



The Casebook of Sherlock Holmes

Adventure LX – The Adventure of Shoscombe Old Place

First published in:

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Time frame of story (known/surmised):

May, 1902 (likely)

Holmes & Watson living arrangements:

Sharing quarters at 221B.

Opening scene:

Holmes had been bending over a low-power microscope. He straightened himself up and remarked upon an unrelated case. Then the new client, who was overdue, arrived and was shown in by the page. Holmes had earlier received from him a letter.



Client:

Mr. John Mason, the head-trainer at Shoscombe Old Place, a tall, clean-shaven man with the firm, austere expression which is only seen upon those who have to control horses or boys. Mason had many of both under his sway.

Crime or concern:

Mason thought his employer, Sir Robert Norburton, had gone mad, and that everything he did was queer. Sir Robert wasn't sleeping, and was down at the stables at all hours. His eyes were wild, and his nerves were affected. He seemed to have caused his sister, Lady Beatrice, to ignore her main interests, and she became brooding and sulky, and took to drink. Sir Robert also was visiting an old ruined chapel on the property.

Under the chapel was a crypt which had a bad name among the staff. The crypt was especially creepy during those hours of darkness when the powers of evil were exalted.

Villain:

Sir Robert. His name was that of a dangerous man. He was the most daredevil rider in England — once second in the Grand National. He was one of those men who overshot their true generation; he should have been a buck in the days of the Regency — a boxer, an athlete, a plunger on the turf, and a lover of fair ladies. But by all account, he was so far down Queer Street he was unlikely to ever find his way back again. Sir Robert lived with his sister, who thought well of him.

Motive:

Sir Robert's sister, Lady Beatrice Falder, was heir to the Shoscombe estate. Upon her death title would go to her late husband's brother. Lady Beatrice died from dropsy 2 weeks before the big race. Sir Robert was on the verge of ruin, and had bet heavily on his horse. His whole life was on it. He was up to the neck; his last chance. Everything he could raise or borrow was on the horse — and at fine odds. He was holding off the Jews till then. He needed to hide his sister's death until his horse came in.

Logic used to solve:

Holmes realized that something happened a week or so before his visit which cut deep into the life of the Shoscombe household. The brother stopped visiting his beloved invalid sister and gave away her favourite dog. The lady kept to her room, altered her habits, was not seen save when she drove out with her maid, she refused to stop at the stables to greet her favourite horse. and apparently took to drink. This line of thought, which concerned Lady Beatrice, had a vaguely sinister flavour. The second line of thought, a scandalous supposition, put forward for argument's sake — was that Sir Robert had done away with his sister. The visits to the crypt and some burned bones were suggestive.

Policemen:

Merivale, of the Yard, who asked Holmes to look into a case. The Yard had begun to realize the importance of the microscope.

Holmes' fees:

No mention.

Transport:

On a bright May evening Holmes & Watson took a first-class carriage bound for the little "halt-on-demand" station of Shoscombe. They posed as visiting fishermen. Upon arrival they took a short drive to an old-fashioned tavern.

Food:

After the "experiment", an encounter with the Lady Beatrice (?), Holmes & Watson did actually use their fishing tackle in the mill-stream with the result that they had a dish of trout for supper.

Drink:

Prior to the queer business, Lady Beatrice would take her glass, but later it often became a whole bottle of an evening.

At the tavern, Holmes & Watson had their host in for a glass of his own wine, and held some high converse upon eels and dace in preparation for their "fishing" activities.

Vices:

Listening to the client's story, Holmes, sat for some time in silent thought, and lit the oldest and foulest of his pipes.

Other cases mentioned:

The St. Pancras case, in which a cap was found beside the dead policeman.

That of a coiner run down by Holmes based upon filings in his cuff.

Notable Quotables:

“By the way, Watson, you know something of racing?” – Holmes “I ought to. I pay for it with about half my wound pension.” – Watson

“Things seem to be of a curiously mixed character. But that should surely help us. It is only the colourless, uneventful case which is hopeless.” – Holmes

“You do occasionally find a carrion crow among the eagles.” – Holmes

Other interestings:

Lady Beatrice died from edema or oedema (British) both words from the Greek οἴδημα, then known as dropsy or hydropsy The disease is an abnormal accumulation of fluid beneath the skin or in one or more cavities of the body, often associated with heart problems.

When all was said and done:

This singular episode ended upon a happier note than Sir Robert’s actions deserved. His horse, Shoscombe Prince, did win the Derby, the sporting owner did net eighty thousand pounds in bets, and the creditors did hold their hand until the race was over, when they were paid in full, and enough was left to reestablish Sir Robert at a fair position in life. Both police and coroner took a lenient view of the transaction, and beyond a mild censure for the delay in registering the lady’s decease, the lucky owner got away scatheless from this strange incident.

McMurdo’s Camp