



The Casebook of Sherlock Holmes

Adventure LI – The Adventure of the Creeping Man

Love can make us do stupid things and that is certainly true in the case of poor old Professor Presbury, writes Charlotte Anne Walters.

This is one of the most unbelievable of all the stories in my opinion but I do rather like it all the same. The poor old professor has fallen madly in love with a young girl and starts taking a dangerous elixir which is meant to restore his youth. Instead, it makes him creep around dragging his knuckles along the floor and climb up walls like a monkey. The potion contained extracts from a Himalayan climbing monkey which is what caused his alarming symptoms.

The story is so fantastical but yet somehow, as you read it, you do find yourself believing every word and getting completely drawn-in. It's memorable too, unlike many of the stories which are so similar to others and formulaic that it is difficult to separate them in your memory. And with the modern boom in rejuvenating procedures such as Botox, face-lifts, Liposuction, fillers, and even a recent discovery of injecting sheep extracts into the face to plump it up, perhaps there was something rather prophetic about Doyle's idea. Thinking about it, it doesn't actually seem very fantastical at all compared to modern ideas – but I do think a monkey elixir would have caused far more serious, possibly fatal, effects, not just a bit of moodiness, creeping and climbing.

We are told by Watson that this is one of Holmes' last cases before retirement. This is sad really, being reminded that it all comes to an end and, like with us all, Holmes must grow old. Watson also gives a



description of the state of their friendship at that time. He has become an institution, a habit, like the violin and shag tobacco. The relations between the two men are described as 'Peculiar' due to their strangely utilitarian nature. It is, as always, a friendship but Watson is a friend-with-benefits (though not in that way of course). Watson is a 'Whetstone for his mind' and a comrade, 'Upon whose nerve he could place some reliance'. Friendship is tinged with usefulness, and a comfortable, familiarity now characterises their relationship. They can each be themselves and appreciate these traits, these points of difference, in one another. Indeed, Holmes summons Watson with a message saying – 'Come at once if convenient-if inconvenient come all the same.' Is this disrespectful or just being yourself? Is it Holmes exercising his superiority or acknowledging how much he needs his friend's help? This is the problem with trying to analyse Holmes, that duality at the core of his personality shifting between kindness and emotion, then coldness and arrogance.

A great story with interesting observations from Watson about the autumn days of their friendship.

8 out of 10.

Charlotte Anne Walters

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