



## His Last Bow

### Adventure XLVI -- The Adventure of the Dying Detective

Well, where do you start with this one? I feel quite overwhelmed by the task in hand, writes Charlotte Anne Walters.

This story is interesting on two different levels. Firstly there is what actually happens, and secondly what this tells us about Holmes and his relationship with Watson.

Let's start with what happens. Holmes is on the trail of a botanist called Culverton Smith who is an expert on a particular tropical disease. Holmes knows that he poisoned a young man called Victor Savage by giving him the disease which led to his death but can't prove it. He cleverly concocts a plan to trap Culverton Smith into confessing in front of a witness – the starting point for which is a little wooden box with a spike inside sent to him by the botanist with the hope of infecting him. Holmes realises that the box is dangerous and avoids infection, but decides to pretend that the plan worked in order to lure Culverton Smith to Baker Street and straight into his trap.

Holmes goes without food or water for three days and uses stage make-up to make himself look like he's only hours from death. Mrs Hudson fetches Watson who is horrified and genuinely moved by his friend's appearance. Holmes insists on being treated by Culverton Smith and sends Watson to fetch him, insisting that he travel back first. At the last second, Holmes makes a startled Watson conceal himself behind the bed and so he hears when Culverton Smith taunts Holmes (who he thinks is dying) about how he got away with the last murder and is about to get away with this one too.

Watson comes out from his hiding place and inspector Morton rushes into the room to apprehend the villain. That in itself is a great story, especially in the way it unfolds and we remain as in-the-dark as



Watson until almost the end. I remember the first time I read it and just couldn't put it down because I was utterly convinced Holmes really was dying and didn't suspect for one minute that he was faking it. There is just something refreshing and different about this one – it doesn't follow the usual pattern of a client turning up at 221B, telling their story and Holmes having to unravel the case. We come in on the investigation just before its conclusion which gives it a pacey feel.

The other level of interest is the love shown between Holmes and Watson as the latter tries to help his friend with such deep concern and the former in his sincere apologies for playing with Watson's emotions and being so very sharp with him at the start. When trying to hurriedly get Watson to hide behind the bed, Holmes says – "Quick, man, if you love me!" – such a touching line as Watson clearly does very much. I believe this is reciprocated, shown strongly when Holmes sees Watson pick up the deadly little box not realising what it contained – 'It was a dreadful cry that he gave', Watson tells us, 'a yell which might have been heard down the street. My skin went cold and my hair bristled at that horrible scream. As I turned I caught a glimpse of a convulsed face and frantic eyes. I stood paralyzed, with the little box in my hand'.

We also hear from Watson a brief, and very humorous, description of what a terrible lodger Holmes was but that Mrs Hudson was very fond of him. We also hear that he paid 'princely' sums of rent as compensation to her and, 'The whole house might have been purchased at the price which Holmes paid for his rooms during the years that I was with him'.

Watson also comments on Holmes' attitude to women in general, saying that he 'Disliked and distrusted the sex'. This is quite a profound statement and I would say that his behaviour towards certain clients, and indeed Mrs Hudson herself, would suggest that he didn't dislike women at all. I think this was an exaggeration on Watson's part, and as Holmes had no male friends either I think we can say that Holmes disliked and distrusted humankind in general.

**I give this story a deserved 9 out of 10.**

**Charlotte Anne Walters**

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