

part one

I visited my friend Sherlock Holmes on the second morning of Christmas. When I arrived he was sitting in front of the fire, wearing his purple dressing-gown. Next to the sofa was a wooden chair, and on the chair was a dirty old hat. A magnifying glass and a forceps were on the chair, so the hat was probably part of one of Holmes' investigations.

'You are busy,' I said. 'Perhaps I interrupt you.'

'Not at all,' he replied, and indicated the hat. 'The problem is very simple, but it is still interesting and maybe even instructive.'

I sat down in an armchair and warmed my hands in front of the fire because it was very cold outside.

'I imagine,' I said, 'that this hat is connected with a terrible crime.'

'No, no. No crime,' said Sherlock Holmes, laughing. 'It is only one of those strange things that happens when four million human beings live within the small area of a city. With so many people, every imaginable combination of events is possible, and sometimes you can find a problem that is striking and strange but not criminal.'

'Do you know Peterson, the commissionaire?'

'Yes.'

'This trophy' belongs to him.'

'It is his hat?'

'No, no. He found it. Its owner is unknown. Look at it carefully, and not as a dirty old hat, but as an intellectual problem. It arrived here on Christmas morning together with a good fat goose. That goose is probably cooking at Peterson's house at this very moment.'

'These are the facts. About four o'clock on Christmas morning Peterson was returning from a party along Tottenham Court Road. In front of him he saw a tall man carrying a white goose. Then he saw some men attack the tall man. One of the attackers knocked his hat off, so the man lifted his walking stick to defence himself. But when he lifted the stick he broke a shop window by mistake. Peterson ran to help the man, but when the man saw Peterson with his commissionaire uniform, he thought he was a policeman, and he ran away and so did the attackers. Peterson was there all alone with the hat and the goose.'

'Of course, Peterson then returned the goose to its owner,' I said.

'No,' replied Holmes, 'that is the problem. It is true that "For Mrs Henry Baker" was written on a small card attached to the leg of the goose, and that the initials "H.B." are written on the lining of the hat. But there are thousands of Bakers and hundreds of Henry Bakers in London.'

'What, then, did Peterson do?'

'He brought both the goose and the hat to me on Christmas morning, because he knows that I am interested in even the smallest problems. I kept the goose until this morning and then I gave it to Peterson to cook for dinner.'

'Did the man who lost the goose put a notice in the newspaper?'

'No.'

'Then how can you discover who he is?' I asked.

'From his hat,' replied Holmes.

'You are joking! What can you learn from this dirty, old hat?'

'Here is my magnifying glass,' replied Holmes. 'You know my methods. Look at the

hat and see what you can discover about the identity of the man.'

I picked up the hat and looked at it carefully. It was a very ordinary round black hat. It was very worn and inside I could see the initials 'H.B.' There was a hole in the brim for the hat-securer, but the elastic was missing. It was very dusty and spotted in several places, but the owner had tried to cover these spots with black ink.

'I can see nothing,' I said, and gave the hat to Holmes.

'On the contrary, Watson, you can see everything, but you do not reason with what you see.'

'Then please tell me what you can deduce from this hat,' I said.

'Well,' said Holmes as he looked at the hat carefully, 'I can see that the man was highly intellectual, and that three years ago he had enough money, but recently he has had difficulties with money. He had foresight in the past, but much less now, which means he has some problem, probably drink. This is probably the reason why his wife has stopped loving him-'

'My dear Holmes!'

'He has, however, kept some self-respect,' continued Holmes. 'He stays at home and goes out very little, he is totally out of training, is middle-aged, has grey hair, which has been recently cut, and he uses lime-cream. These are the main facts. Also, I do not think he has gas lighting in his house.'

'You are certainly joking, Holmes.'

'Not at all. Don't you understand how I inferred these things?'

'I am certain that I am very stupid,' I replied, 'but I can't follow your reasoning. For example, how did you deduce that this man was an intellectual?'

