



The Return of Sherlock Holmes

Adventure XXXI -- The Adventure of the Solitary Cyclist

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Time frame of story (known/surmised):

Stated clearly by Watson – Saturday April 23, 1895. This is one of the few cases where Watson's date is totally specific. Unfortunately he gets it wrong. April 23, 1895 was Tuesday. No clues to the correct date.

Holmes & Watson living arrangements:

Holmes & Watson sharing quarters at 221B.

Opening scene:

Holmes was immersed in a very abstruse and complicated problem. Then a visitor, a young and beautiful woman, tall, graceful, and queenly, called upon him but was at first unwelcome, as Holmes resented anything which distracted his attention from the matter in hand. She was determined, however, and implored his assistance and advice, so he gave in with a resigned air and a somewhat weary smile.



Client:

Miss Violet Smith, the solitary cyclist of Charlington.

Crime or concern:

Client accepted job as music teacher at a country estate offered under strange circumstances with high pay. She visited her mother in London on weekends and had a 6-mile bicycle trip from/to the station. Found herself trailed by a cyclist who lagged behind, but kept her in view. Then there was Mr. Woodley, a guest of her employer, a despicable person, who treated the client poorly. She had misgivings and wanted Holmes' advice on how to proceed.

Villain:

Mr. Carruthers of Chiltern Grange, about six miles from Farnham, and Mr. Woodley, his friend and occasional guest. Woodley was the more villainous. They were both home on a visit from S. Africa. Carruthers was a dark, sallow, clean-shaven, silent person; but he had polite manners and a pleasant smile. Woodley, on the other hand, was hateful. He was a coarse, puffy-faced man, with his hair plastered down on each side of his forehead. Not only that, but he had a red moustache. One evening, he seized Violet in his arms and he swore that he would not let her go until she kissed him. Carruthers kicked him out of the house as a result, but he didn't go far.

Logic used to solve:

Odd situation. Unexplained connection between Carruthers and Woodley, since they appeared to be men a different type. Why were they were both so keen upon looking up Ralph Smith's relations? And, what sort of a menage is it which pays double the market price for a governess, but does not keep a horse though six miles from the station? Odd, — very odd! Holmes sent Watson down to investigate, but he did a poor job. Then Holmes went down to inquire and figured it all out.

Policemen:

Three of the county constabulary arrived at the conclusion of the action.

Holmes' fees:

No mention.

Transport:

Trains between town and Farnam. Six miles by bicycle or horse-drawn trap between the station and Chiltern Grange.

Food, Drink, Vices:

No mention

Other cases mentioned:

That of Archie Stamford, the forger, who was taken near Farnham, on the borders of Surrey.

The peculiar persecution to which John Vincent Harden, the well-known tobacco millionaire, had been subjected.

Notable Quotables:

“He made odious love to me” – Violet Smith, speaking of Mr. Woodley.

“He has never said anything. He is a perfect gentleman. But a girl always knows.” – Violet Smith, speaking of Mr. Carruthers.

Other interestings:

While at the country pub making inquiries, Holmes is overheard by Woodley, who spoke to Holmes, with a fine flow of language, and his adjectives were very vigorous. He ended a string of abuse with a vicious back-hander which Holmes failed to entirely avoid. The next few minutes were delicious. It was a straight left against a slogging ruffian. Holmes emerged with minor scrapes and bruises. Mr. Woodley went home in a cart.

So who was the solitary cyclist? In the opening scene, Watson tells us “I will now lay before the reader the facts connected with Miss Violet Smith, the solitary cyclist of Charlington, and the curious sequel of our investigation, which culminated in unexpected tragedy.”

Then, near the end we hear: “As we turned the curve the whole stretch of road between the Hall and the heath was opened up. I grasped Holmes’s arm. A solitary cyclist was coming towards us. It was Carruthers, with a false beard.

When all was said and done:

It had been a strange plot. Carruthers and Woodley knew Violet's uncle in S. Africa, where he had become rich. He had a fatal disease, and they all know Violet would inherit. Carruthers and Woodley came to England to woo Violet and marry her, and agreed to share the fortune. Woodley won first dibs on her at cards while coming across. But she was engaged and not distracted, but did not know her uncle had money. Carruthers then fell in love with Violet. In the climactic moment, he shot Woodley but did not kill him.

Violet married her original fiancée, Mr. Cyril Morton, an electrical engineer who became the senior partner of Morton & Kennedy, the famous Westminster electricians.

McMurdo's Camp