

THE CASE OF THE JEWISH PAWNBROKER or How Sherlock Holmes Got His Violin

by Carl Heifetz

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Dr. Watson has briefly related, in his account of *The Adventure of the Cardboard Box*, how Mr. Sherlock Holmes acquired his valuable and so loved Stradivarius violin.

In this well-known narrative, which is documented on page 894 of the "Doubleday Edition" of *The Complete Sherlock Holmes*, the following statement appears, "We had a pleasant little meal together, during which Holmes would talk about nothing but violins, narrating with great exultation how he had purchased his own Stradivarius, which was worth at least five hundred guineas, at a Jew broker's in Tottenham Court Road for fifty-five shillings."

Recently, the phone lines have been abuzz with several theories that have been espoused by members of "The Hounds of the Internet" regarding Jews in the Canon and how it was that Mr. Sherlock Holmes got his Stradivarius so cheaply by putting one over on the unwitting Jewish pawnbroker.

To set the record straight once and for all, let me tell you the real "emmus" about that deal.

I got it from my second cousin, Moishe the bank president, who

comes from a long line of money lenders and pawnbrokers.

In fact, one of his ancestors even loaned money to Dr. Watson's older brother on a watch deal, but that's another story.

Anyway, according to Moishe's recollection from talks at a family meeting, one day Sherlock Holmes was disguised: as an orthodox Jewish money lender and pawnbroker.

Why, we don't know.

The kibitzers say that he was trying to entice Moriarty's henchmen to use his services to fence some hot diamonds during the time when Christmas and Chanukah coincided, and some folks were out looking for some hot rocks to give to their madels.

True? Who knows, but it sounds good.

Anyway, Mr. Holmes, dressed in Chasidic Jewish regalia - yarmulke, tsitsis, full beard, black hat and coat, all the stuff - goes walking by the local shul just when the shamus is trying to round up one more guy for a minyan.

Can Sherlock Holmes refuse?

No orthodox Jew would think of it.

In fact, he would be honored by the invitation.

How Mr. Holmes bluffed his way through the mincha I don't know.

What an actor!!!

Anyway, the pawnbroker, Schmulie, sees this new guy as a catch for his older, still unmarried daughter Rachel.

What son-in-law material!

A prosperous frume Jew new to the area, who has not yet a wife found?

So Schmulie brings his new found friend over to his shop for a look see and for Rachel to check him out on the sly.

What does Holmes spot but the rare Strad just sitting there big as life.

Holmes' eyes light up when he sees the fiddle and Schmulie's mind starts clicking.

You get the picture?

Schmulie ain't no fool.

He's been in business for a long time, and his landsman, Karp the

Gypsy fiddler, last week set him straight right away on the real value of this instrument.

But, since Schmulie only advanced a fraction of its value on the fiddle, he considers it a good investment to keep the new guy happy and around.

Guess who helps Sherlock Holmes with his purchase, flashing her smile and bright teeth, Rachel, who else?

She takes a shine to this guy right away.

Guess who is oblivious to what transpires, the usually hep Sherlock Holmes.

Well, at least Sherlock Holmes gets a deal on the fiddle and the shamus has enough guys for the minyan.

Schmulie, what does he get but a good laugh at himself when he reads about the episode in the *Strand* in 1893?

And Rachel realizes that there is nothing wrong with her charms.

This guy doesn't go for any dames, except that uppity Jewish babe from New Jersey, Irene the opera singer.

All's well that ends well on a Chanukah a long time ago.

I hope that this lays to rest all of the fruity notions of how Sherlock Holmes took the Jew pawnbroker to the cleaners one day during the holiday season.