To answer me Holmes put the hat on his head. The hat was too big for him and covered his eyes.

'It's a question of volume,' said Holmes. 'If a man has such a big brain, he must have something in it.'

'How do you know he has less money now than in the past?'

'This kind of hat first came out three years ago. It is a hat of the very best quality. If this man had enough money to buy such an expensive hat three years ago, but he has not bought another hat since then, then it is clear that he has much less money now.'

'Well, that is clear enough, certainly. But how about the foresight?'

Sherlock Holmes laughed. 'Here is the foresight,' he said, pointing at the hat-securer. 'Hat-securers are never sold with hats. This means that he ordered it, which is a certain sign of foresight. But since he has not replaced the broken elastic, this means that he has less foresight than before. But he has tried to hide some of the spots on his hat with ink which means he has not completely lost his self-respect.'

'Your reasoning is certainly very good,' I said.

'That he is middle-aged, that his hair is grey, that his hair has been recently cut and that he uses lime-cream can all be seen by looking closely at the inside of the hat. With the magnifying glass you can see the partially grey hairs cut by a barber's scissors. They slick to the hat and there is the distinct odour of lime-cream. Also, you will observe that the dust on the hat is the soft, brown dust you find in houses, not the hard, grey dust you find in the streets. This means that the hat is kept inside the house most of the time, and that he doesn't go out very often. Also you can see the sweat stain on the inside of the hat, which means he perspired a lot. A man who perspires so much can't be in the best of training.'

'But his wife - you said that she stopped loving him.'

'This hat has not been brushed for weeks. When a man's wife lets him go out in such bad condition it means that she doesn't love him anymore.'

'But he could be a bachelor,' I said.

'No, he was bringing the goose to make peace with his wife. Do you remember the card on its leg?'

'You have an answer for everything. But how did you deduce that he doesn't have gas lighting in his house?'

'Well, if you saw one or two wax stains on a hat, it could be by chance. But I can see at least five on this hat, which means that this man must use candles very frequently.'

'Well, it is very ingenious,' I said laughing, 'but since a crime has not been committed, all this seems to be a waste of time.'

part two

Sherlock Holmes had opened his mouth to reply, when the door opened and Peterson, the commissionaire rushed in. He looked incredibly shocked.

'The goose, Mr Holmes! The goose, sir!' he cried.

'What? Has it returned to life and flown out of your kitchen window?' said Holmes.

'Look here, sir! Look what my wife found in its stomach!' He showed us a shiny blue stone in his hand.

'By Jove, Peterson,' said Holmes, 'this is a treasure! Do you know what you have got?'

'A diamond, sir! A precious stone! It cuts glass like butter.'

'It is more than a precious stone. It's the precious stone.'

'Not the Countess of Morcar's blue carbuncle 1 that was stolen?' I cried.

'Precisely so,' responded Holmes, 'and here is the newspaper article that tells the story:

Hotel Cosmopolitan Jewel Robbery

John Homer, 26-year-old plumber, has been arrested for stealing the famous blue carbuncle from the Countess of Morear.

James Ryder, an attendant at the hotel, said that he had sent Horner to the Countess' room on the day of the robbery to repair a bar of the grate. Ryder said that he stayed with Horner for a few minutes, but then he had to leave. When Ryder returned he saw that somebody had forced open the Countess' bureau. Ryder called the police and the police arrested Horner that same evening. Catherine Cusack, the Countess' maid said that she heard Ryder call for help. She ran into the room and saw the same things that Ryder described to the police. In addition, the police discovered that Horner had already been charged with robbery in the past, but Horner says that in this case he is innocent. His trial will be soon.

'Hum! So much for 1 the police report,' said Holmes throwing the paper on a chair. 'You see, Watson, our little deductions about the hat have become much more important and less innocent. Here is the stone: the stone came from the goose, and the goose came from Mr Henry Baker, the gentleman with the bad hat which we examined so carefully.'

