



The Casebook of Sherlock Holmes

Adventure LVII – The Adventure of the Lion’s Mane

This is a great little tale, dark and gothic, writes Charlotte Anne Walters.

In this story we have crypts, dead bodies, the burning of bones in a furnace, rumours of ghosts, it’s all great fun and a wonderful macabre story. There’s even a bit of horse racing thrown in which made my husband sit up and pay attention (as I have mentioned before, he is an ex-racing journalist).

This story is such a good example of what a great story-teller Doyle was – not just clever and responsible for creating one of the best-loved characters in English fiction, but really good at spinning an imaginative yarn which is entertaining and a real page-turner.

This is the dilemma isn’t it for so many writers? Do you create a work of great intellectual significance which might change the world? Do you use your writing as a vehicle show-off your intellectual prowess, or do you just try to create an entertaining page-turner that people can’t put down? With my book, I went for the latter and aimed for something in-between low-brow and high-brow, an entertaining middle-ground with a mix of literary clout and fast-paced story-telling. I think Doyle made the same choice with Holmes, a choice which he perhaps came to regret when he struggled to get his more serious work recognised – though not when counting his money of course!



The story begins with Holmes bent over a microscope analysing threads from a coat and finding traces of glue amongst the fibres of fabric. He also tells Watson about brining a coiner to justice by finding the zinc and copper filings in the seam of his cuff. In this way Holmes was such a pioneer – using the science of deduction and forensic analysis rather than old-fashion methods of following a hunch to find the bad

guys.

Watson reveals his love of betting on the horses when Holmes asks if he knows anything of the sport – “I ought to. I pay for it with about half my wound pension.” Here again we see how Watson is rather carefree when it comes to money, just as with previous examples of him getting Holmes to keep his cheque book locked away and the general lack of business acumen shown towards his medical practice. This side of Watson gave me great creative opportunities in my own novel and I have used his human deficiencies to their full potential.

The story itself is all about Sir Robert Norborton from the estate of Shoscombe Old Place and his money troubles. The estate is actually owned by his sister who inherited it on the death of her husband. He is in debt and has bet all he has on his horse, Shoscombe Prince, to win the Derby. His sister dies of natural causes a week before the race and Sir Robert is so afraid that creditors will descend upon him and claim the horse, that he conceals the death in the hope of stalling things until after the race. He hides her body in a used coffin in the family crypt and burns the bones of the original occupant in a furnace.

Despite his questionable actions, all ends well when Shoscombe Prince wins the Derby and Sir Robert is able to settle his debts. For once, Doyle doesn't really come down on one side or the other with regard to how wrong the protagonist has been and leaves it up to the reader to decide whether the happy ending is deserved or not. For me, I think it ties things up neatly and rounds off an excellent story which shows Holmes and his methods in all their glory.

A well deserved 9 out of 10.

Charlotte Anne Walters

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