

The Mystery of the Silver Blaze

had laid upon the dressing table and that he had picked it up as he left the room. It was a poor weapon, but perhaps the best that he could lay his hands on at the moment.

"Very possibly. How about these papers?"
"Three of them are receipts for hay dealers' accounts. One of them is a letter of instructions from Colonel Ross. This other is a milliner's account for £17 15 shillings, made out by Madame Lesurier of Bond Street, to William Derbyshire, Mrs. Straker tells us that Derbyshire was a friend of her husband's, and that occasionally his letters were addressed here."

"Madame Derbyshire had somewhat expensive tastes," remarked Holmes, glancing down the account. "Twenty-two guineas is rather heavy for a milliner's cost. However, there appears to be nothing more to learn, and we may now go down to the scene of the crime."

As we emerged from the sitting room a woman, who had been waiting in the passage, took a step forward and laid her hand upon the inspector's sleeve. Her face was haggard and thin and eager, stamped with the print of a recent horror.
"Have you got them? Have you found them?" she panted.

"No, Mrs. Straker. But Mr. Holmes here has come from London to help us, and we shall do all that is possible."

"Surely I met you in Plymouth at a garden party some little time ago, Mrs. Straker?" said Holmes.
"No, sir; you are mistaken."
"Dear me! Why, I could have sworn to it. You wore a costume of dove-colored silk with ostrich feather trimming."

"I never had such a dress, sir," answered the lady.
"Ah, that quite settles it," said Holmes. And with an apology he followed the inspector outside. A short walk across the moor took us to the hollow in which the body had been found. At the brink of it was the furze bush upon which the coat had been hung.

"There was no wind that night, I understand," said Holmes.
"None; but very heavy rain."
"In that case the overcoat was not blown against the furze bushes, but placed there."

"Yes, it was laid across the bush."
"You tell me with interest, I perceive that the ground has been trampled up a good deal. No doubt many feet have been here since Monday night."

"A piece of matting has been laid here at the side, and we have all stood upon that."
"Excellent."
"In this bag I have one of the boots which Straker wore, one of Fitzroy Simpson's shoes and a cast horseshoe of Silver Blaze."

"My dear inspector, you surpass yourself!" Holmes took the bag, and, descending into the hollow, he pushed the matting into a more central position. Then stretching himself upon his face and leaning his chin upon his hands, he made a careful study of the trampled mud in front of him.
"Hallo!" said he, suddenly. "What's this?" It was a wax vesta half burned, which was so coated with mud that it looked at first like a little chip of wood.

"I cannot think how I came to overlook it," said the inspector, with an expression of annoyance.
"It was invisible, buried in the mud. I only saw it because I was looking for it."
"What! You expected to find it?"
"I thought it not unlikely."

He took the boots from the bag and compared the impression of each of them with marks upon the ground. Then he clambered up to the rim of the hollow and crawled about among the ferns and bushes. "I am afraid there are no more tracks," said the inspector. "I have examined the ground very carefully for 100 yards in each direction."

"Indeed!" said Holmes, rising. "I should not have the impertinence to do it again after what you say. But I should like to have a little walk over the moor before it grows dark, that I may know my ground tomorrow, and I think that I shall put this horseshoe in my pocket for luck."

Col. Ross, who had shown some signs of impatience at my companion's quiet and systematic method of work, glanced at his watch. "I wish you would come back with me, inspector," said he. "There are several points on which I should like your advice and especially as to whether we do not owe it to the public to remove our horse's name from the entries for the cup."

"Certainly not," cried Holmes with decision. "I should let the name stand."
The colonel bowed. "I am very glad to have had your opinion, sir," said he. "You will find us at poor Straker's house when you have finished your walk, and we can drive together into Tavistock."

He turned back with the inspector, while Holmes and I walked slowly across the moor. The sun was beginning to sink behind the stable of Mapleton, and the long, sloping plain in front of us was tinged with gold, deepening into rich, ruddy browns where the faded ferns and brambles caught the evening light. But the glories of the landscape were all wasted upon my companion, who was sunk in the deepest thought.

