



The Casebook of Sherlock Holmes

Adventure LIX – The Adventure of the Veiled Lodger

Mrs. Merrilow, a landlady, was concerned about her mysterious boarder. At night Mrs. Merrilow would hear her lodger, Eugenia Ronder, crying aloud in her sleep — terrible cries of “Murder!” and “Coward!”. Mrs. Merrilow counseled Mrs. Ronder that the clergy and the police were available to remedy whatever was bothering her, but Mrs. Ronder opted to talk with Sherlock Holmes instead. Watson mentions a case involving a politician, a lighthouse, and a trained cormorant, but this case features a circus, a lion, and a strongman.

The full title of this story is *The Adventure of the Veiled Lodger*, but it’s not really an “adventure” in the sense of the word that is most often used. It’s an exercise, in hindsight, involving a crime that Holmes was unable to solve when it occurred. In that respect, the plot resembles SIXN, in which Holmes also was consulted but at the time was unable to shed light on the missing Black Pearl of the Borgias. VEIL is also another instance of Holmes “commuting a felony” by shrugging off a woman’s confession of complicity in cold-blooded murder. The question boils down to this: Was Holmes justified, in this case, or any of the others, in concealing the true solution of a crime on the basis of an ethical judgment that disregards the fact that the law was broken?



VEIL is one of three stories in the Canon that have an undercurrent of adultery, the other two being CARD and RETI. In the latter cases, both the wife and her lover are slain by the aggrieved husband. The husbands in CARD and RETI, Jim Browner and Josiah Amberley, were apprehended within days and faced the penalties prescribed by law immediately. But in VEIL, the husband — a real rotter by all accounts — was murdered, and the wife and illicit lover lived on for a number of years. Eugenia Ronder was terribly disfigured but survived, and it might be said that Leonardo got

off scot-free, although we don't know whether his conscience troubled him. Is there any significance in VEIL's deviation from the earlier "norm" set by CARD and RETI? Can all three of these stories, as well as ABBE (published in 1904), DEVI (1910), and HOUN (1902), be linked to Doyle's advocacy for liberalization of England's divorce laws?

Watson begins the narrative by tantalizing us with a reference to yet another unchronicled case, that of "the politician, the lighthouse, and the trained cormorant." In mentioning this case, Watson deplores attempts to obtain his or Holmes' records of it, and threatens to make the facts known to the public if any further attempts are made. "There is at least one reader who will understand," he writes. Implicit in that remark is a clue that more than one person was involved. But how could Watson be sure that the person to whom his threat was directed would actually read those words? Was that person an editor who would handle his manuscript — or a literary agent, may we imagine?

Mrs. Ronder's landlady, Mrs. Merrilow (not "Merridew of abominable memory" (EMPT) is described as "buxom," and when she exits 221B her gait is described as "waddling." To me, this implies more than "buxom;" it indicates obesity. Is this stereotypical description actually a portrait of a typical landlady of the time? Did Mrs. Hudson look like this?

Holmes was consulted by young Edmunds, of the Berkshire Constabulary, at the time of the incident but was unable to shed any light on it; although he was troubled by some inconsistencies that were not considered at the time of the inquest. Young Edmunds, he told Watson, subsequently was sent to Allahabad. Allahabad is a city in southern Uttar Pradesh, in India. Apparently, Edmunds didn't decide to go to Allahabad — he was "sent." Who might have sent him there, and why?

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