



Arthur Conan Doyle Encyclopedia

The Casebook of Sherlock Holmes Adventure LIX – The Adventure of the Veiled Lodger

SUMMARY (Diogenes Club)

Watson is not living at Baker St.

Mrs. Merilew visits Holmes at Eugenia's request.

Eugenia has been a lodger at Mrs. Merrilew's for seven years; her face is horribly mutilated and she wears a heavy veil. She feels she is near death and wants to tell the facts of her husband's murder to someone who will understand. Holmes had investigated this murder at the request of Edmunds but could not solve it.

Holmes and Watson visit Eugenia who tells them the following story.

Rounder had a circus. Eugenia married him in a weak moment. He was a huge man and a terrible bully who beat his wife savagely. All pitied her. She fell in love with Leonardo and the two of them planned her husband's murder.

Leonardo fashioned a club shaped like a lion's claw. When Rounder and Eugenia went to feed the lion in the evening as was their custom, Leonardo hit Rounder in the back of the head, crushing his skull and leaving the mark of a lion. Eugenia turned the lion loose, planning to give the impression it had escaped. Since she did tricks in the show with the lion every night, she did not fear it. But the lion smelled fresh human blood which enraged it and when it was released, it turned on Eugenia and mauled her face. Leonardo could have prevented her mauling but he fled in panic and was never seen again.



She had not spoken out sooner because she did not wish to involve Leonardo, but she read of his death in the paper (he drowned) and wanted to tell the facts to clear her conscience.

She planned to suicide, but Holmes talked her out of it and she sent him via post the bottle of prussic acid she had planned to consume.

SUMMARY (Wikipedia)

Holmes is visited by Mrs Merrilow, a landlady from South Brixton who has an unusual lodger who never shows her face. She saw it once accidentally and it was hideously mutilated. This woman, formerly very quiet, has recently taken to cursing in the night, shouting "Murder, murder!" and "You cruel beast! You monster!" Also, her health has taken a turn for the worse, and she is wasting away. Mrs Merrilow has brought this case to Holmes's attention as her tenant, Mrs Ronder, will not involve the clergy or the police in something that she would like to say. She has told her landlady to mention Abbas Parva, knowing that Holmes would understand the reference.

Indeed he does. It was a most tragic case in which a circus lion somehow got loose and savaged two people, one of whom was killed, and the other badly disfigured. The latter is apparently this lodger – the former was her husband. Holmes could make little of the case at the time, but perhaps if someone had actually hired him, the outcome would have been different. As it was, the inquest ruled that Mr Ronder was the victim of death by misadventure. Still, even the local police were a bit disturbed at the time by some seeming inconsistencies in the accounts. For example, the lion was part of an act which Mr and Mrs Ronder performed right in its cage, and they were the ones who fed it. Why had it suddenly turned on its feeders? Why had it not tried to escape? Who was this man that several people heard screaming when supposedly Mr Ronder had already been killed?

Upon arriving at Brixton, Holmes and Watson are shown into Mrs Ronder's room, which she seldom leaves. She is wearing her veil. Her purpose, it seems, is to make a clean breast of the matter before she dies. She tells Holmes and Watson that Mr Ronder was a terrible husband, cruel and violent in the extreme, even to the circus animals, but he didn't care, even though he wound up in the dock for it several times. He was very rich and the fines meant nothing.

The circus strongman, Leonardo, was Mrs Ronder's lover. He was always very supportive and encouraging to her, who, in turn, felt that Leonardo was the only man her husband feared. Eventually, Mrs Ronder and Leonardo realized that Mr Ronder was not fit to live, and formed a plan to kill him. As part of the plan, Leonardo made a club with five nails in it, which could deliver wounds that might be mistaken for those of a lion's paw. Then, one night at Abbas Parva, a small village in Berkshire where the circus was camped for

the night, Mrs Ronder and Leonardo carried out their plan. When Mrs Ronder and her husband went to the lion's cage to feed it, Leonardo crept up behind them and smashed Mr Ronder's head with the club, and Mrs Ronder released the lion to make it appear that it had broken free and done the deed. But the lion, having been driven into a feeding frenzy by the scent of Mr Ronder's blood, turned and pounced on Mrs Ronder instead, badly chewing her face up in the process. At the sight of this, Leonardo started screaming and ran to get help from the other circus members. He could have saved his lover himself by using the club on the lion, but he was too cowardly.

Mrs Ronder could not bring herself to implicate Leonardo in her husband's murder at the inquest, and is only now telling Holmes and Watson this story because she believes that she will soon die. She never saw or heard of Leonardo again, and later learned that he had drowned. Ever since the night of the incident, she has lived alone and veiled. Holmes can only offer advice in this situation; realising that Mrs Ronder is contemplating suicide, he reminds her that her life is worth something as an example of patient suffering in an impatient world. She responds to this by lifting her veil, and the sight is ghastly.

Nevertheless, Holmes receives a bottle of prussic acid from Mrs Ronder two days later. She was going to use it to kill herself, but upon considering what Holmes told her, she apparently thought better of it.