



The Casebook of Sherlock Holmes

Adventure LVII – The Adventure of the Lion’s Mane

First published in:

Liberty, November 27, 1926; *The Strand Magazine*, December 1926.

Time frame of story (known/surmised):

Towards the end of July, 1907, stated.

Holmes & Watson living arrangements:

Watson not present. At this period of Holmes’ life the good Watson had passed almost beyond his ken. An occasional week-end visit was the most that Holmes ever saw of him. Holmes was retired and living in his little Sussex home, and it was he that wrote the story.

Opening scene:

Holmes and his neighbor Harold Stackhurst, the master of the well-known coaching establishment, The Gables, encountered each other strolling out before breakfast to enjoy the exquisite air the morning after a gale cleared. They walked along the cliff path which led to the steep descent to the Admirable Beach.

Client:

None. Holmes stumbled into this mystery involving his neighbors and friends while in his retirement.



Crime or concern:

While walking, Holmes and Stackhurst encountered the academy's science tutor, Fitzroy McPherson, who had staggered up the steep hill from the beach and collapsed in obvious agony almost at their feet. The appearance was he had been mortally injured by an unknown assailant, and his back was marked with weals resembling those left by a scourge or cat-o'-nine-tails. He uttered the words "the Lion's Mane." The words were slurred and indistinct, and had burst in a shriek from his lips. He threw his arms into the air, then fell forward on his side, dead. He had bitten through his lower lip in the paroxysm of his agony.

Holmes investigated the scene but found no evidence of a second person's presence on the beach where McPherson had been swimming in a tidal pool.

A few days later, McPherson's dog was found dead by the same tidal pool, its little body contorted in agony. Then later came a sudden, similar assault on the academy's mathematics tutor, Ian Murdoch, who was a prime suspect in McPherson's death since they had been rivals for the hand of the beautiful Maude Bellamy.

Villain:

A jellyfish, *Cyanea capillata*. It was trapped in deep end of a tidal pool, so any bather there would encounter it.

Motive:

None. That's just what happens with jellyfish.

Logic used to solve:

Holmes was an omnivorous reader with a strangely retentive memory for trifles. The phrase 'the Lion's Mane' haunted his mind. He knew that he had seen it somewhere in an unexpected context. Turned out it was in the little chocolate and silver volume, *Out of Doors*, by the famous observer, J. G. Wood. Wood himself very nearly perished from contact with the same vile creature, so he wrote with a very full knowledge. The creature radiated almost invisible filaments to the distance of fifty feet, and that anyone within that circumference from the deadly centre was in danger of death.

Policemen:

Anderson, the village constable of Fulworth, a big, ginger-moustached man of the slow, solid Sussex breed.

Inspector Bardle of the Sussex Constabulary — a steady and solid bovine, burly, and phlegmatic man with thoughtful ox-like eyes.

Holmes' fees:

None

Transport:

None. A purely local case.

Food:

No mention.

Drink:

Half a tumbler of brandy (the universal palliative) was given to Ian Murcoch after he was attacked. The raw spirit brought about a wondrous change. Then more and more brandy was poured down his throat, each fresh dose bringing him back to life.

The author who wrote of a jellyfish attack, J.G. Wood, gulped down brandy, a whole bottleful, and it seemed to have saved his life after the attack.

Vices:

No mention

Other cases mentioned:

None

Notable Quotables:

"I hold a vast store of out-of-the-way knowledge without scientific system, but very available for the needs of my work. My mind is like a crowded box-room with packets of all sorts stowed away therein — so many that I may well have but a vague perception of what was there." – Holmes

"That the dog should die was after the beautiful, faithful nature of dogs." – Holmes

Other Interestings:

This was Holmes' last recorded case before he became a spy for Britain against the Germans in the events leading up to WWI, as recorded in *His Last Bow*.

When all was said and done:

Holmes and Stackhurst killed the jellyfish by smashing it with a boulder. A flapping edge of yellow membrane showed that the creature was beneath it. A thick oily scum oozed out from below the stone and stained the water round, rising slowly to the surface.

Well, you've done it! I had read of you, but I never believed it. It's wonderful!" Inspector Bardle to Holmes, following the explanation of the case.

McMurdo's Camp