

The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes

Retold from the Sir Arthur Conan Doyle Original By Chris Sasaki

The Adventure of the Blue Carbuncle

Two days after Christmas, I decided to visit Sherlock Holmes. I wanted to wish him a merry Christmas. When I arrived at Baker Street, I found my friend resting on the sofa. Next to him, an old, worn, dirty hat was slouched over the back of a chair. I saw a magnifying glass sitting on a nearby table.

"I suppose this hat has something to do with a crime?" I asked.

"No, my dear Watson," answered Holmes. "Not a crime. Just one of those odd little events that take place in a large city like London. I received the hat on Christmas morning from a policeman named Peterson. He told me he was walking home on Christmas Eve when he saw a man wearing this hat and carrying a goose over his shoulder."

"No doubt for his Christmas dinner," I said.

"No doubt, Watson," Holmes replied. "Peterson then explained that a group of thugs appeared and began to bother the man. They pushed him and knocked off his hat. The man tried to defend himself by swinging his cane and accidentally broke a store window.

"That's when Peterson ran to help the poor stranger. When the gang saw Peterson coming, they ran. But their victim ran, too. The old man must have thought Peterson would arrest him for breaking the window.

"And so the officer was left with the hat and the goose. A piece of paper was tied to the bird. It read: 'For Mrs. Henry Baker.' And the initials H.B.' are on the hat. But there must be hundreds of Henry Bakers in London. It would be most impossible to find the right Henry Baker and return his hat and goose to him.

"Peterson knows that I am interested in even the smallest problem," said Holmes. "So he brought the items to me. Since I couldn't keep the goose forever,

Peterson came back and took it for his dinner tonight. Meanwhile, I have been learning about the stranger by studying his hat."

"But what can you possibly learn from examining a hat?" I exclaimed.

"You know how I work, Watson," Holmes replied. "Here is my magnifying glass. You tell me what you can discover about our stranger."

I took the hat and looked it over. It was an ordinary black hat, but it had become worn with age. The red silk lining was faded. I saw the initials "H. B." inside. There were holes in the brim for an elastic band to hold the hat on the wearer's head. But the elastic was missing. The hat was cracked, dusty, and had worn spots all over it. Someone had colored the spots with ink.

"I can see nothing," I said, handing the hat back to my friend.

"On the contrary, Watson. You see everything. But you don't understand the meaning of what you see."

"Then what can you tell me about the hat's owner?" I asked.

Holmes explained, "Three years ago the owner was a fairly wealthy man. But since then, he has become much poorer. He was a careful person, but isn't anymore. Something has caused these changes. Perhaps he is gambling. This may be why his wife no longer loves him.

"Despite all of this, our stranger is careful about his appearance. But he doesn't go out much. He is middle-aged and not in the best of health. He has gray hair, cut within the last few days, to which he applies cream. And he probably uses candles to light his home."

"You must be joking, Holmes," I said.

"Not at all, my good Watson. This hat was very fashionable three years ago. It is also expensive. So our stranger must have had enough money to buy it then. I know he is not as wealthy as before because he can't afford to buy a new one now, even though it is old and worn.

"I know he was a careful person once, because he went to the trouble of having the hat fitted with the elastic. But the elastic probably broke. He never replaced it because he is not as careful as he used to be.

"I know he still cares about his appearance," Holmes continued, "because he tries to hide the worn spots on the hat with ink. Look closely at the lining and you will see tiny hair clippings. These tell me the owner's age and hair color. They also tell me he got his hair cut recently. And you can smell the hair cream."

Holmes went on. "The dust on the hat isn't the type you would find outside. It is the sort that collects inside a house. That tells me he spends more time at home than anywhere else. The perspiration marks inside tell me the man perspires even when walking, which means he is not very fit."

"But," I interrupted, "you also said his wife stopped loving him."

"This hat has not been brushed for weeks," replied Holmes. "What loving wife would let her husband leave the house with such a dusty hat upon his head?"

"But he might be a bachelor," I said.

"You forgot the note attached to the goose. It said: 'To Mrs. Henry Baker.'"

"I see. But how on earth do you know that he uses candles to light his house and not gas?"

"There were many wax stains on his hat," Holmes replied. "We would not see those if his house were lit with gas."

Just then, our door flew open and the policeman Paterson rushed in. "Mr. Holmes!" he cried out. "Look what my wife found inside the goose she was preparing for dinner!" Peterson held out his hand toward us. In it, he held a beautiful, blue gemstone. It was slightly smaller than a bean, but it shone and twinkled like a brilliant star.

"Mr. Peterson!" exclaimed Holmes. "I would recognize that stone anywhere. It is the Countess of Morcar's precious blue carbuncle!"

