



The Memoirs of Sherlock Holmes

Adventure XVI -- The Adventure of the Cardboard Box

The beginning of this story is giving me a strange sense of *deja vu*, writes Charlotte Anne Walters.

Let me explain, or try to at least. There is a passage at the start of *The Cardboard Box* which is exactly the same in the *Resident Patient*. Confused? Well this is the reason – as far as I understand it anyway.

The *Cardboard Box* was originally supposed to be included in *The Memoirs*, but Conan Doyle decided to leave it out due to some sexual content. It was presumed that the story would therefore never be published. It seemed to be very unfortunate that the brilliant piece of deduction which Holmes does at the start involving knowing Watson's innermost thoughts just by reading his body language, would never be seen. So it was decided to insert this into the *Resident Patient* instead. Eventually though, the *Cardboard Box*, minus the sexual bit, was published as part of *His Last Bow* and the duplication occurred. Clear? I know, all a bit strange and I probably haven't explained it very well.

If you are more informed, then please do enlighten me using the comments box below. Also, I'd be interested to know what the original sexual content was as it has now been removed (or at least I presume it has as there is nothing remotely sexual in the story). If anyone knows, do write below as it would be very interesting to see what Doyle deemed as 'inappropriate'.

The story itself is a rather gruesome one about an enraged husband who murders his wife and her lover, cuts off an ear from each of them, and sends them to his sister-in-law who he holds responsible for



turning his wife against him. They are accidentally received by the third sister who calls in the police. As usual, Lestrade gets it completely wrong and it is left to Holmes to find out the truth behind the unpleasant parcel.

An analysis of the string which binds it and the knot suggests a sailor is to blame. Discovering that the male ear had a hole for a piercing also compounded the sailor theory. The female ear was remarkably similar to that of the lady who received it suggesting that she must be related to the victim, and quite closely. Holmes professed to have made a study into ears – ‘Each ear is as a rule quite distinctive and differs from all other ones. In last year’s Anthropological Journal you will find two short monographs from my pen on the subject’. There really is no limit to the strange bits of knowledge which Holmes would store in his great brain!

A photograph in the lady’s house of herself with two sisters prompts Holmes to inquire whether either of them is married to a sailor and indeed one of them is – a nasty drunkard. Hey presto, mystery solved.

That usual happy blend of observation, clever logic and sound reasoning gives Holmes all the answers.

**An enjoyable story, but with a sad ending and
macabre undertones – 7 out of 10.**

Charlotte Anne Walters

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