



The Casebook of Sherlock Holmes

Adventure LI – The Adventure of the Creeping Man

First published in:

The Strand Magazine, and in *Hearst's International Magazine*, March 1923. Some twenty years passed between the events and Watson's writing the story, but even then a certain reticence and discretion had to be observed in laying the matter before the public.

Time frame of story (known/surmised):

Sunday, September 6, 1903, clearly given. This was one of the very last cases handled by Holmes before his retirement from practice.

Holmes & Watson living arrangements:

Living separately. Watson was dramatically summoned to 221B with a laconic message from Holmes.

Opening scene:

Watson arrived at Baker Street and found Holmes huddled in his armchair with updrawn knees, in the throes of a vexatious problem.



Client:

Trevor Bennett, professional assistant and personal secretary to Prof. Presbury, the famous Camford University physiologist, a man of European reputation whose life had been entirely academic. Bennett himself was a tall, handsome youth about thirty, well dressed and elegant, but with something in his bearing which suggested the shyness of the student rather than the self-possession of the man of the world. He was engaged to the professor's daughter Edith, a bright, handsome girl of a conventional English type.

The professor himself was a man of European reputation. His life had been academic, with never a breath of scandal. He was a widower with one daughter, Edith, and a man of very virile and positive character.

Crime or concern:

The professor went away to Prague for two weeks and upon returning, a curious change had come over him. He became furtive, sly, and sinister, and under some shadow which darkened his higher qualities. His intellect was not affected; his lectures were as brilliant as ever. Then Bennett spotted him, in the middle of the night, creeping down the hallway in a curious simian fashion. The professor spat out some atrocious word at Bennett and kept going. Then later, Edith saw her father's face looking in through her window one night. Her room was on the third floor (second floor in England). He was also inexplicably twice attacked by Roy, his otherwise dear, affectionate dog.

Villain:

The professor himself, who was a portly, large-featured man, grave, tall, and frock-coated, with the dignity of bearing which a lecturer needs. His eyes were his most remarkable feature, keen, observant, and clever to the verge of cunning. Not only that, but he had shaggy brows and large horn glasses. He had been taking drugs which altered his mind and body. The serum was derived from black-faced Langur monkeys of the Himalayan slopes, the biggest and most human of the climbing monkeys. The drug was furnished by an old colleague, an obscure scientist, Lowenstein of Prague. Lowenstein had developed the wondrous strength-giving serum, but was tabooed by the profession because he refused to reveal the source.

Motive:

The 61-year old professor had married a woman 40 years his junior, and wanted to experience rejuvenescence and the elixir of life.

Logic used to solve:

Holmes noticed the professor's episodes were evenly spaced, every 9 days, which was beyond coincidence.

Policemen:

None

Holmes' fees:

No mention.

Transport:

Holmes & Watson travelled twice by train up to the famous university town of Camford, and stayed at an inn called the Chequers. In Camford, a smart hansom swept them past a row of ancient colleges and on to the Professor's home.

Food:

At the conclusion of the case Holmes & Watson took tea at the Chequers before returning to London.

Drink:

At the Chequers, the port was above mediocrity (and the linen above reproach). After meeting the Professor, Holmes & Watson discussed events with a bottle of the famous vintage (port) on the table between them.

Vices:

Holmes smoked his pipe while introducing the concerns to Watson.

Other cases mentioned:

COPP, regarding which Holmes speculated to Watson about the moods of dogs reflecting the family life.

Notable Quotables:

Story opened with a message from Holmes to Watson: "Come at once if convenient — if inconvenient come all the same. S. H."

Holmes – "The same old Watson! You never learn that the gravest issues may depend upon the smallest things."

Holmes on making observations: “Always look at the hands first, Watson. Then cuffs, trouser-knees, and boots.”

Holmes – “When one tries to rise above Nature one is liable to fall below it.”

Watson – “If I irritated (Holmes) by a certain methodical slowness in my mentality, that irritation served only to make his own flame-like intuitions and impressions flash up the more vividly and swiftly. Such was my humble role in our alliance.”

Other interestings:

Holmes had a general utility man, Mercer, who looked up routine business. Holmes told Watson that Mercer is “since your time.”

When all was said and done:

Professor Presbury learned to take the drug while he was in Prague, and it was later supplied by a Bohemian intermediary in London, Dorak, a curious Slavonic name.

This story was sort of a “Science Fiction” episode. Various Holmes fans view this as one of the weaker stories, written later in Doyle’s career, and abandoning many of the classic attributes.

The idea of a drug altering a man’s physical and mental characteristics was part of a story written by another Scottish author, Robert Louis Stevenson, in 1886, *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*.

McMurdo’s Camp