"Do you mean that the jewel was stolen?" I asked.

"Correct, Watson," was Holmes' answer. "It went missing just five days ago, at the Hotel Cosmopolitan. I have been reading about it in the newspaper. The police arrested a plumber named John Horner. He is being charged with its theft.

"It seems that James Ryder, the hotel manager, let Horner into the Countess' room to fix the plumbing. When Mr. Ryder returned, the plumber was gone and the

gem was missing. Catherine Cusack, the countess' maid, told the police the same story. The police were alerted right away and Horner was arrested that evening. They didn't find the missing gem. And the plumber insists he is innocent.

"So," continued Holmes, "how did the stone get from the Countess to us? We know that it came from the goose, which belonged to Henry Baker. I would say that our first step is to find Mr. Baker. And we can do that by putting a notice in the newspaper."

Holmes took a pencil and paper, and spoke as he wrote. "Found at the corner of Goodge Street, a goose and black hat belonging to Mr. Henry Baker. Please claim both at 6:30 this evening at 221B Baker Street."

"And now, Mr. Peterson," Holmes said, "would you be so kind as to do two things for me? Take this message and place in in all the evening newspapers. And second, please bring us back another goose for Mr. Baker!"

When Peterson had gone, Holmes held the carbuncle to the light. "Watson, this stone was only discovered twenty years ago. It was found on the banks of the Amoy River in southern China. It is very valuable because most stones like it are ruby red and not blue. And like all valuable gems, this one leaves a trail of crime wherever it goes. There have been two murders and many robberies committed because of it already. I will put it away safely and let the Countess know we have her precious pebble."

"And what do you make of the plumber, John Horner? And Henry Baker?" I asked.

"I don't know anything about Horner, my good fellow. And I don't think Mr. Baker is guilty of anything. But we will test that when he answers our notice. Please join me this evening, Mr. Watson. With any luck, we will be able to question him about his bird."

That evening, Henry Baker arrived at our place in search of his lost goose. He was a large man, with a broad face and brown beard. He gave me the impression that he was an educated man. But his worn clothes showed that he had fallen on hard times.

"I am curious," Holmes began. "Why didn't you put a notice about your lost items in the newspaper?"

"Well, Mr. Holmes," Baker replied, "I don't have as much money as I used to. And I was sure the thieves had taken the goose. So I thought it would be a waste of money to pay for a notice."

"I understand, my friend. By the way, Mr. Baker, I am afraid that we have eaten your goose. It would have gone bad had we waited too long..."

Our visitor let out a groan and looked very disappointed.

"But don't worry. We bought you another one." Holmes pointed to the bird, which was sitting on the table. "Of course, we still have the feathers and bones of your goose, if you want them."

"Now, why would I want that?" laughed Mr. Baker. "No, I'll just take this goose and be on my way."

"Very well," said Holmes, as he looked at me with raised eyebrows. "Oh, by the way, Mr. Baker, I wonder if you would tell me where you got your delicious bird. I should like to know where to get another."

"Well, Mr. Holmes," he said, "there is a group of us who are regulars at the Alpha Inn. The owner of the inn started a 'goose club.' Every week for the past year, we all paid a small amount of money. So, by the end of the year, there was enough to buy each man a goose for Christmas. That's where I got it. And now, if you don't mind, I'll take this bird and finally enjoy a proper Christmas dinner."

After our visitor had left, Holmes and I followed up this lead. We left and made our way through the cold London streets to the Alpha Inn. Inside, we found a quiet table and ordered two glasses of hot apple cider from the owner.

"I hope your cider is as good as your geese," Holmes said.

"My geese?" said the owner as he poured out the warm beverage.

"Yes. I was just speaking to Mr. Henry Baker about them."

"Oh, well they're not my geese," said the owner. "I got them from a gentleman down in Covent Garden. Breckinridge is his name."

Holmes and I finished our cider and made our way to Covent Garden Market. Just as he was closing his stall for the night, we found Mr. Breckinridge.

"Sold out, I see," said Holmes to Breckinridge. "That's too bad. By any chance, can you tell me where you get your birds from?"

To our surprise, Holmes' question made the bird seller angry. "Now look, mister," he said loudly. "What are you getting at? You're not the first person today to bother me about my geese. 'Where are they?' and 'Who do you sell them to?' I never heard such fuss being made over some fowl."

"I'm sorry," said Holmes. "It's just that I had made a bet that the geese in question were raised in the country."

"Well, you've lost your bet then, mister," said Breckinridge. "They were raised in town. Here, look at my record book – it shows who I bought the geese from. And it shows who I sold them to. And the birds I sold to the Alpha Inn were raised by a Mrs. Oakshott. And it says right here she lives on Brixton Road, in London!"

