

The Trouble with Mary: The Fourth Series of Sherlock

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Region: [Europe](#)

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The following discussion contains spoilers.

There was much fanfare for the first episode of series 4 of the BBC's *Sherlock*, which graced British television screens on New Year's Day with its fair share of shock and delivery. It promises to be the first of three episodes, dangling the prospect of death of the protagonist in the final instalment.

'The Six Thatchers' promised much, being based on 'The Adventure of the Six Napoleons' in Arthur Conan Doyle's original rendering. It also enables series creators Mark Gatiss (who plays Sherlock's brother Mycroft) and Steven Moffat to have a dig at Thatcher's busts, which are shattered in the course of the mystery. The original story features a quest for the black pearl of the Borgias – value tends to be relative.

As usual, Sherlock Holmes (Benedict Cumberbatch) remains the cosmic being of the show: all characters ultimately revolve around him in celestial fashion, an impress of his mind and matter. The plot development, not always weighty, centres on his continuing relationship with John Watson (Michael Freeman) and wife Mary Morstan (Amanda Abbington).

Be that as it may, there was death, again, though critics and fans alike will raise eyebrows at the skimpiness. Morstan, entered the fray as Watson's sanitising partner, though much of that was wishful thinking. Fans and critics also wondered if it was entirely necessary in the context of the third series, though the soap opera element proved powerful.

'The general fear,' posed Aja Romano, 'was that the show had moved away from the more compelling stories of its first two seasons and gone off the rails in favour of highly implausible plot twists that did nothing very much for the overall narrative.'^[1]

Morstan, as Holmes observes himself, has a lethal skill set, being a highly trained killer in her former days. This becomes the theme of the episode, with statues of Thatcher shattered to reveal a hidden USB memory stick of Morstan's past as a freelance assassin. What unfolds is an old variant of the 'butler did it' – or, in this case, the voyeuristic desk job functionary.

The lies, as a result, proliferate, though Sherlock remains omniscient sage to Watson's trusting manner, having made a promise to protect the Watsons. With such a past as that of Mary's (Sherlock's brother, Mycroft, insists that such individuals are often put down by fate), there is a whiff of inevitability that things are going to turn bloody and sour.

The perfidious desk job functionary (played by Marcia Warren) working under the nose of

the intelligence services eventually wishes to end on a defiant note by shooting Sherlock, though Morstan ends up taking the bullet after dashing at blinding speed in front of the detective.

Make of it what you will: fabulously bold to kill off an important character at this stage, thereby setting the scene for the rest of the series? Or some head scratching gesture resembling filmic appendectomy? It certainly offered a poignant reversal, with Mary having shot Sherlock in 'His Last Vow' even though the intention was not to kill him.

Ben Lawrence of *The Telegraph* had little trouble with seeing it as a case of the former, finding Mary's death 'as affecting because we were drawn, over a terrifically paced 90 minutes, into her new life as a mother and her old life as a freelance assassin, the truth of which is slowly unravelled.'^[2]

There have also been personal reflections where celluloid performance moved off the screen, even if these seemed to be the sort more suitable as tabloid fluff. For one, Abbington and Freeman as an actual couple separating prior to featuring an episode where Clio plays her cruel trick became a topic of press chatter.

The mistake, at that point, is to ask actors what they think, and more often than not, the response is unsatisfactory. The thespian's product is one that should be assessed on its own merits, even if it is bound to be informed, at stages, by personal experience. All too often, the latter substitutes, controls and dictates the interpretation. In this case, critics watched for signs of Watson's anguish as he cradled his dead wife. Would reality spill over onto screen?

The final word, then, for Cumberbatch's Sherlock, who keeps mentioning Jim Moriarty without actually encountering him. 'The episode felt very Bond overall,' claimed Mark Lawson, with Holmes having 'never done so much running toward or away from explosions.'^[3]

A true modern adaptation of a manic character adjusted to the instantaneous wonder of social media (that had been previously the preserve of Watson's blog), a fiend on the smart phone, and stately in his dysfunction, we are left pondering the task ahead for him. For Moffat, it was a case of making him a touch more engaged on an emotional level – in other words, as Cumberbatch himself puts it, 'less of a dick'. Or at the least, more fragile.

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Notes

[1] <http://www.vox.com/2017/1/1/14137800/sherlock-six-thatchers-review-mary-johnlock>

[2] <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/tv/2017/01/01/sherlock-six-thatchers-worth-hype-review/>

[3] <https://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2017/jan/01/sherlock-benedict-cumberbatch--review-james-bond-margaret-thatcher-mark-gatiss-steven-moffat-detective>

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