



Adventure I -- A Study in Scarlet

(“You have been in Afghanistan”)

Note:

In addition to the 56 short stories about Sherlock Holmes, Doyle wrote 4 Holmes novels. This is one of them, and was the first Sherlock Holmes story. It consists of Part 1, a Holmes detective case in England, and Part 2, a flashback in America involving the earlier life of some of the characters in Part 1.

First published in:

Beeton's Christmas Annual, London, 1887

Time frame of story (known/surmised):

March 4, 1881 (subject to interpretation)

Holmes & Watson living arrangements:

Holmes and Watson were introduced by a common acquaintance, and took up residence together at 221B Baker Street.

Opening scene:

Watson and Holmes got better acquainted, then Holmes received a message from Tobias Gregson of Scotland Yard asking for his assistance.

Client:

Scotland Yard/Gregson, although it is not clear if this was an official request or a casual one.



Crime or concern:

A dead man, Enoch J. Drebber, of Cleveland, Ohio, USA, was discovered in an empty house by a constable on patrol. There was no wound upon the deceased although there was plenty of blood (from the killer's nose-bleed).

Villain:

The killer was Jefferson Hope, a former resident of Salt Lake City, Utah, a Mormon settlement in the USA. The dead man, Drebber, was something of a villain himself, in fact, his demise could be considered a positive development.

Motive:

Revenge, for the murder of his prospective father-in-law, John Ferrier, and the dishonour and death of Lucy, his fiancée. Lucy died as a result of a marriage to Drebber forced upon her by the Mormon leadership.

Logic used to solve:

Holmes made a very precise crime scene investigation, and determined there had been murder done, and the murderer was a man, more than six feet high, in the prime of life, with small feet for his height, wearing coarse, square-toed boots and smoking a Trichinopoly cigar. He had arrived with his victim in a four-wheeled cab, which was drawn by a horse with three old shoes and one new one on his off fore-leg, and in all probability the murderer had a florid face, and the finger-nails of his right hand were remarkably long. Holmes smelled the man dead man's lips and determined that he had been poisoned.

Holmes had already determined in his own mind that the man who had walked into the house with Drebber was none other than the man who had driven the cab. The marks in the road showed that the horse had wandered on in a way which would have been impossible had there been anyone in charge of it. Where could the driver have been unless he were inside the house? It would be absurd to suppose that any sane man would carry out a deliberate crime under the very eyes of a third person who was sure to betray him. Lastly, supposing one man wished to dog another through London, what better means could he adopt than to turn cabdriver? These considerations led Holmes to the conclusion that the killer was to be found among the jarveys of the Metropolis.

When the body was removed, a woman's wedding ring was discovered, and Holmes advertised its discovery (on the street, he said) to lure the presumed killer to reveal himself. An old crone, actually a male in disguise, responded, however, and gave Holmes the slip.

A small chip ointment box containing a couple of pills was found on the body of Drebber's secretary, helping to confirm the poisoning premise.

Cable inquiry to the Cleveland Police told Holmes that Drebber had already applied for the protection of the law against an old rival in love, named Jefferson Hope. This name was the key to a convenient capture.

The BSI's were sent systematically to every cab proprietor in London until they ferreted out the wanted man, Hope. Holmes then summoned him to 221B and snapped on the darbies (hand-cuffs).

Policemen:

Inspectors Gregson and Lestrade of Scotland yard, who compete as rivals on this case. Also constable John Rance, who discovered the body, and a stalwart police constable, surrounded by a small knot of loafers who were guarding the crime scene. When he went to arrest Arthur Charpentier, Gregson took two officers with him.

Holmes' fees:

Holmes told Waston: "Supposing I unravel the whole matter, you may be sure that Gregson, Lestrade, and Co. will pocket all the credit. That comes of being an unofficial personage." Holmes then said he would work it out on his own hook, and have a laugh at them if nothing else.

Transport:

Watson and Stamford rattled through the crowded London streets on their way to the Holborn.

A minute after receiving a note from Gregson, Holmes & Watson were both in a hansom, driving furiously for the Brixton Road. Holmes prattled away about Cremona fiddles.

Holmes & Watson took a cab from the nearest telegraph office to the residence of John Rance, the constable.

The old crone who responded to the advertisement about the ring hailed a four-wheeler, but skipped out the other side unobserved by Holmes or the driver.

After the capture of Jefferson Hope, the killer, they used Hope's own cab to take him to Scotland Yard.

The Mormons took a wagon train from Nauvoo, Illinois to Salt Lake City, and on the way, rescued John and Lucy Ferrier who were stranded on the Great Alkali Plain (desert), and were at death's door. They were required to take up the faith as a condition of their rescue.

