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THE RETURN OF SHERLOCK MOLMES ...

BY A. CONAN DOYLE

However, Lestrade was anxious to get his man into safe quarters, so within a few minutes our cab had been summoned and we were all four upon our way to London. Not a word would our captive say, but he glared at us from the shadow of his matted hair, and once when my hand was within his reach he snapped at it like a hungry wolf. We stayed long enough at the police station to learn that a search of his clothing revealed nothing save a few shillings and a long sheath knife. The handle of which bore copious traces of recent blood.

"That's all right," said Lestrade as we parted. "Hill knows all these gentry, and he will give a name to him. You'll find that my theory of the Mafia will work out all right. But I'm sure I am exceedingly obliged to you, Mr. Holmes, for the workmanlike way in which you laid hands upon him. I don't quite understand it all yet."

"I fear it is rather too late an hour for explanations," said Holmes. "Besides, there are one or two details which are not finished off, and it is one of those cases which are worth working out to the very end. If you will come round once more to my rooms at 6 o'clock tomorrow I think I shall be able to show you that even now you have not grasped the entire meaning of this business, which presents some features which make it absolutely original in the history of crime. If ever I permit you to chronicle any more of my little problems, Watson, I foresee that you will enlarge your pages by an account of the singular adventure of the Napoleonic busts."

When we met again next evening Lestrade was furnished with much information concerning our prisoner. His name, it appeared, was Beppo, second name unknown. He was a well known ne'er-do-well among the Italian colony. He had once been a skillful sculptor and had earned an honest living, but he had taken to evil courses and twice already been in jail—once for a petty theft and once, as we had already heard, for stabbing a fellow countryman. He could talk English perfectly well. His reasons for destroying the busts were still unknown, and he refused to answer any questions upon the subject, but the police had discovered that these same busts might very well have been made by his own hands, since he was engaged in this class of work at the establishment of Gelder & Co.

To all this information, much of which we already knew, Holmes listened with polite attention, but I, who knew him so well, could clearly see that his thoughts were elsewhere, and I detected a mixture of mingled uneasiness and expectation beneath that mask which he was wont to assume. At last he started in his chair, and his eyes brightened. There had been a ring at the bell. A minute later we heard steps upon the stairs, and an elderly, red faced man with grizzled side whiskers was ushered in. In his right hand he carried an old fashioned carpetbag, which he placed upon the table.

"Is Mr. Sherlock Holmes here?" My friend bowed and smiled. "Mr. Sandford of Reading, I suppose?" said he.

"Yes, sir; I fear that I am a little late, but the trains were awkward. You wrote to me about a bust that is in my possession."

"Exactly." "I have your letter here. You said, 'I desire to possess a copy of the bust of Napoleon and am prepared to pay you £10 for the one which is in your possession.' Is that right?"

"Certainly." "I was very much surprised at your letter, for I could not imagine how you knew that I owned such a thing."

"Of course you must have been surprised, but the explanation is very simple. Mr. Harding of Harding Bros."

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STANTON'S PAIN RELIEF.

said that they had sold you their last copy, and he gave me your address."

"Oh, that was it, was it? Did he tell you what I paid for it?"

"No, he did not." "Well, I am an honest man, though not a very rich one. I only gave 15 shillings for the bust, and I think you ought to know that before I take £10 from you."

"I am sure the scruple does you honor, Mr. Sandford. But I have named that price, so I intend to stick to it."

"Well, it is very handsome of you, Mr. Holmes. I brought the bust up with me, as you asked me to do. Here it is!" He opened his bag, and at last we saw placed upon our table a complete specimen of that bust which we had already seen more than once in fragments.

Holmes took a paper from his pocket and laid a ten pound note upon the table.

"You will kindly sign that paper, Mr. Sandford, in the presence of these witnesses. It is simply to say that you transfer every possible right that you ever had in the bust to me. I am a methodical man, you see, and you never know what turn events might take afterwards. Thank you, Mr. Sandford. Here is your money, and I wish you a very good evening."

When our visitor had disappeared Sherlock Holmes' movements were such as to rivet our attention. He began by taking a clean white cloth from a drawer and laying it over the table. Then he placed his newly acquired bust in the center of the cloth. Finally he picked up his hunting crop and struck Napoleon a sharp blow on the top of the head. The figure broke into fragments, and Holmes bent eagerly over the shattered remains. Next instant,



HE PICKED UP HIS HUNTING CROP AND STRUCK NAPOLEON.

with a loud shout of triumph, he held up one splinter, in which a round, dark object was fixed like a plum in a pudding.

"Gentlemen," he cried, "let me introduce you to the famous black pearl of the Borgias."

