

The Adventure of the Blue Carbuncle

I had called upon my friend Sherlock Holmes upon the second morning after Christmas, with the intention of wishing him the compliments of the season. He was lounging upon the sofa in a purple dressing-gown, a pipe-rack within his reach upon the right, and a pile of crumpled morning papers, evidently newly studied, near at hand. Beside the couch was a wooden chair, and on the angle of the back hung a very seedy and disreputable hard-felt hat, much the worse for wear, and cracked in several places. A lens and a forceps lying upon the seat of the chair suggested that the hat had been suspended in this manner for the purpose of examination.

“You are engaged,” said I; “perhaps I interrupt you.”

“Not at all. I am glad to have a friend with whom I can discuss my results. The matter is a perfectly trivial one” — he jerked his thumb in the direction of the old hat — “but there are points in connection with it which are not entirely devoid of interest and even of instruction.”



I seated myself in his armchair and warmed my hands before his crackling fire, for a sharp frost had set in, and the windows were thick with the ice crystals. “I suppose,” I remarked, “that, homely as it looks, this thing has some deadly story linked on to it — that it is the clue which will guide

you in the solution of some mystery and the punishment of some crime.”

“No, no. No crime,” said Sherlock Holmes, laughing. “Only one of those whimsical little incidents which will happen when you have four million human beings all jostling each other within the space of a few square miles. Amid the action and reaction of so dense a swarm of humanity, every possible combination of events may be expected to take place, and many a little problem will be presented which may be striking and bizarre without being criminal. We have already had experience of such.”

“So much so,” I remarked, “that of the last six cases which I have added to my notes, three have been entirely free of any legal crime.”

“Precisely. You allude to my attempt to recover the Irene Adler papers, to the singular case of Miss Mary Sutherland, and to the adventure of the man with the twisted lip. Well, I have no doubt that this small matter will fall into the same innocent category. You know Peterson, the commissionaire?”

“Yes.”

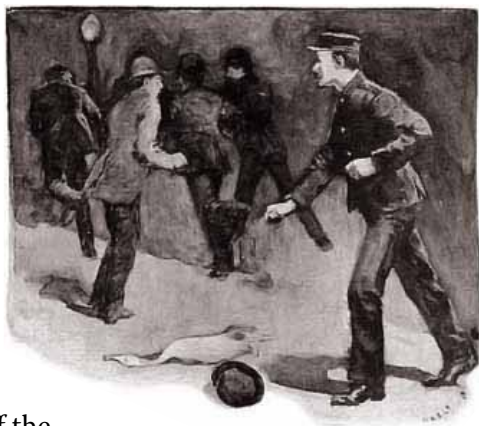
“It is to him that this trophy belongs.”

“It is his hat.”

“No, no, he found it. Its owner is unknown. I beg that you will look upon it not as a battered billycock [felt hat with a low crown] but as an intellectual problem. And, first, as to how it came here. It arrived upon Christmas morning, in company with a good fat goose, which is, I have no doubt, roasting at this moment in front of Peterson’s fire. The facts are these: about four o’clock on Christmas morning, Peterson, who, as you know, is a very honest fellow, was returning from some small jollification and was making his way homeward down Tottenham Court Road. In front of him he saw, in the gaslight,

a tallish man,
walking with a slight
stagger, and carrying
a white goose slung
over his shoulder.

As he reached the
corner of Goodge
Street, a row broke
out between this
stranger and a little
knot of roughs. One
of the latter knocked off the



man's hat, on which he raised his
stick to defend himself and, swinging it over his head, smashed
the shop window behind him. Peterson had rushed forward to
protect the stranger from his assailants; but the man, shocked
at having broken the window, and seeing an official-looking
person in uniform rushing towards him, dropped his goose,
took to his heels, and vanished amid the labyrinth of small
streets which lie at the back of Tottenham Court Road. The
roughs had also fled at the appearance of Peterson, so that
he was left in possession of the field of battle, and also of the
spoils of victory in the shape of this battered hat and a most
unimpeachable Christmas goose."

"Which surely he restored to their owner?"

"My dear fellow, there lies the problem. It is true that 'For
Mrs. Henry Baker' was printed upon a small card which was
tied to the bird's-left leg, and it is also true that the initials
'H. B.' are legible upon the lining of this hat; but as there are
some thousands of Bakers, and some hundreds of Henry
Bakers in this city of ours, it is not easy to restore lost property
to any one of them."