



The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes

Adventure IX – The Adventure of the Blue Carbuncle

Publishing History

9 of the 60 stories

First published in *The Strand Magazine*, January, 1892 Part of *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* collection by George Newnes, Ltd., London, 1892

In the US by Harper Bros., New York, 1892

British Illustrator was Sidney Paget

Chronology

Baring-Gould places the date of the story as Tuesday, December 27, 1887 which makes it the 15th of the 60. This means that Holmes was 33 and Watson 35.



Christopher Morley Says

“Christmas, “the season of forgiveness,” leads Holmes to let a badly frightened thief escape without punishment. Some of his shrewdest deductions lead up to a crisis, particularly the inference from the man’s hat that his wife no longer loves him”

Dummies Short Summary

“The only Christmas tale in the canon is a tour de force of detection as Holmes traces the journey of a stolen jewel from a hotel room to the crop of a Christmas goose.”

How Many Words

At 7,879 words BLUE has the 27TH most words (#1 is VEIL – 4,499, #56 if NAVL – 12,701)

Classifying This Case

This case is one of 4 classified as a theft of gems. The others were BERY, MAZA, and SIXN.

The Best Of Sherlock Holmes

It looks as if BLUE is in everyone's top 10 - - except Arthur Conan Doyle's.

- 1927 – Arthur Conan Doyle did not put it on the list of his 12 favorites.
- 1959 – The Baker Street Irregulars votes it as 3rd on their list of 10 best short stories.
- 1999 – The Sherlock Holmes Society of London voted it #4 of the 56 short stories.

What Else Happened That Year (1887)

1887 again? As you can deduce, Watson (or was it Doyle?) placed many of the earliest stories published as about 5 years ago. Need to know these items again? Go back and check SCAN, REDH, IDEN, FIVE, and TWIS.

Why do we think this year will appear again?

Holmes And Watson – Personal Information

Holmes is, of course, residing at 221B. Watson is living separately with no mention of a wife.

Dramatis Personae

Not an evil person in this cast. Breckenridge isn't evil – just tight fisted.

- **Peterson**, a commissionaire
- **Henry Baker**, frequenter of the Alpha Inn, who lost his hat and goose.
- **Countess Of Morcar**, from whom the blue carbuncle was stolen while she was staying at the Hotel Cosmopolitan
- **John Horner**, a plumber, with a past conviction for stealing, but now an honest tradesman. Accused of stealing the carbuncle.
- **James Ryder**, a senior attendant at the Cosmopolitan Hotel.
- **Catherine Cusack**, maid of the countess and friend of Ryder.
- **Inspector Bradstreet** of the yard who arrested Horner.
- **Windigate**, proprietor of the Alpha Inn.

- **Breckenridge**, a poultry dealer with a shop in Covent Garden. He sold the goose to Windigate.
- **Mrs. Oakshot**, sister of Ryder. She fattened geese and sold them to Breckenridge.
- **John Robinson**, an alias used by Ryder in a futile attempt to deceive Holmes.

Quotable Sherlock

As is expected, the more popular stories are rife with “quotables.”

- "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."
- "On the contrary, Watson, you can see everything. You fail, however, to reason from what you see. You are too timid in drawing your inferences."
- "It is a question of cubic capacity. A man with so large a brain must have something in it."
- "It's a bonny thing," said he. "Just see how it glints and sparkles. Of course it is a nucleus and focus of crime. Every good stone is. They are the devil's pet baits."
- "When you see a man with whiskers of that cut and the *Pink Un* protruding out of his pocket, you can always draw him by a bet."
- "My name is Sherlock Holmes. It is my business to know what other people don't know."
- It is always awkward doing business with an alias."
- "I suppose that I am commuting a felony, but it is just possible that I am saving a soul. This fellow will not go wrong again; he is too terribly frightened. Send him to jail now, and you make him a jail-bird for life."
- "Chance has put in our way a most singular and whimsical problem, and its solution is its own reward."

Holmes' Fee

There was no fee since Holmes really didn't have a client. It is likely Holmes received a big reward for returning the Blue Carbuncle to the Countess, although that is not stated in the story. Holmes may have shared the reward with Peterson the commissionaire. (In our view, he should have.)

