

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle
The Blue Carbuncle

Retold by A L Stringer



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- bold text for words already explained
- full summary at the end of the story
- key points at the end of the story
- full word list at the end of the book

Contents

| | |
|---------------------------|----|
| <i>Introduction</i> | 1 |
| <i>The Blue Carbuncle</i> | 4 |
| <i>Word list</i> | 41 |

Introduction

Sherlock Holmes

Sherlock Holmes is a fictional detective created by the British author and former doctor, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle (1859–1930). He first appeared in 1887.

Holmes lives in a flat in Baker Street, London, with his friend, Dr Watson. He works because he enjoys the mental exercise of solving mysteries rather than for money and he carries out investigations only if he thinks they are interesting.

He is best known for his powers of logical reasoning¹, his ability to use disguises, and his forensic skills.² (He is the author of a book on different types of cigar ash).³ According to Conan Doyle, the character was based on real doctors he had known in Edinburgh, where he was a medical student in the late 1870s.

Holmes is an interesting character because his personality has many contradictions.⁴ He is very methodical⁵ in his work but untidy in his private life: he keeps his tobacco in the end of a slipper,⁶ and his letters, which he doesn't answer, are stuck by a knife to the fireplace. He is a man of science but also a heavy smoker. He is extremely hard working when he is on a case, but when he has nothing to do he is bored and lazy.

¹**logical reasoning** *noun, uncountable* process of thinking about something intelligently in a series of steps in order to understand it

²**forensic** *noun, adjective* using scientific methods to solve crimes

³**cigar ash** *noun, countable* the grey-white material that is left at the end of a **cigar** after it has burnt

⁴**contradiction** *noun, countable* containing two ideas that are opposite

⁵**methodical** *noun, adjective* doing things in a careful, ordered way

⁶**slipper** *noun, countable* soft shoe that you wear inside the house

Introduction

He is an expert in certain fields related to his detective work, but completely ignorant about many other things. He has an excellent understanding of chemistry, English law and past crime cases but knows nothing about literature, philosophy or politics. He once even claimed that he didn't know the earth revolved around the sun because it wasn't relevant to his work. His interests are mostly intellectual¹ but he also plays the violin and is an expert at boxing and sword fighting.

As a person, he often seems unemotional and cold, 'a thinking machine'. However, he gets excited when he is in the middle of an investigation and likes to show off his skills. He is happy when he can solve a case that has defeated² everybody else.

Holmes is a loner³ and has no time for social life. He is not married and has no interest in women. The only woman he admires is Irene Adler and that is because she manages to outwit him (*see A Scandal in Bohemia*). However, he is always charming to female clients and there is never any suggestion that he is gay.

Doctor Watson,

Most of the stories - including those in this collection - are told by his friend Dr John Watson. Watson is an army doctor who was wounded in Afghanistan and sent back to England to recover.

¹**intellectual** *adjective* relating to the use of the mind and the ability to think intelligently

²**defeat** *verb, transitive* to win against someone in a fight, competition etc. *passive voice* **be defeated by something** be unable to solve a problem, difficulty etc.

³**loner** *noun, countable* person who prefers to do things alone

Introduction

He meets Holmes when he is looking for a place to live and they agree to share a flat at 221B Baker Street. They become friends and Watson eventually becomes an unofficial assistant to Holmes and writes up his cases. Watson later marries and moves out of Baker Street but they stay in touch (see A Scandal in Bohemia) and after his wife dies, he returns to Baker Street to live with Holmes.

The Blue Carbuncle¹



I went to visit my friend Sherlock Holmes two days after Christmas and found him sitting on the sofa² wearing a purple dressing-gown.³ His pipe⁴ was on the coffee table and a pile of newspapers was next to him.

Beside the sofa was a wooden chair with a very dirty old hat hanging on the back. His magnifying glass⁵ was lying nearby and I guessed he'd been studying the hat.

¹ **carbuncle** *noun, countable* a valuable stone, usually red in colour

² **sofa** *noun, countable* long comfortable seat that two or three people can sit on

³ **dressing gown** *noun, countable* kind of loose coat that you wear indoors before you have put your day clothes on

⁴ **pipe** *noun, countable* An object that you use to smoke tobacco - Sherlock Holmes always smoked one

⁵ **magnifying glass** *noun, countable* piece of glass (lens) that makes things look bigger

The Blue Carbuncle

‘You’re busy,’ I said; ‘perhaps I’m disturbing you.’