Holmes and I left Mr. Breckinridge to finish closing his stall. We stood in the street, wondering whether to visit Mrs. Oakshott right away or wait until morning. Just then, we heard shouting. It was coming from Mr. Breckinridge. He was yelling at a small man. "Stop bothering me. I've had enough questions about my geese today! Go and ask Mrs. Oakshott about her geese!" Then he turned and stomped away.

"Holmes walked up to the small man and said, "Excuse me. My name is Sherlock Holmes and I believe my friend and I can help you. I take it you are looking for some geese. They were sold by Mrs. Oakshott to Mr. Breckinridge. He, in turn, sold them to the Alpha Inn. From the inn, one of the geese went to Henry Baker."

"Mr. Holmes, you can't imagine how important it is to me that I find my goose," exclaimed the man.

"In that case," said Holmes, "please come to my quarters where we can talk. Mister...?"

"My name is John Robinson," answered the stranger.

"No, no, I mean your real name," said Holmes with a smile. "I insist."

The stranger's face turned red, and he looked very uncomfortable. "Well," he said, "my real name is James Ryder."

"That's better," said Holmes. "Much better, Mr. Ryder, of the Hotel Cosmopolitan."

Back in our rooms, Holmes, Ryder, and I warmed ourselves by the fire. "And now, Mr. Ryder," Holmes began, "you wish to know the whereabouts of Mrs. Oakshott's geese. Or should I say, one special goose. The white one with the black mark on its tail."

"Yes," cried James Ryder, "can you tell me where it went?"

"It came here. And it was a remarkable bird indeed. In fact, after it was dead, it laid an egg. The brightest little blue egg you have ever seen." Holmes held out his hand and showed our guest the blue carbuncle. Ryder stared at it. He sprang from his chair and the color drained from his face.

"The game's up, Ryder," proclaimed Holmes. "I know most of what happened. The police might treat you better if you now tell us what you know."

Ryder looked as if he would faint, so I helped him back into his chair. "It was Catherine Cusack," he answered, "the Countess' maid. She told me about the gem."

"And you decided to steal it," said Holmes. "You knew the plumber, John Horner, had been in trouble with the police before. So you arranged for him to be in the Countess' room. When he left, you stole the stone. Then you called the police, told them about Horner, and they arrested him."

"Please, Mr. Holmes," pleaded Ryder. "Have mercy! I was never in trouble before. I'll never do it again! Please!"

"Really, Mr. Ryder," said Holmes. "You ask for forgiveness. But you were ready to send Mr. Horner to prison for a crime you committed. Enough! Tell us the rest of the story."

Ryder returned to his tale. "When Horner was arrested, I was worried that the police might question me. I was afraid they would search me for the item. So I went to my sister's house..."

"Mrs. Oakshott," said Holmes.

"Yes," said Ryder. "I went there and thought about what to do next. I remembered an old friend who had spent time in prison. I knew he could help me sell the jewel. So I decided I would go to Kilburn, where he lives. But I was still worried the police might find the stone on me.

"I was sitting in my sister's backyard. It was full of the geese she raises. That's when it came to me. My sister had promised me one of her birds as a Christmas present. I decided I would stuff the carbuncle down its throat. Then I would take it with me. If the police stopped me, they would never think to look inside the goose.

"So I caught one of the birds, the one with the black mark on its tail. I held open its bill and stuffed the gem down its throat. My sister came out and asked me what I was doing. Just then, I lost hold of the bird and it flapped its way back to the others. I told her I was going to take my Christmas present. So she caught it and killed it, and I went to Kilburn.

"Imagine my horror," Ryder continued, "when I opened up the bird for my friend and found nothing. There had been some terrible mistake. I rushed back to town and ran to my sister's. I burst into her backyard, only to find all the birds gone. She had sent them to the dealer, Breckinridge. I asked her if there had been another goose with a black mark on its tail. She told me yes. I had taken the wrong bird!

"I ran to Covent Garden as quickly as I could. But Breckinridge would not tell me where my bird had gone. So here I am. I have committed a terrible crime." Ryder burst into tears and buried his face in his hands.

There was a long silence. Sherlock Holmes tapped his fingers on the table. Then he stood up and threw open the door that looked out onto the street.

"Get out!" he said.

In an instant, Ryder ran out the door and disappeared into the night.

"Perhaps I'm making a mistake," said Holmes. "But I don't believe Mr. Ryder will stray from the law again. Besides, Horner will be set free. The blue carbuncle will be returned. In the end, we have saved him from a life in prison.

"After all," Holmes said, "we have had a most interesting problem to solve – for which I am rather grateful to the foolish man..... Aren't you, my dear Watson?"

