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AN
EVENING
IN
BAKER
STREET

DAVID RUFFLE

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Holmes and Watson

An Evening in Baker Street

by

David Ruffle

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A Preamble...

The main story in this small volume is in a way a companion piece to my earlier Holmes and Watson: End Peace in that both are told in dialogue only. Essentially though it is a stand-alone piece although there are crossovers in one or two strands. It is also a stand-alone piece in that it does not exist in the Holmesian universe that I created for the Holmes in Lyme Regis trilogy.

Also included are the short pieces, *The Loch Ness Affair* and *An Essex Adventure*. *The Loch Ness Affair* is a slight re-write of *The Mystery of Loch Ness* which was published as part of the expanded 2nd edition of *Sherlock Holmes and the Lyme Regis Horror*. *An Essex Adventure* takes Holmes and Watson to the heart of the so called 'most haunted house in England.'

Still to come next year is *The Gondolier and the Russian Countess*, a Holmes and Watson adventure set in Venice and *Sherlock Holmes and the Scarborough Affair*, written in collaboration with Gill Stammers; a tale of strong women, jewel thieves, spies, murder and cricket!

David Ruffle
Lyme Regis 2016

An Evening In Baker Street

‘Good evening, Watson.’

‘Evening, Holmes.’

‘I trust your rounds were not too onerous and your patients not too demanding.’

‘No more so than is usual, Holmes. Your note was a little short on information and your prose as always, rather terse. You need my assistance with a knotty problem?’

‘If I had a knotty problem as you term it, then I would only be too glad to share it with you, but I have an announcement to make.’

‘That sounds rather portentous.’

‘You may certainly see it as such. I am retiring, Watson.’

‘I have never seen you as retiring, a little diffident maybe!’

‘Good old Watson! A dose of your pawky humour is nearly always welcome even if at times I fail to understand it fully. As you may have gathered and chose to ignore, I have decided to retire from this profession of mine.’

‘To do what? I cannot imagine the sight of you in carpet slippers, sitting beside the fire in a state of torpor.’

‘No more can I, my friend. I have a worthwhile goal in mind to fill my days; I shall keep bees.’

‘Bees?’

‘Indeed, Watson. Bees.’

‘But you know nothing about bees or the keeping of them.’

‘Is that so? Pray, have a look at the volumes on the dining-table; there you see *Langstroth on the Honey Bee*, Root’s essential *The ABC of Bee Culture* and Playfair’s *Of the care and knowledge of bees, their management and natural history, containing an account of the singular mode of generation by which they are produced*. What do you think?’

‘I think that Playfair should have been advised by his publisher to come up with a rather more enticing title for his tome.’

‘Perhaps he did not share your love of penny-dreadfuls! My hives are ordered; Langstroth hives in fact with tried and tested Quinby frames. My colony will soon follow’

‘Is Mrs Hudson aware of the changes to her yard?’

‘There will be no changes to her yard for I am decamping to Sussex. I have taken a villa at Fulworth on the edge of the southern downs. It fulfils my requisites to the letter; enough land to indulge my new hobby, peace, quiet and seclusion and the glorious country and sea views that you have been known to wax most lyrically about.’

‘I remember well your own comments on the countryside, remarking on the impunity with which crimes may be committed there. If I waxed lyrically it was to countermand your own somewhat jaundiced view of the delights of country living. Yet, you were brought up in the country so I never quite understood your antipathy towards it.’

‘As to that I cannot profess to have any great antipathy towards it, not in reality. My own childhood, spent in the moors of North Yorkshire, was reasonably happy notwithstanding certain tensions within the family circle. I was much like any other child, you will be surprised to learn. I climbed my fair share of trees, slid down hayricks a plenty, and rambled the fields with a toy bow and arrow imagining myself to be a big game hunter.’

‘With Mycroft as companion in these adventures?’

‘Nay, Mycroft was neither built for such pursuits or indeed had the inclination. And remember, he is seven years older which would have tended to exclude sibling adventuring. I was a solitary child, which will not be any great surprise to you even if the nature of my pastimes does. My chosen profession coloured the countryside for me, the pastoral scenes of my childhood were tainted by murders, beatings, blackmail, robberies and the like in leafy Surrey, the gardens of Kent or the downs of Sussex. But now as I free myself from the shackles of detecting, I can rediscover the love of the countryside I once had.’

‘You speak as though it will a matter of little or no consequence to throw off the mantle of the world’s greatest consulting detective.’

‘Really, Watson, I do not believe anyone thinks of me in those terms, they are your words, your prose.’

