



The Casebook of Sherlock Holmes

Adventure L – The Problem of Thor Bridge

First published in:

Published in two parts, *The Strand Magazine* and *Hearst's International Magazine*, February and March 1922.

Time frame of story (known/surmised):

October 4, 1900 (pretty certain)

Holmes & Watson living arrangements:

Together at 221B. They had a new cook, and Billy the page-boy.

Opening scene:

It was a wild morning, and the last remaining leaves were being whirled from the solitary plane tree which graced the yard behind the house. Holmes was in a good mood, with that somewhat sinister cheerfulness characteristic of his lighter moments. After a month of trivialities and stagnation, he had a case.



Client:

J. Neil Gibson, the Gold King, an American. He was once a Senator for some Western state, but was better known as a great gold-mining magnate. Extremely wealthy, he was is the greatest financial power in the world. He was the successful man of affairs, iron of nerve and leathery of conscience. His tall, gaunt, craggy figure had a suggestion of hunger and rapacity. An Abraham Lincoln keyed to base uses instead of high ones would give some idea of the man. His face might have been chiselled in granite, hard-set, craggy, remorseless,

with deep lines upon it, the scars of many a crisis. His eyes were cold and gray, and looked shrewdly out from under bristling brows. Not only that, but he had bony knees.

Crime or concern:

The client's wife Maria was found in the grounds nearly half a mile from their house, late at night, clad in her dinner dress, with a shawl over her shoulders and a revolver bullet through her brain, dead. No weapon was found near her and there was no local clue as to the murder. A pistol of the type used to kill Maria was found in the bottom of the wardrobe of Grace Dunbar, the beautiful governess. The pistol was one of a matched pair.

Villain:

The dead wife. She faked her suicide to look like murder.

Motive:

Jealousy. to implicate the governess, Grace Dunbar. Neil Gibson was in love with Grace. Grace spurned Gibson's physical advances and maintained their relationship as platonic. Gibson's wife Maria was jealous, and she truly hated Grace.

Logic used to solve:

When Holmes considered the passionate, unconventional, unbusinesslike tone of the client's letter and contrasted it with his self-contained manner and appearance, it was pretty clear that there was some deep emotion which centred upon the accused woman rather than upon the victim.

Holmes' analogy as he explained it: "Well now, Watson, suppose for a moment that we visualize you in the character of a woman who, in a cold, premeditated fashion, is about to get rid of a rival. You have planned it. A note has been written. The victim has come. You have your weapon. The crime is done. It has been workmanlike and complete. Do you tell me that after carrying out so crafty a crime you would now ruin your reputation as a criminal by forgetting to fling your weapon into those adjacent reed-beds which would forever cover it, but you must needs carry it carefully home and put it in your own wardrobe, the very first place that would be searched? Your best friends would hardly call you a schemer, Watson, and yet I could not picture you doing anything so crude as that." Conclusion was that the gun was placed in her wardrobe. Who placed it there? Someone who wished to incriminate her, logically, the actual criminal.

Policemen:

Sergeant Coventry, whose humble cottage also served as the local police-station. It was a walk of half a mile or so away from the Thor Bridge, where Mrs. Gibson's body was found.

Holmes' fees:

Possibly lucrative, but we can't tell. Client told Holmes: "Money is nothing to me in this case. You can burn it if it's any use in lighting you to the truth. This woman is innocent and this woman has to be cleared, and it's up to you to do it. Name your figure! Strangely, Holmes replied, "My professional charges are upon a fixed scale, (and) I do not vary them, save when I remit them altogether."

In some other cases, especially PRIO, Holmes was perfectly willing to extract a high fee from a rich man of whom he did not approve. In THOR, Holmes exhibited a high degree of disdain for a rich man who exhibited poor behavior, but Watson did not record any fee negotiations, other than Holmes' dismissal of the subject.

Transport:

Holmes & Watson had a first-class carriage to themselves when they travelled from Thor Place to Winchester and back.

Food:

Holmes & Watson had two improperly-cooked hard-boiled eggs for breakfast before the client's visit. The new cook had not distinguished herself.

Drink:

No mention

Vices:

While discussing the case with Watson, Holmes knocked out the ashes of his after-breakfast pipe and slowly refilled it. Then, after initially dismissing the client, Holmes smiled languidly and reached his hand out for his pipe.

After solving the case, Holmes & Watson late that evening, sat together smoking their pipes in the village inn. Holmes gave Watson a brief review of what had passed.

Other cases mentioned:

That of Mr. James Phillimore, who, stepping back into his own house to get his umbrella, was never more seen in this world.

That of the cutter Alicia, which sailed one spring morning into a small patch of mist from where she never again emerged, nor was anything further ever heard of herself and her crew.

A third instance is that of Isadora Persano, the well-known journalist and duellist, who was found stark staring mad with a match box in front of him which contained a remarkable worm said to be unknown to science.

Notable Quotables:

“I can discover facts, Watson, but I cannot change them.” – Holmes

Other interestings:

A plane tree is usually called a Sycamore in North America. There is a hybrid variety known as a London Plane that is tolerant of urban and/or dry environments. The London Plane was developed in the 1700's in Spain.

When all was said and done:

Holmes wrap-up: “Well, Watson, we have helped a remarkable woman, and also a formidable man. Should they in the future join their forces, as seems not unlikely, the financial world may find that Mr. Neil Gibson has learned something in that schoolroom of sorrow where our earthly lessons are taught.”

McMurdo's Camp