Now we must discover Mr Baker's part in this mystery. To find him, the simplest thing is to put an advertisement in the newspaper.'

'What will you say?' I asked.

'Well,' said Holmes, "'Found at the corner of Goodge Street a goose and a black hat. Mr Henry Baker can have them if he comes to 221b Baker Street at 6.30 this evening.'"

Then Holmes sent Peterson to buy another goose to give to Baker if he came, and to put the advertisement in all the newspapers. I left to work for the day.

That evening when I returned, I saw a tall man wearing a Scotch hat waiting outside Holmes house. We entered together.

'Mr Henry Baker, I believe,' said Holmes when he saw us. 'Please sit by the fire and get warm. Ah, Watson, you have come at the right time. Is this your hat, Mr Baker?'

'Yes, sir, that is certainly my hat.'

'We have kept your things,' said Holmes, 'but we had eaten the goose.'

'You ate it' said our visitor with excitement, 'Yes, it was going to go bad, but I bought you another goose. It is over there, and I think it is just as good.'

'Oh, certainly, certainly!' answered Mr Baker with relief.

'Oh course,' said Holmes, 'we have the feathers, logs and stomach of your bird if you want them.'

The man laughed loudly. 'Perhaps I could keep them to remember my adventure, but, no, I don't need them. Thank you, but I will take this goose and go.'

'There is your hat, then, and there is your bird,' said Holmes. 'By the way, I could you tell me where you got your goose from? It was a splendid bird, and I would like to get another one like it.'

'Certainly, sir,' said Mr Baker, 'I got it at the Alpha Inn near the Museum. You see, the owner of the inn, Mr Windigate, started a goose-club. Each week we gave him a few pence, and then at Christmas we received a goose.'

After this Mr Henry Baker picked up his hat and goose, and left.

'So much for Mr Henry Baker,' said Holmes when Baker had gone.

We decided to go immediately to the Alpha Inn to investigate the goose. At the Alpha Inn we discovered that the goose had come from a salesman called Mr Breckinridge in Covent Garden. So, once again, Holmes and I put on our coats and walked to Covent Garden to talk to Mr Breckinridge.

'Remember,' said Holmes as we walked to Covent Garden, 'at one end of this chain of events we have a simple goose, but at the other end of the chain there is a man who will go to prison for seven years if we cannot show that he is innocent.'

We soon found Mr Breckinridge's stall, I and Holmes asked him about his geese. I was surprised when Mr Breckinridge replied angrily to Holmes' questions.

'I have had enough. I am tired of people asking me "Where are the geese?" and "Who did you sell the geese to?" and "How much money do you want for the geese?" Enough!'

With a little bit of difficulty, Holmes finally got the information we needed: the geese had come from Mrs Oakshott, 117 Brixton Road. We were walking away when we heard shouting from Mr Breckinridge's stall. We turned round and saw a little man in front of the stall.

'I've had enough of you and your geese! If you come here again, my dog will attack you!' shouted Mr Breckinridge at the little man.

The little man started walking away, and Holmes and I went after him. Holmes put

his hand on the man's shoulder. The little man turned around and looked frightened. He said, 'Who are you? What do you want?'

'Excuse me,' said Holmes, 'but I heard you talking to the goose salesman, and I think I can help you.'

'You? Who are you? How could you know anything about the matter?'

'My name is Sherlock Holmes. It is my business to know what other people don't know.'

'But do you know anything about this?'

'Excuse me, I know everything about this. You are trying to find some geese which were sold by Mrs Oakshott, of Brixton Road, to a salesman called Breckinridge, who then sold them to Mr Windigate of the Alpha Inn, who then gave one of them to a member of his goose-club called Mr Henry Baker.'

'You are the man I wanted to meet,' said the little man, whose name, as we then discovered was John Ryder. Yes, John Ryder, the man who had called the police to report the stolen blue carbuncle. We then returned to Holmes' house to discuss the matter in front of a warm fire.

