



The Memoirs of Sherlock Holmes

Adventure XV -- The Adventure of Silver Blaze

With this story, we enter into the Memoirs of Sherlock Holmes, nearly one quarter of the way through our current Canonical round of discussion on the Hounds. And Silver Blaze is one of the great stories, isn't it? Holmes is in top form as to both brilliance of mind and quirkiness of temperament. And of course this is the story that contains one of his most memorable quotations – the wonderful incident of the dog in the nighttime! Which brings us to this week's comments and questions from me. I thought I would try something a little different, just for fun. To do this, I had to leave out certain other points that may be of interest to some of the Hounds. But there's many a covert to be drawn, so if you want to follow another scent . . . go for it!



The Silver Herrings: One of the things that makes the solution to "Silver Blaze" so wonderful is that there is no shortage of alternative suspects and motives for the murder of John Straker. To consider these "silver herrings" in their proper perspective, I would like to try an experiment. Let us suppose for a moment that the horse didn't do it. Well, even Sherlock Holmes could make a mistake now and then, and if he got it wrong in this case, who was going to come forward to tell him so? The attorney for the horse?

To simplify the exercise, however, let us assume that John Straker did lead Silver Blaze out of his stable and into the hollow that night in order to fix the outcome of the Wessex Cup (or Plate). The question is: if the murderer wasn't Silver Blaze, then who really killed Straker and why? Make your choice and give your reasons, and in the process we can talk about any and all the things that are fishy on the Canonical turf. Here are some suspects, but please feel free to name your own favorite person and circumstance:

Mrs. Straker. Her face was "stamped with the print of a recent horror." Was it grief? Or guilt? How

much did she know about her husband's extramarital escapades? Did she follow him out to the stable that night, thinking he was keeping a rendezvous with the other woman?

Those gypsies. Is it possible that they were members of the same band or family that used to pal around with Grimesby Roylott at Stoke Moran? Perhaps they had hooked up with yet another bad egg – one who might be willing to “fence” a valuable racehorse for them if they gave him a generous cut of the profits.

Silas Brown. He was known to have some big bets riding on the race, and he didn't get along with Straker. Perhaps while he was walking on the moor that night, Brown saw Straker's candle — that wonderful candle that stayed burning even in the heavy rain — and then . . . ?

Fitzroy Simpson. Just because he was the one arrested by the official police doesn't mean he was innocent! Consider the business with the ten-pound note that was found in his pocket. He wanted to give the money to the stable boy, and he was willing to pay Edith Baxter, the maid, to deliver the cash. But what good would the money have done if the boy didn't know why he was getting it? Inference: the stable lad, Ned Hunter, knew exactly what the money was for. Simpson and Hunter were cooking up their own plot to fix the race. What happened when Simpson found that Straker was doing some fixing of his own?

And don't forget Colonel Ross, Inspector Gregory, Edith Baxter, and the sheep, who had as much reason as anyone at King's Pyland to wish Straker dead! And by the way, is it possible that “Ned” Hunter was Violet Hunter with her hair cut even shorter? And what was she doing at King's Pyland?

Rosemary Michaud