



## The Return of Sherlock Holmes

### Adventure XXIX -- The Adventure of the Norwood Builder

Doyle himself lived at Norwood for four years, writes Charlotte Anne Walters

During this time, Doyle completed the compilation of stories which make up The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes and made the decision to 'kill off' his most famous creation. London historian and Holmesian scholar Alistair Duncan wrote an excellent book on this period of Doyle's life called The Norwood Author which won the Howlett Literary Award this year. It's well-worth a read.

Back to the original story and the fascinating details it reveals about the relationship between Holmes and Watson after the detective returns 'from the dead' and is back with his old friend.

At Holmes' request, Watson sells his practice to a mysterious doctor Verner and returns to live in his old rooms at Baker Street.

As if this isn't quite extraordinary enough, we then learn that Verner is actually a relative of Holmes and paid a generous amount for the practice because it was actually Holmes who put up the money himself. Gosh, for a man that is supposed to be without emotion, this is a very clear statement of deep emotional attachment towards his friend and how much he needs him. But there are alternate views to be considered – could it have been guilt that prompted such generosity? Did Holmes feel guilty about leaving Watson to mourn him for three years, putting him through all that grief and not being there to support him when his wife died? And what about all the money Watson has lost over the years due to neglecting his business and chasing off after Holmes? That trip to Switzerland must have been very expensive, not to mention earlier examples such as rushing from London to Lyon in twenty-four hours to be at Holmes' bedside when he fell ill there.



Was this money his compensation? A thank you and a sorry which Holmes couldn't find the words to say in the conventional way? Or was it simply an act of love?

As to the rest of the story, it returns us to the tried and tested formula of an innocent man being arrested and the evidence stacking up against him, with Holmes trying to prove his innocence much to the amazement of Inspector Lestrade who teases him as every fresh piece of evidence comes to light in the apparent favour of the Inspector's case.

Unusually, Holmes works on intuition at the start of the investigation. I say unusual because what tends to differentiate between Holmes and other detectives is his method, the reasoned observation which he uses to form his opinion, but in this case it is the other way around and he looks for evidence to fit his theory.

A young lawyer is accused of murdering a builder who had once been a suitor of his mother's until she threw him over in favour of another. Mr Jonas Oldacre turns up at the young man's office and asks him to draw up his will, in which the lawyer will be his heir. When Mr Oldacre is believed to have been murdered and his body burned in a fire the night the lawyer visits him to conclude their business, there is only one suspect.

Holmes very cleverly discovers that the builder faked his death and is still hiding in the house – in a den of his own construction. To take a little revenge on Lestrade who had teased him so much for being supposedly on the wrong track, Holmes dramatically gets the builder to run out from his hiding place after a cry of "Fire" is given by Holmes, Watson, Lestrade and the sceptical policemen. Lestrade is suitably humbled and an innocent man saved.

**Brilliant, what a great story full of humour, friendship,  
intrigue and deduction. 9 out of 10.**

**Charlotte Anne Walters**

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