"It's this way, Watson," said he at last. "We may leave the question of who killed John Straker for the instant, and confine ourselves to finding out what has become of the horse. Now, supposing that he broke away during or after the tragedy, where could he have gone to? The horse is a very gregarious creature. If left to himself his instincts would have been either to return to King's Pyland or to go over to Mapleton. Why should he run wild upon the moor? He would surely have been seen by now. And why should gypsies kidnap him? These people always clear out when they hear of trouble, for they do not wish to be pestered by the police. They could not hope to sell such a horse. They would run a great risk and gain nothing by taking him. Surely that is clear."

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"We had been walking briskly during this conversation and a few more minutes brought us to the hollow in question. At Holmes' request I walked down the bank to the right and he to the left, but I had not taken fifty paces before I heard him give a shout and saw him waving his hand to me. The track of a horse was plainly outlined in the soft earth in front of him.

"The horse was alone before," I cried.
"Quite so. It was alone before. Hallo, what is this?"
The double track turned sharp off and took the direction of King's Pyland. Holmes whistled and we both followed along after it. His eyes were on the trail, but I happened to look a little to one side and saw to my surprise the same tracks coming back again in the opposite direction.

"One for you, Watson," said Holmes, when I pointed it out. "You have seen us a long walk, which would have brought us back on our own tracks. Let us follow the return track."
We had not to go far. It ended at the paving of asphalt which led up to the gates of the Mapleton manor. As we approached a groom ran out from them.

"We don't want any litters about here," said he.
"I only wished to ask a question," said Holmes, with his finger and thumb in his waistcoat pockets. "Should I be too early to see your master, Mr. Silas Brown, if I were to call at 5 o'clock tomorrow morning?"
"Bless you, sir, if any one is about he will be, for he is always the first stirring. But here he is, sir, to answer your questions for himself. No, sir, no; it is as much as my place is worth to let him see me touch your money. Afterwards, if you like."

As Sherlock Holmes replaced the half crown which he had drawn from his pocket a fierce-looking elderly man strode out from the gate with a hunting crop swinging in his hand.
"What's this, Dawson?" he cried. "No gossiping! Go about your business! And you, what the devil do you want here?"
"Ten minutes' talk with your good sir," said Holmes in the sweetest of voices.
"I've no time to talk to every gabbard. We want no strangers here. Be off, or you may find a dog at your heels."

Holmes leaned forward and whispered something in the trainer's ear, and he started violently and flushed to the temples.
"It's a lie!" he shouted; "an infernal lie!"
"Very good. Shall we argue about it in public or talk it over in your parlor?"
"Oh, come in if you wish to."

Holmes smiled. "I shall not keep you more than a few minutes, Watson," said he. "Now, Mr. Brown, I am quite at your disposal."
It was twenty minutes, and the reds had faded into greys, before Holmes and the trainer reappeared. Never had I seen such a change as had been brought about in Silas Brown in that short time. His face was ashy pale, beads of perspiration shone upon his brow, and his hands shook until he could scarcely hold a pipe in his mouth. He looked at first like a little chip of wood.

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and the shoe which he took from his pocket exactly fitted the impression.
"See the value of imagination," said Holmes. "It is the one quality which Gregory lacks. We imagined what might have happened, acted upon the supposition, and found ourselves justified. Let us proceed."

We crossed the marshy bottom and passed over a quarter of a mile of dry, hard turf. Again the ground sloped, and again we came on the tracks. Then we lost those for half a mile, but only to pick them up once more quite close to Mapleton. It was Holmes who saw them first, and he stood pointing with a look of triumph upon his face. A man's track was visible beside the horse's.

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"At least, you have his assurance that your horse will run," said I.