‘Not at all. I’m glad to have a friend to discuss this with,’ he said, looking at the hat. ‘It’s not a very important case, but there are some interesting points and we might learn something from it.’

I sat down in his chair and warmed my hands in front of the fire. The weather was very cold and the windows were covered with ice. ‘I suppose that hat is a clue¹ in some deadly crime that you’re trying to solve.’

‘No crime,’ said Sherlock Holmes, laughing. ‘Just one of those funny little incidents² that happen in large cities, where so many people live together in a small space. Many problems are just strange without being criminal.’

‘That’s true,’ I agreed. ‘Our last case didn’t involve anyone breaking the law.’

‘Exactly. You’re talking about the Irene Adler case. Well, I’m sure this one will be the same. Do you know Peterson, the security guard?’³

‘Yes.’

‘Well, this prize belongs to him.’

‘You mean it’s his hat.’

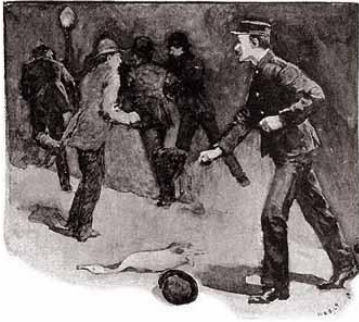
¹ **clue** *noun, countable* piece of information etc. that helps someone solve a mystery, crime etc.

² **incident** *noun, countable* something that happens - strange, interesting, unusual etc.

³ **security guard** *noun, countable* someone who guards a building, bank, construction site etc.

The Blue Carbuncle

‘Not exactly. He found it. We don’t know who it belongs to. But please, don’t look at it as a dirty old hat. It’s an intellectual¹ problem. First, let me tell you how it got here. It arrived on Christmas morning, with a good fat goose,² which is probably roasting³ in Peterson’s oven⁴ right now. The facts are these: about four o’clock on Christmas morning, Peterson, who is a very honest man, was walking home from a small party. In front of him, in the street light, he saw a tallish⁵ man carrying a white goose over his shoulder.



When they reached the end of the street, an argument started between this tall stranger and a group of yobs.⁶ One of these yobs knocked the man’s hat off. He raised his stick to defend himself and accidentally smashed⁷ the shop window behind him. Peterson came forward to protect the stranger from his attackers. However, the man was obviously worried about breaking the

¹ **intellectual** *adjective* relating to intelligent thought

² **goose** *noun, countable* large white or grey bird that can be eaten

³ **roast** *verb, transitive* way of cooking meat in an oven or over a fire

⁴ **oven** *noun, countable* piece of cooking equipment heated by gas, electricity or fire - food can be cooked inside

⁵ **tallish** *adjective* quite tall. The suffix -ish means 'quite' when added to an adjective.

⁶ **yob** *noun, countable* rude, violent person

⁷ **smash** *verb, transitive* break glass, plates etc.

The Blue Carbuncle

window. He must have thought Peterson was a policeman as he was wearing his uniform,¹ so he dropped the goose and ran off down a side street. The jobs also ran away and Peterson was left with this old hat and a delicious-looking Christmas goose.’

‘Didn’t he give it back to its owner?’

‘My dear Watson, that’s the problem. It’s true that there was a small card tied to the bird’s left leg with, “For Mrs Henry Baker,” written on it; and it’s also true that the initials “H. B.” can be seen inside this hat. But as there are thousands of Bakers, and hundreds of Henry Bakers in this city, it’s impossible to know which one.’

‘What did Peterson do?’

‘He brought both the hat and the goose round to me on Christmas morning, as he knows I find even the smallest problems interesting. We kept the goose until this morning, when there were signs that it should be eaten immediately. Peterson has taken it home while I still have the hat of the unknown gentleman who lost his Christmas dinner.’²

‘And what are you going to do with it?’

‘I’m going to find the owner.’

‘How on earth are you going to do that?’

