

Silver Blaze

Sherlock Holmes had been walking around the room all morning with his head bent down, smoking his pipe.¹ He refused to answer any of my questions but I could guess what he was thinking about. There was only one problem that would need all this concentration:² the disappearance of the famous racehorse,³ Silver Blaze, and the terrible murder of its trainer.⁴ It was in every newspaper in England, so when at last he looked up and said, ‘I am afraid I’ll have to go, Watson,’ I guessed immediately what he was talking about.

‘To Dartmoor,⁵ I suppose,’ I said. I knew that the horse had been stolen from stables⁶ on Dartmoor.

¹ **pipe** *noun, countable* An object that you use to smoke tobacco - Sherlock Holmes always smoked one

² **concentration** *noun, uncountable* from verb **concentrate** - to think very hard and carefully about something, giving it all your attention

³ **racehorse** *noun, countable* horse that can run very fast and takes part in competitions (races)

⁴ **trainer** *noun, countable* someone who teaches someone to do an activity, especially a sport

⁵ **Dartmoor** *place name* a wild, lonely place (moor) in the west of England where there are few houses or farms. Conan Doyle liked this location for his stories. The most famous Sherlock Holmes story, *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, also takes place here.

⁶ **stable** *noun, countable* place where horses are kept

Silver Blaze

‘Of course.’

‘I’ll be very happy to come with you if I won’t be in the way,’ I said.

‘My dear Watson, I’d be delighted if you came. And I don’t think you’ll waste your time as this case seems to be absolutely unique.¹ I think we have just enough time to catch the next train at Paddington.² I’ll tell you the details on the way. And bring your excellent binoculars³ with you.’

An hour later I was sitting in the corner of a first-class carriage speeding westwards towards Dartmoor and Sherlock Holmes was sitting opposite reading the latest news from the papers we had bought at Paddington. At last he put the papers down and offered me a cigar.⁴

‘I suppose you’ve read up on the murder of John Straker and the disappearance of Silver Blaze?’ he said.

‘I’ve seen what’s in the newspapers.’

‘We need to examine the existing evidence⁵ very carefully before we look for new information. So many people are making guesses about this case that it’s difficult to separate the

¹ **unique** *adjective* unusual or special; the only one that exists

² **Paddington** *place name* large railway station in London. Trains from here go to the west of England and Wales

³ **binoculars** *noun, countable* something you use to see things that are far away - i.e. they make small things look bigger. Binoculars have two lenses (pieces of glass), one for each eye

⁴ **cigar** *noun, countable* rolled tobacco leaves used for smoking; like a fat, brown cigarette but made without paper

⁵ **evidence** *noun, uncountable* information that shows that something is true or not true

Silver Blaze

facts from the theories¹ of reporters. On Tuesday evening I had requests for help from the owner of the horse, Colonel² Ross, and from Inspector³ Gregory, who is investigating the case.’

‘Tuesday evening!’ I said. ‘And now it’s Thursday morning. Why didn’t you go yesterday?’

‘I made a mistake, my dear Watson. I make more mistakes than people think. You see, I thought it was impossible that the most famous horse in England could be hidden for such a long time in a lonely place like **Dartmoor**. I expected to hear at any minute that he’d been found, and that the person who stole him was also the murderer of the **trainer**, John Straker. However, another day passed and nothing happened apart from the arrest⁴ of a young man, Fitzroy Simpson. So this morning I decided it was time to take action. Still, I don’t think yesterday was completely wasted.’

‘You have a **theory**, then?’

‘I understand the essential facts of the case. Let me tell them to you. Telling somebody else always makes the story clearer, and I can’t expect you to help if you don’t know what I’m thinking.’

¹ **theory** *noun, countable* an idea that explains why something happened or happens. It may or may not be true.

² **colonel** *noun, countable* army officer of quite high rank

³ **inspector** *noun, countable* senior police officer

⁴ **arrest** *verb, transitive* taken by the police to a police station for questioning

Silver Blaze

I made myself comfortable in my seat and lit my **cigar** while Holmes leaned forward and summarized¹ the story.

‘Silver Blaze has been the fastest **racehorse** in the country for five years. He’s won every prize there is for **Colonel** Ross, his lucky owner. Until he disappeared, he was 3-1 favourite² for the Wessex Cup race, which takes place next week.

‘Of course, if he wins, there are others who will lose a lot of money and have a good reason to try to stop him entering the race. As a result security was very tight³ at King's Pyland, the village on Dartmoor where the Colonel's **stables** are situated.

‘The **trainer**, John Straker, had worked for Colonel Ross for twelve years and was hard-working and honest, and so were the three stable boys. One of these boys sat up every night in the stable with the horse while the other two slept upstairs. John Straker was a married man and lived in a small house about two hundred metres from the stables. He had no children, one maid⁴, and was quite well-off.⁵

‘The countryside is very lonely here, but a kilometre to the north there are a few new houses that have been built recently for visitors. People like to come to **Dartmoor** for the fresh air.

¹ **summarize** *verb, transitive* to say the most important facts about something

² **favourite (race)** *noun, countable* the horse that most people think will win a race

³ **tight (security)** *adjective* very carefully controlled

⁴ **maid** *noun, countable* woman or girl servant

⁵ **well-off** *adjective* quite rich

Silver Blaze

The town of Tavistock¹ is about three kilometres to the west, and there is another racing stables, Mapleton, about three kilometres in the opposite direction. These stables are owned by Lord Backwater and managed by a man called Silas Brown. Other than this, the empty moor² stretches away in every direction. The only people are a few wandering gypsies.³



‘On the evening that the crime took place, the horses were exercised and fed as usual, and the stables were locked up at nine o’clock. Two of the stable boys had dinner at the **trainer's** house, while the third, Ned Hunter, remained on guard with the horse. Just after nine o’clock the **maid** took him his dinner, a plate of chicken curry.⁴ She carried a lamp⁵ with her as it was very dark and the path between the house and the stables ran across the open **moor**.

¹ **Tavistock** *place name* market town in the west of England

² **moor** *noun, countable* wild, open country, unsuitable for farming and having few trees

³ **gypsy** *noun, countable* group of people in Europe who came from India many years ago and traditionally travelled around the country from place to place

⁴ **curry** *noun, countable and uncountable* spicy Indian dish that can be made of different kinds of meat and vegetables

⁵ **lamp** *noun, countable* a small light that burns oil or gas that you can carry