

# The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes

## THE ADVENTURE OF THE BLUE CARBUNCLE. Continued

"Indeed! Whose, then?"  
 "Well, I got the two dozen from a salesman in Covent Garden."  
 "Indeed? I know some of them. Which was it?"  
 "Breckinridge is his name."  
 "Ah! I don't know him. Well, here's your good health landlord, and prosperity to your house. Good-night."  
 "Now for Mr. Breckinridge," he continued, buttoning up his coat as we came out into the frosty air. "Remember, Watson that though we have so homely a thing as a goose at one end of this chain, we have at the other a man who will certainly get seven years' penal servitude unless we can establish his innocence. It is possible that our inquiry may but confirm his guilt but, in any case, we have a line of investigation which has been missed by the police, and which a singular chance has placed in our hands. Let us follow it out to the bitter end. Faces to the south, then, and quick march!"  
 We passed across Holborn, down Endell Street, and so through a zigzag of slums to Covent Garden Market. One of the largest stalls bore the name of Breckinridge upon it, and the proprietor a horsy-looking man, with a sharp face and trim side-whiskers was helping a boy to put up the shutters.  
 "Good-evening. It's a cold night," said Holmes. The salesman nodded and shot a questioning glance at my companion.  
 "Sold out of geese, I see," continued Holmes, pointing at the bare slabs of marble.  
 "Let you have five hundred to-morrow morning."  
 "That's no good."  
 "Well, there are some on the stall with the gas-flare."  
 "Ah, but I was recommended to you."  
 "Who by?"  
 "The landlord of the Alpha."  
 "Oh, yes; I sent him a couple of dozen."  
 "Fine birds they were, too. Now where did you get them from?"  
 To my surprise the question provoked a burst of anger from the salesman.  
 "Now, then, mister," said he, with his head cocked and his arms akimbo, "what are you driving at? Let's have it straight, now."  
 "It is straight enough. I should like to know who sold you the geese which you supplied to the Alpha."  
 "Well then, I shan't tell you. So now!"  
 "Oh, it is a matter of no importance; but I don't know why you should be so warm over such a trifle."  
 "Warm! You'd be as warm, maybe, if you were as pestered as I am. When I pay good money for a good article there should be an end of the business; but it's 'Where are the geese?' and 'Who did you sell the geese to?' and 'What will you take for the geese?' One would think they were the only geese in the world, to hear the fuss that is made over them."  
 "Well, I have no connection with any other people who have been making inquiries," said Holmes carelessly. "If you won't tell us the bet is off, that is all. But I'm always ready to back my opinion on a matter of fowls, and I have a fiver on it that the bird I ate is country bred."  
 "Well, then, you've lost your fiver, for it's town bred," snapped the salesman.  
 "It's nothing of the kind."  
 "I say it is."  
 "I don't believe it."  
 "D'you think you know more about fowls than I, who have handled them ever since I was a nipper? I tell you, all those birds that went to



● Sir Arthur Conan Doyle

the Alpha were town bred."  
 "You'll never persuade me to believe that."  
 "Will you bet, then?"  
 "It's merely taking your money, for I know that I am right. But I'll have a sovereign on with you, just to teach you not to be obstinate."  
 The salesman chuckled grimly. "Bring me the books, Bill," said he.  
 The small boy brought round a small thin volume and a great greasy-backed one, laying them out together beneath the hanging lamp.  
 "Now then, Mr. Cocksure," said the salesman, "I thought that I was out of geese, but before I finish you'll find that there is still one left in my shop. You see this little book?"  
 "Well?"  
 "That's the list of the folk from whom I buy. D'you see? Well, then, here on this page are the country folk, and the numbers after their names are where their accounts are in the big ledger. Now, then! You see this other page in red ink? Well, that is a list of my town suppliers. Now, look at that third name. Just read it out to me."  
 "Mrs. Oakshott, 117, Brixton Road — 249," read Holmes.  
 "Quite so. Now turn that up in the ledger." Holmes turned to the page indicated. "Here you are, Mrs. Oakshott, 117, Brixton Road, egg and poultry supplier."  
 "Now, then, what's the last entry?"  
 "'December 22d. Twenty-four geese at 7s. 6d.'"  
 "Quite so. There you are. And underneath?"  
 "'Sold to Mr. Windigate of the Alpha, at 12s.'"  
 "What have you to say now?"  
 Sherlock Holmes looked deeply chagrined. He drew a sovereign from his pocket and threw it down upon the slab, turning away with the air of a man whose disgust is too deep for words. A few yards off he stopped under a

