



The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes

Adventure VIII – The Man with the Twisted Lip

A respected businessman, husband, and father is missing. The last person to have seen him was his wife, who saw him in the upstairs window of an opium den. He was never known to have partaken of opium or to have frequented that part of town. His suspected killer is a powerfully-built cripple with a hideous scar on his face that writhes his upper lip away from his teeth. The businessman's body is nowhere to be found, but his clothing, or most of it, is found hidden in the room where he was last seen. There is a bloodstain on the window overlooking the turgid Thames River, and then at full high tide. When the tide recedes his coat is found, pockets stuffed with small change, but there is no sign of his body. This is the riddle that Holmes was called to solve by the businessman's attractive wife.

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In REIG, Holmes says that he never makes assumptions, and yet in TWIS he must have made a series of them, beginning with the assumption that Mrs. St. Clair had indeed seen her husband in the window of the Bar of Gold. He made another assumption when he gracefully accepted Mrs. St. Clair's assertion that the handwritten note she had received was indeed authored by her husband. There are further assumptions which flow from these if any Hounds care to trace them.



One of the premises of TWIS is that a capable beggar could make quite a decent living at his “trade.” Neville St. Clair as Hugh Boone did just that, it seems. But his story raises questions, some of them not at all related to begging, which need answering. For example, why did Kate marry Isa Whitney when she knew him to be an opium addict since his days at college?

To the best of my knowledge, this is the only Adventure in which Holmes drives a horsedrawn vehicle. We are told that the dog-cart was “flying” along and that Holmes “lit his pipe” when he came out of his silent meditation. Is it possible to drive a dog-cart and still be able to light a pipe while moving at a smart clip? The original driver of the dog-cart, John, was left on foot, alone, in the dead of night in some of the vilest and meanest streets of East London. Why could Holmes not have let him come along at least until he could be dropped off in a more respectable part of town?

In a different vein, Neville St. Clair said of his decision to beg professionally for a living, “It was a long fight between my pride and the money, but the dollars won at last...” Why would he, a Victorian gentleman, speak of “dollars” when all his life he had dealt with pounds and pence?

For the thespians among us: How does one go about making “a good scar” that will withstand the tugs and pulls of facial muscles while speaking, be strong enough to hold the upper lip in a “perpetual snarl,” and yet be water-soluble?

For the barristers among us: Holmes says that Hugh Boone “pretended to a small trade in wax vestas” in order to be protected from the laws against begging. Later, Holmes asks, “But what was a fine to him?” The implication there is that Boone had nevertheless been arrested on more than one occasion, but what would have been the basis for the arrests if Boone was operating in a technically legal fashion?

And since it’s bound to arise in the week’s discussion anyhow, was Mrs. St. Clair glad to see Watson when he arrived in company with Holmes? Did she have hopes that Holmes was bringing her husband back with him when she set out a cold supper for two while she was waiting? And why did Holmes involve the long-suffering Watson in this case in the first place? Surely, he took a calculated risk in revealing his true identity to Watson right there in the vile opium den where his natural enemies, or rather his natural prey, were all about him. If he had wanted Watson along, wouldn’t he have wired him in advance rather than risk detection on the spur of the moment? Did he bring Watson along to give him some breathing room from the alluring Mrs. St. Clair and her *mousseline de soie*?

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