

Arthur Conan Doyle Encyclopedia

The Casebook of Sherlock Holmes Adventure LVIII – The Adventure of the Retired Colourman

SUMMARY (Diogenes Club)

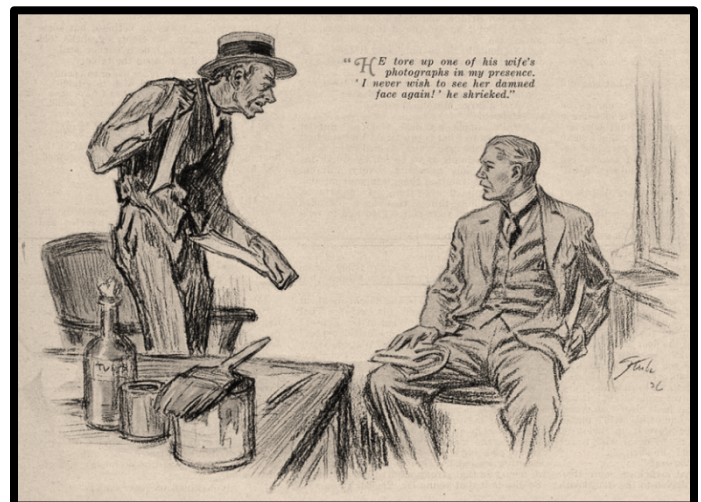
After he retired from his firm which manufactured paint and artists supplies, Amberly married a beautiful, much younger woman. He was a miser and made her life miserable with his niggardly ways.

Amberly frequently played chess with Ernest, a man approximately his wife's age. Ernest and Mrs. Amberly might have been having an affair; at least Mr. Amberly thought so. Amberly had constructed a "Strong room" inside his house which was much like a bank vault. He contrived to lock his wife and Dr. Ernest in this room and flood it with natural gas from an adjacent pipe. They both died from the fumes.

Amberly hid the bodies in an abandoned well and faked an elopement. He called in the police who referred him to Holmes. Holmes was absorbed in another case and sent Watson to investigate.

Barker had been hired by Ernest's family to investigate the matter. Holmes and he crossed paths and continued together. They soon solved the case.

When confronted by the evidence, Amberly tried to poison himself with a capsule. Holmes makes him spit it out with the comment, "No shortcuts, Amberly!"



SUMMARY (Wikipedia)

Sherlock Holmes is hired by a retired art supply dealer from Lewisham, Josiah Amberley, to look into his wife's disappearance. She has left with a neighbour, Dr. Ray Ernest, taking a sizeable quantity of cash and securities. Amberley wants the two tracked down.

Holmes is too busy with another case at the moment, so he sends Dr. Watson to Lewisham to observe what he can, although Watson is keenly aware that this is more Holmes's province. He does his best, observing that Amberley is busy painting his house, which seems a bit odd. He even sees Amberley's wife's unused theatre ticket; she and her young man disappeared while Amberley went to the theatre alone after his wife complained of a headache. Watson notes the seat number.

Watson also sees Amberley's strongroom from which his wife had taken the valuables. She, apparently, had a key of her own. He meets a lounge with a rather military appearance in the street, and later observes him running to catch the train at Blackheath Station as he is returning to 221B Baker Street. Holmes recognises the description; it is his rival in detection, Barker. It later turns out that Ray Ernest's family has hired him to find the missing doctor.

A number of other things about Amberley are obvious. He is a miser, and as such is quite a jealous man. He is an avid chess player (indeed, so is Ernest, which is how they became acquainted), suggesting to Holmes that he also has a scheming mind.

Holmes suspects something, and so sends Watson and Amberley on a fool's errand to the remote village of Little Purlington, near Frinton in Essex, just to keep Amberley out of the way while Holmes breaks into his house to investigate it. He is "caught" by Barker, but they decide to work together.

They reach a conclusion, and later Holmes confronts Amberley with the dramatic question "What did you do with the bodies?" Holmes manhandles Amberley just in time to stop him taking a poison pill. Amberley is obviously guilty.

Holmes explains how he reached his conclusion. Amberley's alibi fell apart when Holmes discovered that his seat at the Haymarket Theatre had not been occupied on the night in question, its number deduced from the ticket that Watson had seen. Also, the painting was a clue. Holmes realised that it was being done to mask a smell, and he soon discovered what that was: gas. He found a gas pipe leading into the strongroom with a tap outside. Amberley had lured his wife and her lover—for so he had believed Dr. Ernest to be—into the strongroom, locked them in, and turned the gas on, killing them out of jealousy. He had simply hidden the "stolen" valuables somewhere. In indelible pencil, one of the victims wrote "We we...", perhaps meaning to write "We were murdered."

The bodies are found in a disused well in the garden, hidden under a dog kennel, just where Holmes suggested that the police look.

Amberley apparently hired Holmes out of "pure swank", believing that no-one would ever find him out.

Holmes believes that Amberley will likely end up at Broadmoor rather than on the scaffold, owing to his mental state.