lamp-post and laughed in the hearty, noiseless fashion which was peculiar to him.  
 "When you see a man with whiskers of that cut and the 'Pink 'un' protruding out of his pocket, you can always draw him by a bet," said he. "I daresay that if I had put 100 pounds down in front of him, that man would not have given me such complete information as was drawn from him by the idea that he was doing me on a wager. Well, Watson, we are, I fancy, nearing the end of our quest, and the only point which remains to be determined is whether we should go on to this Mrs. Oakshott to-night, or whether we should reserve it for to-morrow. It is clear from what that surly fellow said that there are others besides ourselves who are anxious about the matter, and I should —"  
 His remarks were suddenly cut short by a loud hubbub which broke out from the stall which we had just left. Turning round we saw a little rat-faced fellow standing in the centre of the circle of yellow light which was thrown by the swinging lamp, while Breckinridge, the salesman, framed in the door of his stall, was shaking his fists fiercely at the cringing figure.  
 "I've had enough of you and your geese," he shouted. "I wish you were all at the devil together. If you come pestering me any more with your silly talk I'll set the dog at you. You bring Mrs. Oakshott here and I'll answer her, but what have you to do with it? Did I buy the geese off you?"  
 "No; but one of them was mine all the same," whined the little man.  
 "Well, then, ask Mrs. Oakshott for it."  
 "She told me to ask you."  
 "Well, you can ask the King of Proosia, for all I care. I've had enough of it. Get out of this!"

He rushed fiercely forward, and the inquirer flitted away into the darkness.  
 "Ha! this may save us a visit to Brixton Road," whispered Holmes. "Come with me, and we will see what is to be made of this fellow." Striding through the scattered knots of people who lounged round the flaring stalls, my companion speedily overtook the little man and touched him upon the shoulder. He sprang round, and I could see in the gas-light that every vestige of colour had been driven from his face.  
 "Who are you, then? What do you want?" he asked in a quivering voice.  
 "You will excuse me," said Holmes blandly, "but I could not help overhearing the questions which you put to the salesman just now. I think that I could be of assistance to you."  
 "You? Who are you? How could you know anything of the matter?"  
 "My name is Sherlock Holmes. It is my business to know what other people don't know."  
 "But you can know nothing of this?"  
 "Excuse me, I know everything of it. You are endeavouring to trace some geese which were sold by Mrs. Oakshott, of Brixton Road, to a salesman named Breckinridge, by him in turn to Mr. Windigate, of the Alpha, and by him to his club, of which Mr. Henry Baker is a member."  
 "Oh, sir, you are the very man whom I have longed to meet," cried the little fellow with outstretched hands and quivering fingers. "I can hardly explain to you how interested I am in this matter."  
 Sherlock Holmes hailed a four-wheeler which was passing. "In that case we had better discuss it in a cosy room rather than in this windswept market-place," said he. "But pray tell me, before we go farther, who it is that I have the pleasure of assisting."  
 The man hesitated for an instant. "My name is John Robinson," he answered with a sidelong glance.  
 "No, no; the real name," said Holmes sweetly. "It is always awkward doing business with an alias."  
 A flush sprang to the white cheeks of the stranger. "Well then," said he, "my real name is James Ryder."  
 "Precisely so. Head attendant at the Hotel Cosmopolitan. Pray step into the cab, and I shall soon be able to tell you everything which you would wish to know."  
 The little man stood glancing from one to the other of us with half-frightened, half-hopeful eyes, as one who is not sure whether he is on the verge of a windfall or of a catastrophe. Then he stepped into the cab, and in half an hour we were back in the sitting-room at Baker Street. Nothing had been said during our drive, but the high, thin breathing of our new companion, and the claspings and unclaspings of his hands, spoke of the nervous tension within him.  
 "Here we are!" said Holmes cheerily as we filed into the room. "The fire looks very seasonable in this weather. You look cold, Mr. Ryder. Pray take the basket-chair. I will just put on my slippers before we settle this little matter of yours. Now, then! You want to know what became of those geese?"  
 "Yes, sir."  
 "Or rather, I fancy, of that goose. It was one bird, I imagine in which you were interested — white, with a black bar across the tail."  
 Ryder quivered with emotion. "Oh, sir," he cried, "can you tell me where it went to?"  
 "It came here."  
 "Here?"  
 "Yes, and a most remarkable bird it proved. I don't wonder that you should take an interest in it. It laid an egg after it was dead — the

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