibition.
  - Hugo de Vries publishes The Mutation Theory, leading to the modern evolution theory.
- Benjamin Holt invents the caterpillar tractor

### **Holmes And Watson – Personal Information**

The duo is sharing bachelor quarters at 221B. They, however, had a new cook (did Mrs. Hudson ever have one before?), and Billy the page-boy is mentioned once again.

### **Dramatis Personae**

A relatively small cast but one of them could purchase his own country

- **Neil Gibson**, ex American Senator from a Western state and an extremely wealthy gold magnate.
- **Maria Gibson** nee **Pinto**, the murder victim and wife of Neil. "A creature of the tropics, a Brazilian by birth."
- **Grace Dunbar**, governess to the Gibson children.
- **Sgt. Coventry**, local policeman who investigated the murder.
- **Marlow Bates**, secretary to Gibson.
- **Mr. Ferguson**, assistant to Bates.
- **Mr. Joyce Cummings**, barrister representing Miss Dunbar.

## Quotable Sherlock

- “My professional charges are upon a fixed scale. I do not vary them, save when I remit them altogether.”
- “I do not think that I am in need of booming.”
- “It may surprise you to know that I prefer to work anonymously, and that it is the problem itself which attracts me.”
- “Some of you rich men have to be taught that all the world cannot be bribed into condoning your offences.”
- “When once your point of view is changed, the very thing which was so damning becomes a clue to the truth.”
- “All cards are at present against us.”
- “One drawback of an active mind is that one can always conceive alternate explanations which would make our scent a false one.”
- “We must look for consistency. When there is a want of it we must suspect deception.”
- “We can but try.”
- “Well, Watson, we have helped a remarkable woman, and also a formidable man. Should they in the future join their forces, as seems not unlikely, the financial world may find that Mr. Neil Gibson has learned something in that schoolroom of sorrow where our earthly lessons are taught.”

## Holmes' Fee

I must have clipped this from someplace but can't remember. My apologies to whomever.

Possibly lucrative, but we can't tell. Client told Holmes: “Money is nothing to me in this case. You can burn it if it's any use in lighting you to the truth. This woman is innocent and this woman has to be cleared, and it's up to you to do it. Name your figure! Strangely, Holmes replied, “My professional charges are upon a fixed scale, (and) I do not vary them, save when I remit them altogether.” --- In some other cases, especially PRIO, Holmes was perfectly willing to extract a high fee from a rich man of whom he did not approve. In THOR, Holmes exhibited a high degree of disdain for a rich man who exhibited poor behavior, but Watson did not record any fee negotiations, other than Holmes' dismissal of the subject. I, personally, would have had quite a few zeros in his bill.

## Unrecorded Cases

We have 3 here that have been many times by Sherlockian pastiche writers.

- Mr. Jason Phillimore who came out of his house one morning, returned for his umbrella and was never seen again.
- The cutter *Alicia* which turned into a small patch of mist and was never seen again.
- Isadora Persano, noted duelist and journalist who was found one dark day, stark raving mad, staring into a match box which contained a worm of a type unknown to science.

## Sherlock Holmes On The Big And The Little Screen

- 1923 *The Mystery of Thor Bridge* with Eille Norwood as one of his 47 movies. The National Film and Television Archive at the BFI has viewing copies of this film but it has not been released
- 1968 *Thor Bridge* with Peter Cushing in his *Sherlock Holmes* TV series. All copies of this episode are lost.
- 1991 *The Problem of Thor Bridge* with Jeremy Brett as an episode in his 43 episode *Sherlock Holmes* series.

## Annotated Sherlock

- “the solitary plane tree” Americans call the tree a sycamore
- “booming” 19<sup>th</sup> cent American, to advertise

## Weapons

- **Service Revolver** - Dr. Watson's and is mentioned in 13 cases. With the help of which Holmes undertook a most informative experiment.
- **Sinister Array of Firearms** - In the home of J. Neil Gibson, which he had collected throughout a long and adventurous life.
- **Brace of Pistols** - From Gibson's collection, which were taken by his wife, one of which she hid in the wardrobe of Grace Dunbar; the other she used to kill herself in a most ingenious manner, so that Miss Dunbar would be accused of murdering her.
- **Loaded Revolver** - Which Gibson kept in a drawer by his bed.
- **Remarkable Worm** - Which was apparently used to drive Isadora Persano stark Staring mad.

Frank Mentzel