



# The Memoirs of Sherlock Holmes

## Adventure XV – The Adventure of Silver Blaze

# 15 of the 60 Stories

### Publishing History

First published in *The Strand Magazine*, December, 1892

In the US in *Harper's Weekly*, February 25, 1893

Part of *The Memoirs of Sherlock Holmes* collection by George Newnes, Ltd.,  
London, 1894

Harper Bros., New York, 1894

British Illustrator – Sidney Paget

US illustrator – W. H. Hyde

### Chronology

Baring-Gould places the dating of the story as Thursday, September 25 to Tuesday, September 30, 1890, which makes it the 29<sup>th</sup> of the 60. This means that Holmes is 36 and Watson 38.

### Christopher Morley Says

'This fine story, which shows Holmes at the top of his form, involves various problems of ethics. The crime was caused by a woman's excessive taste for expensive clothes, yet the actual murdered was not human, and all concerned (including Holmes) might have been prosecuted as accomplices in crooked gambling.'



## Dummies Short Summary

“An investigation into a stolen racehorse and a murdered trainer leads to a surprising suspect!”

## How Many Words

At 9,650 words SILV has the 43<sup>rd</sup> most words (#1 is VEIL – 4,499, #56 if NAVL – 12,701)

## Classifying This Case

This case is one of 23 classified as a MURDER and one of 14 where the perpetrator was either killed, arrested, or otherwise satisfactorily handled. And the victim was killed by a horse.

## The Best Of Sherlock Holmes

- 1927 – Arthur Conan Doyle did not put it on his list of 12 favorites
- 1944 – The Baker Street Irregulars voted it as #4 on their top 12 favorites
- 1954 - The Baker Street Irregulars voted it as #2 on their top 12 favorites
- 1999 – The Sherlock Holmes Society of London voted it # 5 of the 56 short stories

## What Else Happened That Year (1890)

- Omnibus strike in London settled on basis of 12-hour day.
- January 4, *Daily Graphic* launched, first daily illustrated paper. Merged with Daily Sketch in 1926.
- London-Paris telephone line opened.
- Lunacy Act gives management of asylums to visiting committees.
- Booth writes, *In Darkest England*.
- Bismarck dismissed.
- Wounded Knee massacre.
- First meeting of Japanese Legislature under new Constitution.
- First Chinese cotton mill constructed.
- Degas paints *Dancers in Blue*.
- Ibsen writes, *Hedda Gabler*.
- Bertillon publishes *La photographie judiciaire*, in which he explains his anthropometry (q.v., 1882).
- Halstead, at John Hopkins Hospital, first to use rubber gloves in surgery.
- Discovery of Cleopatra's tomb.

## Holmes And Watson – Personal Information

Our duo are still sharing bachelor quarters at 221B.

## Dramatis Personae

It is always fun when the cast of characters includes one with 4 legs

- **John Straker**, an ex jockey turned trainer. He trained Silver Blaze
- **Col. Ross**, owner of Silver Blaze.
- **Fitzroy Simpson**, a neighbor of the Colonel who liked to bet on the horses.
- **Lord Backwater**, owner of a training stable across the moor from the Colonel.
- **Silas Brown**, trainer for Lord Backwater.
- **Edith Baxter**, maid to Straker. She delivered the curried mutton to Ned.
- **Ned Hunter**, groom on guard duty when Silver Blaze was stolen.
- **Inspector Gregory**, a competent local officer.
- **Silver Blaze**, prize winning horse.

## Quotable Sherlock

- "We are going well," said he, looking out the window and glancing at his watch. "Our rate at present is fifty-three and a half miles per hour."
- "It is one of those cases where the art of the reasoner should be used rather for the sifting of details than for the acquiring of fresh evidence."
- "Nothing clears up a case so much as stating it to another person."
- "Inspector Gregory, to whom the case has been committed, is an extremely competent officer. Were he but gifted with imagination he might rise to great heights in his profession."
- "That is the case as it appears to the police, and improbable as it is, all other explanations are more improbable still."
- "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 find ourselves justified."
- "I follow my own methods and tell as much or as little as I choose. That is the advantage of being unofficial."

- “Is there any point to which you would 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?”

### **Holmes’ Fee**

The story make no mention, although Col. Ross did acknowledge he was under obligation to Holmes. Holmes had also made a bet on the next race and stood to win a little. It is possible he was helped with a little inside information.

### **Sherlock Holmes On The Big And The Little Screen**

- 1923 Silver Blaze with Eille Norwood as one of his 47 Canonical stories, The National Film and Television Archive at the BFI has viewing copies of this film but it has not been released
- 1937 Silver Blaze with Arthur Wontner in one of his 4 theater movies
- 1977 Dark and Dangerous: Silver Blaze with Christopher Plummer in this TV movie
- 1988 Silver Blaze with Jeremy Brett as an episode of his Sherlock Holmes TV series
- 2000 Silver Blaze as an episode of Sherlock Holmes in the 22<sup>nd</sup> Century (Animated TV series)

### **Fainting In The Canon**

Silas Brown almost fainted.

### **Newspapers**

- **Daily Chronicle** - A morning paper established in 1877. Liberal and one of the most popular.

### **Annotated Sherlock**

- **“vestas”** A vesta is a friction match, so named for the Roman goddess of the hearth and fire.
- **“Cavendish”** A kind of smoking tobacco softened and pressed into solid cakes, and so called from the name of the maker.
- **“a drag”** A private stagecoach with seats inside and on top.
- **“spirits of wine”** brandy
- **“subcutaneously”** adjective (Anatomy & Medicine) how situated or applied under the skin

- **“his ear-flapped traveling cap”** This and the reference in **BOSC** to a “close-fitting cloth cap” are the only references to the **“deerstalker”** which Sidney Paget depicted Holmes and which became his trademark. The **HOUN** also refers to a cloth cap but Paget drew a homburg.
- **“Penang lawyer”** A walking stick with a large round head and imported from Penang, an island off the west coast of Malaya. Origin of “lawyer” part is debatable. Could refer to “fire-dried” process in manufacturing or its being used to settle legal matters.
- **the “boss” of a shield** The convex projection in the center.

### Weapons

- **Small Surgeon’s Knife** - Which John Straker used in an attempt to cripple Silver Blaze, Col. Ross’s prized race horse
- **Heavy, Bulbous-Headed Cane** - Of Fitzroy Simmons, weighted with lead at the end, which Inspector Gregory thought Simpson used to murder John Straker.
- **Opium** - Mixed with curried mutton, which John Straker used to dope the stable boy, Ned Hunter.
- **Dog** - Which Silas Browne threatened to set on Holmes and Watson.
- **Watch Dog** - At King’s Pyland, which was set on Fitzroy Simpson, and which later gained eternal fame for doing nothing in the nighttime.
- **Threat** - Used by Holmes on Silas Brown, implicating the latter in the illegal possession of Silver Blaze.

### Interesting Stuff

Doyle received a lot of criticism not knowing the rules and procedures of the horse racing industry. Later, in his autobiography, *Memories and Adventures* he wrote . . .

“Sometimes I have got upon dangerous ground where I have taken risks, through my own want of knowledge of the correct atmosphere. I have, for example, never been a racing man, and yet I ventured to write “Silver Blaze”, in which the mystery depends upon the laws of training and racing. ... [In that story] my ignorance [of those laws] cries aloud to heaven.

I read an excellent and damaging criticism of the story in some sporting paper, written clearly by a man who/did/know, in which he explained the exact penalties which would have come upon every one concerned if they had acted as I described. Half would have been in jail and the other half warned off the turf forever.”

**Frank Mentzel**