



His Last Bow

Adventure XLII -- The Adventure of the Bruce-Partington Plans

Holmes has a new hobby – music of the middle-ages – why? Why? Could he be any more extreme in his interests? And how unusual to find him studying so hard at something which doesn't relate to his work, writes Charlotte Anne Walters

Normally, Holmes liked to keep his brain uncluttered and fill it only with relevant information, but then I guess music has always been an interesting exception to this.

The story reacquaints us with Mycroft Holmes, Sherlock's elder brother. We do gain some extra information about him this time. Holmes now felt able to trust Watson enough to tell him how indispensable Mycroft really was to the British government. Holmes says to Watson – “You would also be right in a sense if you had said that occasionally he is the British Government”.

We hear more about the similarities between the brothers such as their singular devotion to their work, the orderly brains with fantastic memories for detailed facts and the lack of ambition they both share in terms of wanting fame or wealth.

Mycroft comes to visit Holmes and Watson, causing Holmes to remark that it is only the second time he has ever done so and the case he brings must be extremely important to make him break his routine. Mycroft is a stickler for routine – “Has his rails and he runs on them” as Holmes explains.



So again we are (or I am certainly) reminded of all those peculiarities which correlate with symptoms of autism and savantism so clearly evident in the two brothers – the genetic connection only serves to prove the theory in my mind.

A young man called Cadogan West has been found dead on the underground. To my knowledge, this is the first time the underground has been mentioned in the stories as Holmes and Watson never seem to use it. I have always found this rather surprising and wonder why Doyle didn't ever see fit to include this great feat of engineering in the stories before. Anyway, Mycroft reveals that the young man was actually found to be in possession of vital Government papers which detailed the plans of the Bruce-Partington submarine. The three most important pages are missing and Mycroft wants Holmes to find them before they fall into the wrong hands.

This is another of those cases when all seems to be in darkness and you think to yourself – “How on earth is he going to sort this one out, it's impossible” and the resolution at the end when he does is all the greater for it.

Through his investigation Holmes discovers that Cadogan West is innocent and the papers were planted on him by the brother of a high-ranking civil servant and an international agent. He was about to expose them when they killed him and pushed his body out of a window and onto the roof of an underground carriage which paused below. When the carriage changes track further along, the body falls to the rails.

Holmes is simply brilliant in working all this out and the story is a perfect example of his method. And once again the benefits of being an unofficial person become clear when he breaks into the house of the suspect – no need to fuff around waiting for a search warrant. It must be remembered that this does give Holmes a massive advantage over the police and allows him to do things they simply couldn't.

Holmes asks Watson to accompany him on the illegal house-breaking mission but Watson is reluctant at first. Holmes reminds him that this is an issue of national importance and Watson enthusiastically agrees to do his duty prompting Holmes to say – “I knew you would not shirk at the last”. Watson then makes a lovely observation revealing so much about the depth of their friendship – ‘I saw something in his eyes which was nearer to tenderness than I had ever seen’. Considering Holmes has no other friends and this was only the second time his own brother had ever been to his house, he really must think a very great deal of Watson to be so attached to him.

At the end of the story we hear about Holmes receiving an emerald tie-pin “From a certain gracious lady” who I presume is Queen Victoria herself. Though it is unusual for him to take gifts, you can quite understand him doing so on this occasion.

Mycroft had made it clear that he could receive a title for his work on this case but Holmes’ nature was such that he did not want that honour – the little tie-pin does seem a more appropriate gesture.

What an adventure! 9 out of 10.

Charlotte Anne Walters

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