"Yes, I have his assurance," said the colonel, with a shrug of his shoulders. "I should prefer to have the horse myself. It was about to make some reply in defense of my friend when he entered the room again."
"Now, gentlemen," said he, "I am quite ready for Tavistock."

As we stepped into the carriage one of the stable lads held the door open for us. A sudden idea seemed to occur to Holmes, for he leaned forward and touched the lad upon the sleeve.
"You have a few sheep in the paddock," he said. "Who attends to them?"

"I do, sir."
"Have you noticed anything amiss with them of late?"
"Well, sir, not of much account; but three of them have gone lame, sir."

Holmes leaned forward and was extremely pleased, for he chuckled and rubbed his hands together.
"A long shot, Watson; a very long shot," said he, pinching my arm. "Gregory, let me recommend to your attention this singular epidemic among the sheep. Drive on, coachman!"

"Colonel Ross still wore an expression which showed the poor opinion which he had formed of my companion's ability, but I saw by the inspector's face that his attention had been keenly aroused.
"You consider that to be important?" he asked.

"Exceedingly so."
"Is there any point to which you would wish to draw my attention?"
"To the curious incident of the dog in the night-time."

"The dog did nothing in the night-time."
"That was the curious incident," remarked Sherlock Holmes.
Four days later Holmes and I were again in the train, bound for Winchester to see the race for the Wessex cup.

Colonel Ross met me by appointment outside the station, and we drove in his drag to the course beyond the town. His face was grave, and his manner was cold in the extreme.
"I have seen nothing of my horse," said he.

"I suppose that you would know him when you saw him?" said Holmes.
"The colonel was very angry. 'I have been on the turf for twenty years, and never was asked such a question as that before,' said he. 'A child would know Silver Blaze, with his white forehead and his mottled off-foreleg.'"

"Well, that is the curious part of it. You could have got fifteen to one yesterday, but the price has become shorter and shorter, until you can hardly get three to one now."

"Hum!" said Holmes. "Somebody knows something that is clear to me in the inclosure near the grand stand I glanced at the card to see the entries."
Wessex Plate (1 ran) 50 sovs. each h ft with 1,000 sovs. added for 4 and 5 year olds. (Second, £300. Third, £200. New course (one mile) and five furlongs). 1. Mr. Heath's The Negro. Red Cap. Cinnamon jacket.

2. Colonel Wardlaw's Pugilist. Pink cap. Blue and black jacket.
3. Lord Backwater's Desborough. Yellow cap and sleeves.
4. Colonel Ross's Silver Blaze. Black cap. Red jacket.
5. Duke of Balmoral's Iris. Yellow and black stripes.
6. Lord Singleford's Rasper. Purple cap. Black sleeves.

"We scratched our other one, and put all hopes on your word," said the colonel. "Why, what is that Silver Blaze favorite?"
"Five to four against Silver Blaze!" roared the ring. "Five to four against Desborough! Five to four on the field."
"There are the numbers," I cried. "They are all six there."

"All six there? Then my horse is running," cried the colonel in great agitation. "But I don't see him. My colors have not passed."
"Only five have passed. This must be he."

As I spoke a powerful bay horse swept out from the weighing inclosure and cantered past us, bearing on its back the well known black and red of the colonel.
"That's not my horse," cried the owner. "That beast has not a white hair upon its body. What is this that you have done, Mr. Holmes?"

"Well, well, let us see how he gets on," said my friend, imperturbably. For a few minutes he gazed through my field-glasses, and then he started. "There they are, coming round the curve!"
From our drag we had a superb view as they came up the straight. The six horses were so close together that a carpet could have covered them, but half way up the yellow of the Mapleton stable showed to the front. Before they reached us, however, Desborough's bolt was shot, and the colonel's horse, coming away with a rush, passed the post a good six lengths before its rival, the Duke of Balmoral's Iris making a bad third.