Sherlock Holmes On The Big And The Little Screen

Surprisingly, in spite of its popularity, BLUE has only been on a screen 4 times.

- 1923 *The Blue Carbuncle* with Eille Norwood as one of his 47 short movies over 3 years. The National Film and Television Archive at the BFI has viewing copies of this film but it has not been released

- 1968 *The Blue Carbuncle* with Peter Cushing as an episode of his *Sherlock Holmes* series
- 1984 *The Blue Carbuncle* with Jeremy Brett at his best in the 43 episode *Sherlock Holmes* series
- 1999 *The Adventure of the Blue Carbuncle* as an episode of *Sherlock Holmes in the 22nd Century* (Animated TV series)

Fainting In The Canon

In this story James Ryder almost faints but John Horner actually does faint. (“Horner, who had shown signs of intense emotion during the proceedings, fainted away at the conclusion and was carried out of the court.”)

Newspapers

If you need to advertise “found items” in the papers, here are the ones Holmes used:

- **Echo** - London evening paper that was liberal in politics and near bankruptcy throughout its short career.
- **Evening News** - A conservative London paper that was founded in 1881.
- **Evening Standard** - The evening version of the popular Standard.
- **Globe** - The oldest evening London paper. Became Conservative after a long-time supporter of Whigs.
- **Pall Mall Gazette** - London evening paper which was initially independent but frequent owner changes changed format and politics.
- **St. James Gazette** - Founded in 1880. Was a Tory paper on high intellectual level but could not succeed on own and was absorbed into the Evening Standard in 1905.
- **Sporting Times** - Contained mainly betting information. Known as the Pink Un.”
- **Star** - A Liberal paper. Was acquired by the Daily News in 1909.

ALSO

- **Pink Un** was akin to a Police Gazette type publication aimed at horse racing

Annotated Sherlock

- **“billycock”** Usually, a round low-crowned soft felt hat, but sometimes a stiff felt hat, or bowler
- **“the Assizes”** periodic sessions of judges of the superior courts in every county in England for the purpose of administering justice in the trial and determination of civil and criminal cases
- **“a scotch bonnet”** A tam-o'-shanter; a soft woolen bonnet or cap with a flat circular crown, the circumference of which is about twice that of the head
- the *“pink Un”* A sporting journal, printed on pink paper, not unlike the *Police Gazette*

- **“commissionaire”** an association of pensioned, former soldiers, formed in London in 1859 by a retired cavalry officer, determined to better the lot of veterans, who were often down on their luck. They were uniformed and acted as porters, messengers, attendants, and the like.
- **“It cuts glass as though it were putty”** A mythical test. Diamonds, rubies, sapphires, garnets, aquamarines, beryl’s, and so forth, are all harder than glass and will cut it. So will tempered glass.
- **“carbuncle”** is a garnet, typically cut en cabochon, (with a domed top) Garnets come in many colors: white, yellow, green, red, orange, brown, purple, and black; no blue garnet has ever been reported.
- **“penal servitude”** has three stages: (1) solitary confinement in a “close” prison, limited to nine months but with the prisoner engaged in some industrial employment; (2) a period of labor at a “public works” prison; and (3) conditional release for the unexpired portion of the sentence upon license or ticket-of-leave if the prisoner earned “marks” of credit for remission of up to one-quarter of his or her sentence.
- **“disjecta membra”** scattered members; disjointed portions or parts

Weapons

A “peaceful” story with only 2 items considered “weapons.”

- **Stick** - Which Henry Baker used to defend himself against a gang of ruffians.
- **Dog** - Which Mr. Breckenridge threatened to set on James Ryder.

Facts - - Who Needs Facts?

This is one of the stories in which Arthur Ignatius Conan Doyle didn’t do research and the publishing houses have yet to create the job of “fact checker” In later stories, Sherlockians point out that Doyle needed to learn more about horseracing and the abilities of snakes.

In BLUE, there are a few points that always pop-up. First – Geese don’t have crops. Second – carbuncles can be found in several colors, but never blue.

Frank Mentzel