'Here we are!' said Holmes happily, as we entered his room. 'Now do you want to know what happened to those geese?'

'Yes, sir,' replied Ryder.

'But you really want to know what happened to that goose - the white one with a black bar across its tail.'

Ryder shook with emotion. 'Oh sir,' he cried, 'where did it go?'

'It came here.'

'Here?'

'Yes, and it was an incredible bird. I am not surprised that you want to find that goose. It laid an egg after it died - the brightest little blue egg that you have ever seen. I have it here in my museum.'

Our visitor stood up and then almost fell down. Holmes took out the blue carbuncle, and Ryder stared at it. He did not know if he should say it was his or not.

'The game is up, Ryder. I know almost exactly what happened. Because you worked at the Hotel Cosmopolitan you knew that the Countess of Morcar had the blue carbuncle in her room.'

'It was the Countess' maid, Catherine Cusack, who told me about it.'

'I see,' continued Holmes, 'so you and Catherine Cusack broke the grate in the Countess' room so that Horner had to come and repair it. You knew that Horner had had a part in a robbery before so that he would be blamed for this one. Then, when Horner had finished repairing the grate, you called the police and the unfortunate man was arrested. You then...'

Ryder threw himself onto the rug and held onto Holmes' knees, 'For God's sake have mercy! Think of my father! Think of mother! It would break their hearts.'

'Get back into your chair!' said Holmes sternly. 'It is easy to say that now, but you did not think of this poor Horner before.'

'I will go away, Mr Holmes, and without my testimony Horner will be free.'

'Hum! We will talk about that next,' said Holmes. 'And now tell us how the blue carbuncle came into the goose, and how the goose came into the open market, Tell us the truth because that is your only chance not to go to prison.'

Ryder moved his tongue over his dry lips and began his story.

I will tell you exactly what happened. After I had the blue carbuncle I was terrified. I did not know where to go, I thought I saw the police everywhere. Finally I decided to go to my sister's. My sister married a man called Oakshott and lives on Brixton Road, where she fattens geese for the market. When I arrived she asked me what was wrong. I told her that I was upset about the robbery at the hotel.

Then I went out into the backyard where the geese are, and smoked a pipe. I had a friend called Maudsley who had been in prison. He had told me how thieves sold stolen property, so I decided to go to him with the blue carbuncle. However, I did not know how I could carry the blue carbuncle to his house. Then I had the idea to force one of the geese to swallow the stone. My sister had told me that I could have one of the geese for Christmas. So I caught one of the geese - a big white one with a barred tail, and forced open its beak and pushed the stone in with my finger. The goose then swallowed the stone. Then I told my sister that I wanted my Christmas goose then. She thought it was a bit strange, but in the end she said I could have the goose.

Unfortunately, while I was talking to my sister the goose escaped and went in the middle of the flock with the other geese. I caught it again, killed it and took it to my friend Maudsley. I told him the story. We then cut open the goose, but we could not find the stone! I ran back to my sister, and asked her if there were any other white geese with barred tails. She said that there were two other ones, but she had sold them to the dealer called Breckinridge of Covent Garden.

I went to him, and he told me that he had sold them all. You heard him tonight. Now I will be considered a thief, and I have not even touched the blue carbuncle. God help me!

There was a moment of silence, and then Holmes got up and opened the door.

'Get out!' shouted Holmes.

'What sir? Oh thank you!' cried Ryder.

'No more words. Get out!'

And there were no more words. Ryder ran out of the room and out of the house.

'After all, Watson,' said Holmes, reaching for his pipe, 'if the police can't catch their own criminals, I don't have to do it for them. Also this Ryder will never commit another crime again. He is too frightened. Besides, this is the season of forgiveness. Chance has given us an incredibly interesting little problem, and its solution should satisfy us. And now, Doctor, we shall begin another investigation in which a bird is also the most important part: our dinner.

- THE END -

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