"It's my race anyhow," gasped the colonel, passing his hand over his eyes. "I confess that I can make neither head nor tail to it. Don't you think that you have kept up your mystery long enough, Mr. Holmes?"
"Certainly, Colonel, you shall know everything. Let us go round and have a look at the horse together. Here he is," he continued, as we made our way into the weighing inclosure, where only owners and their friends are admitted. "You have only to wash his face and his leg in spirits of wine, and you will find that he is the same old Silver Blaze as ever."

"You take my breath away!"
"I found him in the hands of a fakir, and took the liberty of running him just as he was sent over."

"My dear sir, you have done wonders. The horse looks very fit and well. It never went better in its life. I owe you a thousand apologies for having doubted your ability. You have done me a great service by recovering my horse. You would do me a greater still if you could lay your hands on the murderer of John Straker."

"I have done so," said Holmes, quietly. "The colonel and I stared at him in amazement. 'You have got him! Where is he, then?'"
"Here! Where?"
"In my company at the present moment."

The colonel flushed angrily. "I quite recognize that I am under obligations to you, Mr. Holmes," he said. "But I must regard what you have just said as either a very bad joke or an insult."
Sherlock Holmes laughed. "I assure you that I have not associated you with the crime, colonel," said he. "The real murderer is standing immediately behind you, and I beg that you will wave your jockey in readiness. Might I ask for a photograph of Mr. John Straker?"

"The inspector took one from an envelope and handed it to him."
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"The horse!" cried both the colonel and myself.
"Yes, the horse. And it may lessen his guilt if I say that it was done in self-defense, and that John Straker was a man who was entirely unworthy of your confidence. But there goes the bell, and as I stand to win a little on this next race, I shall defer a lengthy explanation until a more fitting time."

We had the corner of a Pullman car to ourselves that evening as we whirled back to London, and I fancy that the journey was a short one to Col. Ross as well as to myself, as we listened to our companion's narrative of the events which had occurred at the Dartmoor training stables upon that Monday night, and the means by which he had unraveled them.

"I confess," said he, "that any theories which I had formed from the newspaper reports were entirely erroneous. And yet there were indications there, had they not been overruled by other details which concealed their true import. I went to Devonshire with the conviction that Fitzroy Simpson was the true culprit, although, of course, I saw that the evidence against him was by no means complete. It was while I was in the carriage, just as we reached the trainer's house, that the immense significance of the curried mutton occurred to me. You may remember that I was distraught, and remained sitting after you had all alighted. I was marveling in my own mind how I could possibly have overlooked so obvious a clue."

"I confess," said the colonel, "that even now I cannot see how it helps us."
"It was the first link in my chain of reasoning. Powdered opium is by no means tasteless. The flavor is not disagreeable, but it is perceptible. Were it mixed with any ordinary dish the eater would undoubtedly detect it and would probably suggest others. A curry was exactly the medium which would disguise this taste. By no possible supposition could this stranger, Fitzroy Simpson, have caused curry to be served in the trainer's family that night, and it is surely too monstrous a coincidence to suppose that he happened to come along with powdered opium upon the very night when a dish happened to be served which would disguise the flavor. That is unthinkable. Therefore Simpson, because eliminated from the case, and our attention centers upon Straker and his wife, the only two people who could have chosen curried mutton for supper that night. The opium was added after the dish was set aside for the stable boy, for the trainer had the same supper, and no ill effects. Which of them, then, had access to that dish without the maid seeing them?"

"Before deciding that question I had grasped the significance of the silence of the dog, for the true inference invariably suggests others. The Simpson incident had shown me that a dog was kept in the stables, and yet, though some one had been in and fetched out a horse, he had not barked enough to arouse the two lads in the loft. Obviously, the dog was a retriever, and was some one whom the dog knew well."

"I was already convinced, or almost convinced, that John Straker went down to the stables in the dead of the night and took out Silver Blaze. For what purpose? For a dishonest bet, or for some ill effect. Which of them, then, had access to that dish without the maid seeing them?"

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