



The Casebook of Sherlock Holmes

Adventure LVIII – The Adventure of the Retired Colourman

Publishing History

58 of the 60 stories

First published in *The Strand Magazine*, January, 1927

In the US *Liberty Magazine*, December 18, 1926

Part of *The Case Book of Sherlock Holmes* collection by

John Murray, London, 1927

George D. Doran, New York, 1927

British illustrator – Frank Wiles

U.S. ILLUS – Frederick Dorr Steele

Chronology

Baring-Gould places the dating of the story at Thursday, July 28 to

Saturday, July 30, 1898 making it 45th of the 60. This means that Holmes in 44 and Watson 46.



Christopher Morley Says

“When Holmes ate two hard-boiled eggs for breakfast it meant he was on someone’s trail. Not satisfied with Dr. Watson’s preliminary investigation Holmes went himself to see why Mr. Amberly had been painting his strong room at the time when he would more properly have been secluded in grief and dismay. But Mr. Amberly was a chess player, “the mark of a scheming mind.” The history of Sherlock Holmes ends, as it began, with the official police getting the credit.”

Dummies Short Summary

“Burglary has always been an alternative profession, had I cared to adopt it,” remarks Sherlock Holmes. It’s a skill he turns to in solving a case of a missing wife and her lover.

How Many Words

At 5,559 words RETI has the 2nd most words (#1 is VEIL – 4,499, #56 if NAVL – 12,701)

Classifying This Case

This case is one of 23 classified as a MURDER and one of 14 where the perpetrator was either killed, arrested, or otherwise satisfactorily handled.

The Best Of Sherlock Holmes

- 1927 – Arthur Conan Doyle did not have it on his list of 12 favorites.
- 1959 – The Baker Street Irregulars voted it 54th on their list of favorites.
- 1999 – The Baker Street Irregulars voted it 44th of the 56 short stories.
- 1999 – The Sherlock Holmes Society of London voted it 37th of the 56 short stories.

What Else Happened That Year (1898)

- Battle of Omdurman in Sudan. Kitchner defeats Mahdi and Dervishes, avenges General Gordon's death
- Introduction of Imperial Penny Postage.
- British Goods given preferential tariff in Canada.
- Congo railway completed to Stanley Pools.
- Electrification of underground railway from Mansion House to Waterloo.
- First escalator at Harrods.
- USS Maine blows up in Havana Harbor, Spanish-American War begins, Spain defeated at Santiago and Manila. Treaty of Paris ends war, Cuba independent, U.S.A. acquires Philippines.
- Powers appoint Prince George of Greece as High Commissioner in Crete, under Turkish suzerainty.
- Workmen's Social Democratic Party formed in Russia.
- "Hundred Days of Reform" in China. Deposition of Kuang-Hsu and reinstatement of Dowager Empress, suppression of reform.
- U.S.A. annexes Hawaii.
- End of state of debtor nation for U.S.A., existing since 1783, \$500 million foreign investments.

- Work begins on Aswan Dam.
- German fleet seizes Kiachow, secures 99-year lease from China.
- Swiss railways nationalized.
- Severe food riots in Italy.
- Zola's *J'Accuse*.
- Wells' *War of the Worlds*.
- Wilde's *Ballad of Reading Gaol*.
- Curies discover radium and polonium.
- Pickering, using photography, discovers nine of Saturn's moons.
- Rudolf Diesel demonstrates his engine, which requires no sparkplugs.
- M.J. Owens, U.S.A., designs automatic bottle-making machine.
- Konstantin Tsiolkovski states principles of rocket propulsion.

Holmes And Watson – Personal Information

Holmes is residing at Baker Street, but it is unclear if Watson is living there or just calling.

Dramatis Personae

One of the smallest casts of a story in the canon

- **Josiah Amberly**, the retired colourman.
- **Mrs. Amberly**, his wife, 20 years his junior
- **Dr. RAY ERNEST**, a chess playing friend of Mr. Amberly
- **Barker**, another private investigator and friendly rival of Holmes.
- **Mackinnon**, a smart young police officer.

Quotable Sherlock

- "Exactly, Watson. Pathetic and futile. But is not all life pathetic and futile?"
- "He has been sent on by the Yard. Just as medical men occasionally send their incurables to a quack."
- "The old story, Watson. A treacherous friend and a fickle wife."
- "Cut out the poetry, Watson."
- (Watson) 'No of course, it is art for art's sake with him,"

- “You have missed everything of importance, yet even those things which have obtruded themselves upon your notice give rise to serious thought.”
- "With your natural advantages, Watson, every lady is your helper and accomplice."
- "It has been done. Thanks to the telephone and the help of the Yard, I can usually get my essentials without leaving this room.”
- “What did you do with the bodies?”
- “Things must be done decently and in order.”
- “Amberly excelled at chess – one mark, Watson, of a scheming mind.”
- “He felt so clever and so sure of himself that he imagined no one could tough him. He could say to any suspicious neighbor, “Look at the steps I have taken. I have consulted not only the police, but even Sherlock Holmes.””

Holmes’ Fee

No fee is mentioned. Since the client was proven to be the criminal, it is unlikely Holmes got paid. Again, we revert to the possibly that he had an arrangement with the police, which could account for his allowing them credit for solving the case.

Unrecorded Cases

Holmes seems to do a lot of work for the different religions

- The Case of the two Coptic Patriarchs

Sherlock Holmes On The Big And The Little Screen

This story has only been done once by not a famous player but a very good one

- 1965 *The Retired Colourman* with Douglas Wilmer in his *Sherlock Holmes* TV series

Newspapers

- **North Surrey Observer** - Fictional

Annotated Sherlock

Just one - - Holmes does love his reference books

- “**Where is my Crockford?**” *Crockford’s Clerical Directory*.

Weapons

Not your standard weapons, but enough to kill

- **Lethal Gas** - Which Josiah Amberly used to murder his wife and her putative lover, Dr. Ray Ernest, after he lured them down into his strong room.
- **Poison Pills** - Which Amberly tried to commit suicide with, after the discovery of his crime by Holmes.

Frank Mentzel