



The Memoirs of Sherlock Holmes

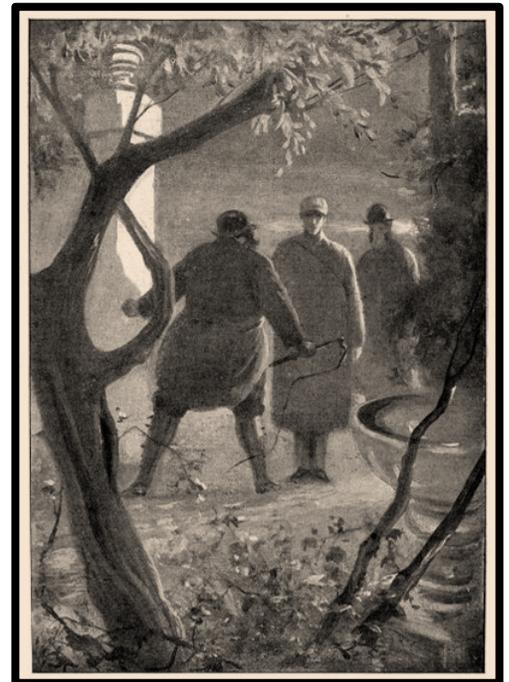
Adventure XV – The Adventure of Silver Blaze

It's the main event of the 1890 horse racing season. All odds favor the great Silver Blaze, a descendant of the immortal Sonomy and every bit as successful as his famous ancestor. The winner receives the coveted Wessex Plate (or Cup) and a cash prize exceeding £1,000. There are only a few days remaining before the race, and national excitement and anticipation are at a fever pitch when...Silver Blaze disappears. The stable boy assigned to stand guard is drugged, and the horse's trainer is found dead on the moor with his head smashed in by a heavy weapon.

Despite diligent searching by the local constabulary, including the interrogation of the gypsies who wander on the lonely moor, no trace of Silver Blaze beyond his hoofprints near the dead man's body can be found. The horse has simply vanished into thin air. A suspect, a tout named Fitzroy Simpson, has been apprehended for the trainer's murder, and the local police believe they have a strong case against him. But Sherlock Holmes says that a clever lawyer could tear their case to tatters, and assures the horse's owner that Silver Blaze will mysteriously reappear in time to run in the Wessex Plate race.

What did a curious surgical knife, the stump of a burnt match, a dog that did nothing in the nighttime, and an epidemic of lameness in a herd of sheep have to do with the solution to this bizarre mystery? The Hounds will course hard on the heels of the solution, and on their way, will unravel false scents and trails that double back upon themselves.

Holmes called him "young Fitzroy Simpson," but the maid at King's Pyland said Simpson was more likely to be over thirty than under it. Holmes at this point (1890) was 36. Was Holmes being condescending, or



was over 30 still an age at which Victorians referred to men as “young”? Did Holmes think of himself as “young”?

When Ned Hunter jumped up to set the dog on Fitzroy Simpson, the latter took to his heels in such haste that he apparently lost his cravat. Yet after Hunter had declared his intent to “show you how we serve [touts] in King’s Pyland,” Simpson was seen leaning through the stable window. As it turns out, he was not putting opium on the curried mutton. In face of Hunter’s threat, it would have availed Simpson little to offer a £10 bribe. Why did he linger?

Edith Baxter, the maid, told investigators that when she encountered Fitzroy Simpson near the stable, “He took a piece of white paper folded up out of his waistcoat pocket.” She subsequently stated that as Simpson was looking through the stable window at Ned Hunter, she noticed “...the corner of the little paper packet protruding from his closed hand.” Inspector Gregory told Holmes, “[Simpson] says that it was a ten-pound note.” But ten-pound notes are not white. And why would Simpson fold a banknote into a little packet? What was the little piece of folded white paper?

It must have been difficult for the stable boy, whose turn it was to remain on watch, to stay awake or at least reasonably alert all night. Why wasn’t a rotating system of watches established among the three stable boys?

When Holmes examined the cataract knife, he found traces of blood on it. Yet there was no indication that the Penang lawyer carried by Simpson was examined for traces of blood. If Inspector Gregory was as competent as Holmes believed him to be, why was this obvious precaution overlooked, or if it had been taken, why didn’t Gregory advise Holmes that there were no traces of blood upon the presumed murder weapon? Also, Gregory supplied Holmes with boots belonging to Straker and Simpson, and Holmes compared both boots with footprints at the scene of the crime. Why didn’t Gregory think to do that?

It’s quite obvious that Colonel Ross believed Holmes had Chiroptera in his carillon. Why, then, did the Colonel decide to scratch Bayard and go with Holmes’ assurance that Silver Blaze would run? And if Colonel Ross had been around horses for twenty-years as he said, wouldn’t he have recognized Silver Blaze by physical characteristics other than the white blaze on the forehead and the mottled off foreleg?

When the day of the race arrives, Holmes inquires about the betting and Colonel Ross tells him, “Well, that is the curious part of it. You could have got fifteen to one yesterday, but the price has become shorter and shorter...” To which Holmes replies, “Hum! Somebody knows something, that is clear.” The “something,” obviously, was that Silver Blaze was going to appear in time to run in the Wessex Plate.

And who knew that? Holmes, Watson, and Silas Brown, that’s who. Did one or more of those three place enough in wagers to drive the odds on Silver Blaze down? Was it Holmes, who stood to win a little on

the next race? Was it Watson, whose fondness for the turf cost him half of his wound pension? Or was it Brown, that “perfect compound of the bully, coward, and sneak”?

Finally, I'd like to ask: “Is it possible to nick a horse's tendon subcutaneously with a cataract knife and leave 'absolutely no trace'?”

Steve Clarkson

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