Lestrade and I sat silent for a moment, and then with a spontaneous impulse, we both broke out clapping, as at the well wrought crisis of a play. A flush of color sprang to Holmes' pale cheeks, and he bowed to us like the master dramatist who receives the homage of his audience. It was at such moments that for an instant he ceased to be a reasoning machine and betrayed his human love for admiration and applause. The same singularly proud and reserved nature which turned away with disdain from popular notoriety was capable of being moved to its depths by spontaneous wonder and praise from a friend.

"Yes, gentlemen," said he, "it is the most famous pearl now existing in the world, and it has been my good fortune, by a connected chain of inductive reasoning, to trace it from the Prince of Colonna's bedroom at the Ducre hotel, where it was lost, to the interior of this, the last of the six busts of Napoleon which were manufactured by Gelder & Co. of Stepney. You will remember, Lestrade, the sensation caused by the disappearance of this valuable jewel and the vain efforts of the London police to recover it. I was myself consulted upon the case, but I was unable to throw any light upon it. Suspicion fell upon the maid of the princess, who was an Italian, and it was proved that she had a brother in London, but we failed to trace any connection between them. The maid's name was Lucretia Venetia, and there is no doubt in my mind that this Pietro who was murdered two nights ago was the brother. I have been looking up the dates in the old files of the paper, and I find that the disappearance of the pearl was exactly two days before the arrest of Beppo for some crime of violence—an event which took place in the factory of Gelder & Co. at the very moment when these busts were being made,



He carried an old fashioned carpetbag.

Now you clearly see the sequence of events, though you see them, of course, in the inverse order to the way in which they presented themselves to me. Beppo had the pearl in his possession. He may have stolen it from Pietro, he may have been Pietro's confederate, he may have been the go-between of Pietro and his sister. It is of no consequence to us which is the correct solution.

"The main fact is that he had the pearl, and at that moment, when it was on his person, he was pursued by the police. He made for the factory in which he worked, and he knew that he had only a few minutes in which to conceal this enormously valuable prize, which would otherwise be found on him when he was searched. Six plaster casts of Napoleon were drying in the passage. One of them was still soft. In an instant Beppo, a skillful workman, made a small hole in the wet plaster, dropped in the pearl and with a few touches covered over the aperture once more. It was an admirable hiding place. No one could possibly find it. But Beppo was condemned to a year's imprisonment, and in the meanwhile his six busts were scattered over London. He could not tell which contained his treasure. Only

other. There only remained a single bust, the Reading one, and the pearl must be there. I bought it in your presence from the owner, and there it lies."

We sat in silence for a moment. "Well," said Lestrade, "I've seen you handle a good many cases, Mr. Holmes, but I don't know that I ever knew a more workmanlike one than that. We're not jealous of you at Scotland Yard. No, sir; we are very proud of you, and if you come down tomorrow there's not a man, from the oldest inspector to the youngest constable, who wouldn't be glad to shake you by the hand."

"Thank you," said Holmes. "Thank you." And as he turned away it seemed to me that he was more nearly moved by the softer human emotions than I had ever seen him. A moment later he was the cold and practical thinker once more. "Put the pearl in the safe, Watson," said he, "and get out the papers of the Conk-Singleton forgery case. Goodbye, Lestrade. If any little problem comes your way I shall be happy, if I can, to give you a hint or two as to its solution."

Degenerate.

One day in the cloakroom of the senate, apropos of a discussion whether, from an intellectual standpoint, statesmen of the present fall below the standard set by those of the past, one of the members told the following story:

"There lived in Lee county, Ky., a local sage by the name of Jesse Cole. Jesse entertained the notion that the present day type of lawyer was not to be compared with the jurists of the old days. One day as he was entering the courthouse at Beattyville he noticed a group of lawyers who were discussing the points of a case that was to come up that day. Cole, disgusted by their conversation, stepped up to them and said:

"Gentlemen, thirty or forty years ago the lawyers in this state were men—great, big, immense men, wearing fur hats as big as bushel baskets. But now, gentlemen, I honestly believe that a fellow could without the least difficulty draw a tomato can over the head of any one of you."—Harp's Weekly.

Things to Eliminate.

That candy eating habit, girls—does it do you any good?

That tobacco habit, boys, or the occasional "treating" or "being treated"—is it of real use or benefit? That way of spending money on every little trifle that we fancy—is it of real use or benefit?

Better one good friend of nature, stimulating, congenial and sympathetic, than a host of society friends of the wreathed smile, the nod and beck which conceal the sneer.

These faults of music or art or short fits of study—are they of any real use or benefit?

One branch of knowledge concentrated upon amounts to more in the long run.—Philadelphia Bulletin.



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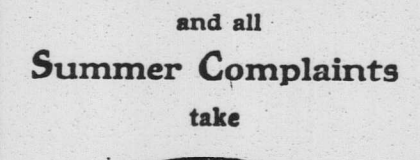
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