¹ **uniform** *noun, countable* special clothes worn by members of some organizations - police officers, soldiers, fire fighters etc.

² **Christmas dinner** *noun, countable* In England today, turkey is the most popular choice for Christmas dinner. However, this is a fairly modern tradition. In the 19th century, other birds such as geese were eaten, and long ago, all kinds of meat and fish were common

The Blue Carbuncle

‘By seeing what I can deduce.’¹

‘From his hat?’

‘Exactly.’

‘You’re joking. What can you learn from a dirty old hat?’

‘Here’s my **magnifying glass**. You know my methods. But how about you, Watson? What can you tell about the owner from this hat?’

I picked it up and turned it over. It was an ordinary black hat but in very bad condition. It was cracked² and covered in dust, and there were dirty marks in several places. Someone had tried to hide these by painting them with ink. The inside was lined³ with red silk⁴ but it was very discoloured.⁵ There was no maker’s name but, as Holmes had said, on one side there were the initials “H. B.”. I could also see that there had once been a loop⁶ to fix the hat to the head, but the elastic⁷ was missing.

‘I can see nothing,’ I said, handing it back to my friend.

¹ **deduce** *verb, transitive* to know something after thinking carefully about the fact

² **cracked** *adjective* damaged with lines on the surface but not yet broken

³ **lined** *adjective* with a **lining** *noun, countable* - cloth that is inside a piece of clothing

⁴ **silk** *noun, uncountable* very soft cloth made from thread produced by an insect, the silkworm

⁵ **discoloured** *adjective* no longer the proper colour

⁶ **loop** *noun, countable* piece of narrow material made into a round shape for hanging something

⁷ **elastic** *noun, uncountable* material that stretches; used in clothing

The Blue Carbuncle

‘I disagree, Watson. You can see everything. But you’re not thinking about what you see. You’re not making any **deductions**.’¹

‘Then please tell me what you can **deduce** from this hat?’

He picked it up and looked at it very carefully as he always did. ‘Some facts are fairly clear,’ he said, ‘and a few others are very likely if not certain. For example, anyone can see that the owner is intelligent and also that he’s been fairly rich within the last three years, but he’s lost a lot of money recently. He’s careful and likes to plan things, but less now than in the past. Perhaps he’s drinking² heavily. If you consider that he’s lost money, then that’s quite likely. It may also be the reason why his wife doesn’t love him any more.’

‘My dear Holmes!’

‘However, he still has some self-esteem,’³ he continued. ‘He’s a man who doesn’t take exercise, isn’t very fit and goes out rarely. He’s middle-aged, has curly⁴ hair and uses hair cream. And he’s had his hair cut within the last few days. These are the more obvious facts which we can tell from his hat. Oh

¹ **deduction** *noun, countable* knowledge that you get from logical thought

² **drink** *verb, transitive* drink alcoholic drinks, often too much

³ **self-esteem** *noun, uncountable* positive feelings about yourself

⁴ **curly** *adjective* not straight

The Blue Carbuncle

yes – one other thing, he probably doesn't have gas lighting¹ in his house.'

'You must be joking, Holmes!'

'Certainly not. Is it really possible that you can't see how I know, even though I've told you all this?'

'I'm sure I'm very stupid, but I'm afraid I don't follow. For example, how did you **deduce** that this man was intelligent?'

Holmes put the hat on his head. It was too big and covered his eyes. 'It's simply a question of size,' he said. 'A man with such a large head must surely have something inside it.'

'How about losing money?'

'This hat is three years old. I can tell that by the style. It's a very good quality hat. Look at the silk lining.² The man could afford to buy an expensive hat three years ago, but he hasn't bought a new one since then. Therefore, we can guess he has less money now than when he bought the hat.'

'Well, that's clear enough. But how about being careful and losing his **self-esteem**?'

Sherlock Holmes laughed. 'This is why he is careful,' he said pointing to the **loop** used to fix the hat to the head. 'They never sell hats with loops. You have to order the loop specially. If this man ordered one, it shows he had thought about the danger of

¹ **gas lighting** *noun, uncountable* in the 19th and early 20th centuries, gas was used to light homes and streets in many countries until it was replaced by electricity

² **lining** *noun, countable* - cloth that is inside a piece of clothing

The Blue Carbuncle

losing his hat in the wind. But since it's now broken and he hasn't bothered to replace it, we can guess he isn't as careful now as he was before. On the other hand, he's tried to hide some of these stains¹ with ink, so he hasn't completely lost his **self-esteem**.²

'That is believable.'

