



The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes

Adventure IX -- The Adventure of the Blue Carbuncle

The story opens with one of the longest sitting room scenes in the Canon, and one of the most enjoyable. What fun it is to see Holmes and Watson relaxing together in the holiday season, chatting about Henry Baker's hat and how it came to Baker Street. Holmes seems to be in a particularly light-hearted mood (perhaps the friends may have shared some liquid holiday cheer as well?) carrying his brilliant deductions into the stratosphere of logical supposition, and going so far as to illustrate one of his more outrageous points by the comic device of clapping the oversized hat onto his own head. Is this the cold, precise reasoning machine we've been led to expect? No, and heavens bless Watson for showing us this jollier side of Holmes!

A nucleus and focus of crime: Watson called upon Holmes on the second morning after Christmas. Holmes said that Peterson brought the hat and the goose to him on Christmas morning, and we can understand why there was no effort made to locate Henry Baker on that day. But what about the day after Christmas? If Holmes understood that "to a poor man, the loss was a heavy one," then why didn't he advertise the discovery of goose and the hat sooner than he did?



When confronted by Holmes, James Ryder was quick to bring up Catherine Cusack's name, as if to share the guilt. However, it is worth noting that Ryder only said, "It was Catherine Cusack who told me of it." It was Holmes who made the leap to calling her a "confederate." Was Cusack truly involved in the crime, or was she merely guilty of talking too freely about her mistress's jewels? As a practical matter, wouldn't an "upper attendant" at a hotel have reasonably free access to a guest's room if he chose to exercise it? Did Holmes jump to conclusions too rapidly?

In other stories where Holmes let the perpetrator of a crime go free, he generally decided to do so because of his sympathy with the criminal's motives. In "The Blue Carbuncle," Holmes granted a pardon to a man whose motives and personality he despised, citing the tragedy of making the pathetic Ryder a "jail-bird for life," especially during the Christmas season. Is the "season of forgiveness" sufficient explanation of Holmes's actions? Or may there have been some other reason for Holmes to let Ryder go unpunished? Any ideas?

Watson ended the story before Holmes returned the jewel to the Countess, and also before John Horner got out of jail. Did Peterson get his reward as the one who really found the gem? Did Holmes tell the police what really happened? Did Horner have to stand trial? And if Holmes was so sure that Cusack had been involved in the crime, what did he do about her?

By the way, I recommend the "Best of Hounds" archives for "The Blue Carbuncle" to all those who find themselves perplexed by the "crop versus crap" question of the Christmas goose. The reader will also be rewarded with some delightful holiday poetry from years past!

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