



The Return of Sherlock Holmes

Adventure XXXI – The Adventure of the Solitary Cyclist

Publication History

31 of the 60 stories

First published in *The Strand Magazine*, January, 1904

In the US *Collier's Weekly*, December 26, 1903

Part of *The Return of Sherlock Holmes* collection by

George Newnes, Ltd., London, 1905

McClure Phillip & Co., New York, 1905

British illustrator – Sidney Paget

American illustrator – Frederick Dorr Steele

Chronology

Baring-Gould places the dating of the story at Saturday, April 13 to

Saturday, April 20, 1895 making it 35th of the 60. This means that Holmes

is 41 and Watson 43.



Christopher Morley Says

“The beautiful Violet Smith, a music teacher, was not as solitary as she wished to be. As she rode on her bicycle through the picturesque countryside of Surrey she was mysteriously pursued by another rider. Holmes thought it might be only “some trifling intrigue” and sent Watson to investigate. Later Sherlock went himself, and got into a fist fight.”

Dummies Short Summary

“Violet Smith is being followed. Having no one to turn to, she appeals to Holmes for advice. This creepy story of a young woman being stalked by bicycle on a lonely country lane is a classic.”

How Many Words

At 7,908 words SOLI has the 29th most words (#1 is VEIL – 4,499, #56 if NAVL – 12,701)

Classifying This Case

This case is one of 3 classified as a disappearance by abduction. The other two were LADY and PRIO.

The Best Of Sherlock Holmes

- 1927 – Arthur Conan Doyle did not put it on list of his 12 favorites.
- 1959 – The Baker Street Irregulars did not have it on the top 10.
- 1999 – The Baker Street Irregulars voted it 25th of the 56 short stories.
- 1999 – Sherlock Holmes Society of London voted it 19th of the 56 short stories.

What Else Happened That Year (1895)

- Anglo-French interests begin to conflict in Nile Valley.
- U.S. intervenes in Anglo-Venezuelan border dispute, arbitration in Britain's favor.
- Construction of Uganda railway commenced.
- British East Africa Company surrenders Kenya as British protectorate.
- Liberals defeated at general election, Salisbury again becomes prime minister.
- First automobile exhibition in London.
- Electrification of first mainline railway.
- Japan takes Formosa (Taiwan).
- Germany, France, and Russia unite to compel Japan to return Liaotung peninsula to China.
- Treaty of Simonoseki, end of Sino-Japanese war.
- Cuban rebellions begin, U.S. protests brutal suppression.
- Dreyfus refused new trial by French President Faure.
- Armenian demonstration in Constantinople leads to massacre of 50,000 Armenians.
- Introduction of diphtheria antitoxin.

- Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest* debuts. Later that year, Wilde is imprisoned.
- H.G. Wells publishes *The Time Machine*.
- Wilhelm Konrad, German physicist, experiments with Crooke's tubes and discovers X-rays.
- Ramsey obtains helium, first identified by its spectrum in the sun, in 1868.
- Thomas Armat, of Washington, develops modern cinema projection.
- King Gillette (U.S.) invents safety razor.
- Wireless telegraphy is demonstrated.

Holmes And Watson – Personal Information

Our pair are residing, as usual, at 221B

Dramatis Personae

- **Violet Smith**, the solitary cyclist.
- **Mrs. Smith**, Violet's mother
- **James Smith**, Violet's father; deceased; formerly orchestra leader at the Imperial Theater.
- **Ralph Smith**, Violet's uncle who went to South Africa 25 years ago and has not been heard from since.
- **Bob Carruthers**, South African miner. A widow.
- **Jack Woodley**, South African highwayman and ally of Carruthers.
- **Mr. Williamson**, a defrocked clergyman who had leased Chiltern grange. An ally of Woodley.
- **Cyril Morton**, Violet's fiancé. An electrical engineer.
- **Mrs. Dixon**, Carruthers' housekeeper.
- **Peter the groom**.
- **Miss Carruthers**, Bob's daughter. No first name given. (given the name Sarah in Granada/Brett version)

Quotable Sherlock

- "He made odious love to me"
- "He has never said anything. He is a perfect gentleman. But a girl always knows."
- "It is part of the settled order of nature that such a girl should have followers."
- "We had got as far as this, when who should walk in but the gentleman himself, who had been drinking his beer in the taproom and had heard the whole conversation. Who was I? What did I want? What did I mean by asking questions? He had a fine flow of language, and his adjectives were very vigorous."

- “I was a straight left against a slogging ruffian. I emerged as you see me. Me Woodley went home in a cart.”
- “So you can put that in your pipe and smoke it, Mr. Busybody Holmes.”

Holmes’ Fee

No mention but Violet Smith believed she was poor but discovers at end of tale she had a fortune. Since Holmes saves her from “A fate worse than death,” perhaps she rewarded him?

Unrecorded Cases

- The peculiar persecution of John Vincent Harden, the tobacco millionaire
- Archie Stamford, the forger

Sherlock Holmes On The Big And The Little Screen

It is surprising that this has been on the screen so few times. We have a heroine, evil bad guys, fisticuffs, outdoor action, a good plot - - what more is needed?

- 1921 *The Solitary Cyclist* with Ellie Norwood as 15th of his 47 movies. The National Film and Television Archive at the BFI has viewing copies of this film but it has not been released
- 1968 *The Solitary Cyclist* with Peter Cushing in his *Sherlock Holmes* TV series. This episode is lost.
- 1984 *The Solitary Cyclist* with Jeremy Brett in one of his best episodes in the *Sherlock Holmes* series.

Fainting In The Canon

Our heroine, Violet Smith, almost faints in this story.

Annotated Sherlock

- “**ménage**” French: the persons taken collectively who occupy one house; a household
- “**grange**” is a farmhouse with outbuildings
- “**leather CORDS**” leather corduroy breeches

Weapons

- **Revolver** - Sherlock Holmes’ and is mentioned in 8 cases. To cover Williamson and Carruthers.
- **Pistol** - Which Bob Carruthers used to would Roaring Jack Woodley after the surly ruffian forced Violet Smith to marry him.

- **Pistol** - Which Williamson, the ex-clergyman who performed the mock wedding, pulled on Carruthers after the latter's wounding of Woodley.
- **Riding Crop** - Which Jack Woodley used to knock out the driver of Carruther's trap carrying Violet Smith, and which was probably used to force her into marrying him.
- **Hands** - Of Sherlock Holmes used on Roaring Jack Woodley.
- **Fist** - Of Jack Woodley, which he used to knock down Bob Carruthers in the latter's own home. Also, with it he was able to land a lucky punch on Holmes' forehead, before the Master floored him with a straight left.

Frank Mentzel