'As for the other points - that he's middle-aged, that his hair is curly, that it's recently been cut, and that he uses hair cream - we can see all these by looking closely at the **lining**. If you look through the **magnifying glass**, you will see a lot of small hairs cut by the hairdresser's scissors. The hairs are grey, they are sticking to the hat and there's a smell of hair cream. You should also look carefully at the dust.² This is not the thick dust you find in the street, it's the fine dust you find in the house, so clearly, the hat has been indoors most of the time. And finally, these marks on the inside show that the owner sweats³ a lot, so he can't be very fit.

'But his wife - you said that she didn't love him anymore.'

'This hat hasn't been brushed⁴ for weeks. If your hat was all dusty like this one, and if your wife allowed you to go out in

¹ **stain** *noun, countable* dirty mark made by liquid etc.

² **dust** *noun, uncountable* small pieces of dirt in the form of powder

³ **sweat** *verb, intransitive* when liquid comes from your skin when you are hot to cool you down

⁴ **brush** *verb, transitive* to clean something with a brush (the floor, teeth, clothes etc.)

The Blue Carbuncle

such a state, I would fear that your wife didn't love you either, Watson.'

'But he might be a bachelor.'¹

'No. He was bringing the goose home as a present for his wife. Remember the card on the bird's leg.'

'You have an answer to everything. But how on earth² can you tell that he doesn't have gas in his house?'

'There are five candle³ **stains** on the hat. Who would use a candle when they have gas?'

'Well, it's very clever,' I said, laughing; 'but as you said there hasn't been a crime, it all seems rather a waste of energy, doesn't it?'

Sherlock Holmes had opened his mouth to reply, when the door suddenly opened and Peterson, the **security guard**, rushed in with a look of amazement⁴ on his face.



'The goose, Mr Holmes! The goose, sir!' he said in excitement.

'What about it? Has it returned to life and flown away through the kitchen window?'

¹ **bachelor** *noun, countable* unmarried man

² **on earth** *phrase* used for emphasis in questions

³ **candle** *noun, countable* a piece of wax with a string in the centre that you burn to make light

⁴ **amazement** *noun, uncountable* great surprise

The Blue Carbuncle

‘Look here, sir! Look what my wife found in its stomach!’ In his hand there was a brilliant¹ blue stone about the size of a bean, but so pure² that it shone³ and twinkled⁴ like an electric spark.⁵ Sherlock Holmes sat up straight. ‘My god, Peterson!’ he said, ‘Do you know what it is?’

‘A diamond,⁶ sir? It cuts glass very easily.’

‘It’s more than a diamond. It is *the* diamond!’

‘Not Lady⁷ Morcar’s blue **carbuncle**!’ I said.

‘Exactly. The diamond that everyone is talking about. I’ve read about it in the newspapers every day this week. There’s no other stone like it in the world. She’s offering a reward⁸ of a thousand pounds but it’s probably worth twenty times that.

‘A thousand pounds! My God!’ Peterson sat down heavily in a chair and looked from one of us to the other.

‘It was lost at the Hotel Cosmopolitan, wasn’t it?’ I said.

¹ **brilliant** *adjective* (of light) very bright; (of person) very intelligent; (informal) very good, fantastic etc.

² **pure** *adjective* not mixed with anything; very clean; (of sound, light etc.) perfect

³ **shine** *verb, intransitive* produce light

⁴ **twinkle** *verb, intransitive* (of light) flash on and off in an attractive way (As in the children’s rhyme, ‘Twinkle, twinkle, little star’)

⁵ **spark** *noun, countable* flash of light made by electricity; small piece of burning wood, coal etc. that jumps out of the fire

⁶ **diamond** *noun, countable* very hard, clear gem stone used for jewellery. Extremely valuable

⁷ **Lady** title used for some female members of the British upper class

⁸ **reward** *noun, countable* something that somebody receives because they have done something good or helped someone