Lucy Ferrier often traveled on horseback when she went into town.

Food:

Watson had lunch at the Holborn, with no mention of what he and young Stamford ate.

Upon the 4th of March, Holmes was eating breakfast, and munched silently at his toast. Slightly later, Watson sat down at his own breakfast. He used an eggspoon.

There was a lack of food for the pair of vagabonds trapped in the desert, but, after their rescue by the Mormons, a meal was already awaiting them.

When Hope came to the Ferrier house two days away from the deadline, he had had no time for bite or sup for eight-and-forty hours." He flung himself upon the cold meat and bread which were still lying upon the table from his host's supper, and devoured it voraciously.

After discovering Ferrier's grave and Lucy's abduction, Hope cooked enough of the bighorn sheep he had killed to last him for a few days, as he swore his revenge.

Drink:

Watson encountered Stamford in the Criterion Bar. No mention of drink there. Then they went to lunch at the Holborn, where during lunch, Young Stamford looked rather strangely at Watson over his wineglass. No mention of what type of wine they had.

Gregson spilled his drink when he found out Stangerson the secretary had been murdered.

While on patrol John Rance pondered how uncommon handy a four of gin hot would be. No record if he actually had any to drink.

The old crone who came to get the ring said it belonged to her girl, Sally, whose husband was short with her enough at the best o' times, but more especially when he had drink.

Enoch Drebber, on the very night of his arrival at Mme. Charpentier's, became very much the worse for drink, and, indeed, after twelve o'clock in the day he could hardly ever be said to be sober.

Back in London and trailed by Jefferson Hope, Drebber walked down the road and went into one or two liquor shops, staying for nearly half an hour in the last of them. When he came out, he staggered in his walk, and was evidently pretty well on. Then, in Hope's cab, the craze for drink seized him again, and he ordered Hope to pull up outside a gin palace. He went in, and there he remained until closing time.

Vices:

Holmes & Watson discussed their smoking habits of choice during their first meeting at Bart's.

At the Brixton Road crime scene, Holmes gathered up very carefully a little pile of gray dust from the floor, and packed it away in an envelope. It was cigar ash, from which Holmes determined what type of cigar the killer had smoked.

Gregson came and told Holmes he had arrested Arthur Charpentier, sub-lieutenant in Her Majesty's navy. At Holmes' invitation, he had a cigar with some whisky and water. He puffed complacently.

While Holmes was out following the "old crone" who came to pick up the ring, Watson sat stolidly puffing at his pipe.

Holmes had given a friend a little pinch of the latest vegetable alkyloid.

Other cases mentioned:

The case of Von Bischoff at Frankfort. Mason of Bradford, the notorious Muller, Lefevre of Montpellier, and Samson of New Orleans. The death of Van Jansen, in Utrecht, in the year '34. The Ratcliff Highway murders. The forcible administration of poison in the cases of Dolsky in Odessa, and of Leturier in Montpellier.

Notable Quotables:

"It is a capital mistake to theorize before you have all the evidence. It biases the judgment."

"You know a conjurer gets no credit when once he has explained his trick and if I show you too much of my method of working, you will come to the conclusion that I am a very ordinary individual after all."

"The most commonplace crime is often the most mysterious, because it presents no new or special features from which deductions may be drawn."

Other interestings:

The introduction of the Baker Street Irregulars (BSI's), half a dozen dirty and ragged street Arabs.

When all was said and done:

The killer, Hope, died of an aortic aneurysm not long after his capture, but he had his revenge. Lestrade and Gregson got the credit, and Watson got the idea of publishing an account of the case, along with Holmes' permission to do so.

Said Watson to Holmes, “I have all the facts in my journal, and the public shall know them. In the meantime you must make yourself contented by the consciousness of success, like the Roman miser — “Populus me sibilat, at mihi plaudo Ipse domi simul ac nummos contemplar in arca.” (The people hiss at me, but I applaud myself at home, as I contemplate the money in my chest.) – from Horace, Book 1, Satire 1

This whole business would have been much different had Jefferson Hope the sense to blow out his candle before leaving the scene. The discovery of Drebbler’s body would have been likely delayed until its putrefaction attracted attention, probably a lengthy process given the closed-up empty house and its history of problems with the drains (sewers) and typhoid. The tracks which were key to the solution would have been obliterated. Would Holmes have gotten another high-profile case? Would Watson have recorded it? Or would the career of this remarkable 19th-century consulting detective passed unrecorded?

McMurdo’s Camp