‘Methinks you protest too much, Holmes. You are more than aware of your special gifts in your chosen field.’

‘And I am aware that you chose to exaggerate those gifts to embellish your stories. I am convinced that your readers saw me as a superhuman magician who could do no wrong and was never wrong.’

‘Norbury.’

‘*Touché*, Watson! Would you care for a brandy? Or is the present Mrs Watson keeping a watchful eye on your intake?’

‘You know full well that I have never been one to over indulge.’

‘All the same, married life seems to suit you admirably again judging by your weight gain which speaks to me of a contented home life. Some six pounds I believe.’

‘Less I think, Holmes, more like four pounds.’

‘A trifle more I suspect.’

‘I won’t put it to the test. When do you expect to move to Sussex?’

‘In five days’ time.’

‘As soon as that. I am glad I responded to your note so promptly.’

‘Thank you, Watson. As soon as I am settled, you must pay a visit, I feel sure it is a location for which you will feel the need to wax lyrically once more. You have an eye for poetry, which is evident from the romance you always attempted to find in our cases which you then foisted on the public with your chronicles which at times only briefly flirted with reality.’

‘Had you wished me to write essays, treatises and monographs you should have made your point and stood your ground. I do not think for one minute the public would have gained any enjoyment from such treatments. Besides, I don’t think you have any real cause for complaint; my chronicling of your adventures did bring you some degree of fame and acclaim. I believe I elevated your name to the forefront of the detective profession.’

‘I would retort that it was through my skills, my sleuthing, and my deductions that my name was elevated.’

‘Quite so, Holmes, but tell me how this fame would have spread if I had not been on the scene? Would Scotland Yard and local police forces throughout the country posted notices to the effect that if they were particularly busy then by all means take your problem to Mr Holmes at 221b Baker Street? I concede to you your skills as I have always done, but I really think you need to concede this particular point to me.’

‘You may have a point, Watson.’

‘Thank you, Holmes. Have you any cases in hand at the moment?’

‘One or two problems have been brought to their conclusion this week. The affair of the Yellow Handkerchief and the rather interesting puzzle regarding the Worplesdon blacksmith¹. Neither problem particularly knotty you understand, but they both provided some points of interest. With the tidying up of those cases, my workload is over. It’s the bees and the downs for this jaded soul.’

‘Jaded? Nonsense, you have the constitution of an ox. In my view you are far too young to take this step. Whatever will Scotland Yard do without you, Holmes?’

‘They will have to muddle through the best they can, although I must say the current crop of detectives domiciled there do show signs of promise.’

‘How so?’

‘By their willingness to seek me out and ask my advice; they wish to learn from the master and who I am to turn them away?’

‘Who indeed, Holmes! Which serves to illustrate my point. Surely, you have much to offer still; it’s not as if there has been any waning of your powers... or modesty!’

‘Hah! I do not rank modesty as a virtue; if one happens to be the best in one’s field then one should not be impeded in saying so. By all means, shout it from the rooftops I say.’

[1] Neither of these two cases are mentioned by Watson.

‘Or have a chronicler take on that task...’

‘*Touché* once more, Watson. I have devised a means of imparting my knowledge to future generations should they wish to avail themselves of it. I intend to write the definitive work on the art of deduction; it will, I believe, be the finest such handbook to ever appear. I will use some of my best known cases as examples and redress the balance and damage that your over-romanticising caused. The public will be left in no doubt that the science of deduction speaks for itself without the need of pastoral or other delights tacked on to each case as a sop to those who have been brought up on yellow-backed novels and demand adventure above all else.’

‘This public you mention, Holmes, perhaps you could enlighten to me as to who will form this public of yours. Policemen? Ex-policemen such as Lestrade reading by the light of the fire in his dotage?’

‘You have developed a strain of sarcasm to sit beside your pawky humour of old. It is not a pleasant trait, Watson.’

‘Possibly not, Holmes, but for now it serves a purpose; that of seeing a little discomfiture on your features.’

‘Yet, even as I tell you of my plans, I am wracked with a severe case of doubting what use such a tome would have in the increasingly modernised world. Perhaps my methods belong to yesteryear and I am the equivalent of a dinosaur in today’s policing. New advances in the world of science will have a tremendous impact of the gathering of evidence and how that evidence is interpreted. Even the humble magnifying glass may become redundant.’

‘But magnifying glasses and the like are only part of the process. Surely, clear reasoning and deductions based on what can be seen will always be part of any solution regardless of actual evidence or the paucity of it. A good brain will always be essential in the world of detection.’

‘It may be so, who can tell? And who knows what advances may come in the years to come? We only have to think of the changes