



The Memoirs of Sherlock Holmes

Adventure XXII – The Adventure of the Crooked Man

Colonel James Barclay was a much-decorated hero of the Sepoy Mutiny, who had risen through the ranks to command the regiment in which he had once served as a private. He married the belle of the regiment, Nancy Devoy, and for thirty years they were the very model of a devoted couple. Colonel Barclay was admired and respected by his fellow officers, who nevertheless noticed that he was prone to occasional bouts of melancholy and had an irrational fear of being apart from his wife and of being alone after dark.

All this came to an abrupt halt when Mrs. Barclay came home one night in a highly agitated state after attending a meeting of a church charity she sponsored. Her husband, learning that she had returned, joined her in the morning-room...and was never seen alive again. The servants heard a terrific argument between the two during which Mrs. Barclay accused her war-hero husband of being a coward and the name “David” was repeatedly mentioned. Suddenly there was a shout, a crash, and screams from the lady which abruptly ended in silence. The servants tried to enter the room but were prevented from doing so because the door was locked from the inside. Finally, the coachman ran outside and found that the French door opening onto the lawn was open. Inside the room, he found Colonel Barclay dead on the floor with blood seeping from a head wound and Mrs. Barclay in a deep faint on the couch.



A strange wooden club with a bone handle lay on the floor next to the Colonel’s body, and Nancy Barclay was suspected of killing her husband with it. Since she remained unconscious, it was impossible to determine what had transpired. A search of the room revealed that the key to the door was inexplicably missing.

Questions arose: Who was “David?” Why had Mrs. Barclay suddenly changed from loving wife to murderess? Where was the key? A call was made for the services of Sherlock Holmes.

It’s fairly obvious that Colonel Barclay had occasional attacks of remorse for what he did to Henry Wood, and it’s remarkable that only three out of five of his fellow officers noticed it, even though they didn’t recognize it for what it was. But why did Barclay fear being alone, especially in the dark, if he and the rest of the world believed Wood to be dead?

How could the servants not recognize a “singular club of hard carved wood with a bone handle,” particularly after they would have had to dust it nearly every day had it been one of the numerous curiosities in Lachine? That being the case, why didn’t it occur to the police that it may have been brought to the scene by a third party? Would Barclay’s head wound have been consistent with the type that would be made by a wooden club? Why didn’t the police check for traces of blood on the fireplace fender? And why did they conclude that the missing key had nothing to do with the incident and therefore not conclude that there had been a third person present who removed it?

For the animal experts in the Pack: would a mongoose try to eat a canary? Do mongooses have red eyes? And wouldn’t a mongoose kill a cobra, toothless or not, given the opportunity?

Holmes tells Watson, “The colonel had been sitting in the dining-room but, hearing that his wife had returned, he joined her in the morning-room. The coachman saw him cross the hall and enter it.” There is no indication that the Colonel was impeded in his access to the morning-room, as would have been the case had the door been locked. After Holmes and Watson visited Wood, Wood told them, “Then Nancy fainted, and I caught up the key of the door from her hand...” So it is apparent that Mrs. Barclay had locked the door after the Colonel entered and had continued to hold the key all during a protracted argument with her husband, right up to the time it was taken from her unresisting hand. Why would she do that?

As Holmes describes Lachine, the villa occupied by the Barclays, he says that “...the west side of it is not more than thirty yards from the highroad.” The Barclays were in the morning-room when Henry Wood charged across the lawn from the road and entered through the French window. That would put the “morning-room” on the **west** side of Lachine. Why then was it called a “morning-room?”

For historians familiar with the history of the Sepoy Mutiny: Is it recorded anywhere that the rebellious native Indians took British soldiers captive and kept them alive rather than killing them on the spot or torturing them to death at some later time? And was it the custom of the hill people in the foothills of the Himalayas, north of Darjeeling, to have slaves?

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