



SILVER BLAZE

By Sir Arthur Conan Doyle

Characters

Narrator, *the narrator is Dr. Watson, who looks back on the events in the story*

Sherlock Holmes, *the world's greatest detective*

Dr. John Watson, *Holmes's friend and biographer*

Fitzroy Simpson, *a young gambler*

Edith Baxter, *a housemaid*

Ned Hunter, *a stable boy*

John Straker, *a horse trainer*

Mrs. Straker, *John Straker's wife*

Inspector Gregory, *a detective on the police force*

Colonel Ross, *the wealthy owner of Silver Blaze*

Silas Brown, *a mean old man, and Ross's chief rival*

Boy, *another stable boy*

Scene One

Narrator: It was being called the greatest mystery of the decade — perhaps the century. For days, the newspapers were filled with the strange case of Silver Blaze, the missing racehorse, and John Straker, his murdered trainer. But Sherlock Holmes did not read the newspapers in the days following the crime. He spent his time rambling about our rooms, his chin upon his chest and his brows knitted, puffing away on his pipe. Still, I was not surprised when he announced at breakfast one morning —

Holmes: I am afraid, Watson, that I shall have to go.

Watson: Go! Where to?

Holmes: To Dartmoor.

Watson: Of course! Dartmoor is where Silver Blaze disappeared. My only wonder is that you have not already been mixed up in this extraordinary case.

Holmes: Then you know something about it?

Watson: Certainly. It has been reported in all of the newspapers. I would like to go with you, if I may.

Holmes: My dear Watson, you would do me a great favor by coming. We just have time to catch the train to Dartmoor. I will give you more details on the matter during our journey.

Narrator: And so, an hour later I found myself on a train speeding for Dartmoor with Sherlock Holmes.

Scene Two

Holmes: This is a singular case we are undertaking, Watson.

Watson: I have read all about it in the newspapers. Every issue carries a new story about the mysterious disappearance of Silver Blaze and the murder of his trainer.

Holmes: Yes. But most of those stories have nothing to do with the facts of the case. My challenge is to separate the facts from the mere theories of the police and newspaper reporters.

Watson: And do you have a grip on the facts of the case?

Holmes: I believe I do. Silver Blaze, who belongs to Colonel Ross, is the greatest racehorse in all of England. The horse was entered to run in the race for the Wessex Cup next week. He was the favorite in that race. Enormous sums of money were bet on him.

Watson: That means anyone who bet against Silver Blaze would have a motive for seeing to it that he did not win the race.

Holmes: Exactly. Silver Blaze was kept at Colonel Ross's stable on the moors in Dartmoor. The stable is miles from the nearest village, and the moors around it are a complete wilderness. The stable was run by the horse trainer John Straker, who lived with his wife in a small house a few hundred yards away.

Watson: How long had Straker worked for Colonel Ross?

Holmes: Over 12 years. He has always shown himself to be an honest man.

Watson: I see. Did anyone else live with the Strakers?

Holmes: Three stable boys help take care of the horses. One of these lads sat up all night to guard the horses, while the others slept in the loft. All three were trustworthy lads. The only other person living there was the housemaid, Edith Baxter. She, too, seems to be an honest person.

Watson: So the people working at the stable are not suspects. What exactly happened that fateful night?

Introduction

"Elementary, my dear Watson." Sherlock Holmes, the character who spoke those famous words, is one of the best-known characters in English literature. He's so famous that many people believe Holmes was a real person, and not just a character in books!

This story, "Silver Blaze," is one of Holmes's most baffling mysteries. The author of the story, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, bet his own wife that she could not figure out the killer's identity. Doyle won the bet with his wife. Now it's your turn to take the challenge. See if you can outsmart Sherlock Holmes, "the world's greatest detective."

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**Holmes:** The horses were exercised and watered as usual, and the stables locked up at nine o'clock. Two of the stable boys went to the house for supper, and the third, Ned Hunter, remained on guard. A few minutes after nine, the maid, Edith Baxter, took Hunter his supper. She was almost to the stables, when a man named Fitzroy Simpson stepped from the shadows. . .

### Scene Three

**Simpson:** Can you tell me where I am?

**Baxter (startled):** These are Colonel Ross's training stables.

**Simpson:** Oh, indeed! What a stroke of luck! I understand that a stable boy keeps watch there all alone at night. Perhaps that is his supper you are taking to him.

**Baxter (nervous):** It-it is, sir.

**Simpson:** How would you like to earn some money? *(He offers her a slip of paper.)* Just give the stable boy this.

**Baxter:** No-no, sir. Thank you, sir! *(She runs into the stables.)* Ned! Look sharp! A strange man has been asking about you!

**Simpson (appearing at the door):** Good evening! I want a word with you, young man.

**Hunter (suspicious):** Oh? And what business do you have here?

**Simpson:** It's business that might put some money in your pocket. Rumor has it that Silver Blaze is not as fast as he once was, and that your bosses are betting against him. Is that true?

**Hunter (angry):** So you're a gambler, are you? I'll show you how we handle the likes of you at this stable!

### Scene Four

**Holmes:** With that, Hunter ran to unleash the guard dog to chase away Simpson. The maid turned and ran back to the house — but as she left, she saw Simpson leaning over Hunter's food. By the time Hunter had unleashed the dog, Simpson was gone. Later that night, John Straker was unable to sleep. . .

**Mrs. Straker (sleepy):** John? What's the matter?

**Straker:** You heard what happened at the stables tonight. I'm nervous about Silver Blaze. I'm going to see if he is all right.

**Mrs. Straker:** But it's almost two o'clock in the morning! And it's raining outside. Don't go, John.

**Straker:** Don't worry, dear. I'll be right back.

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Holmes: But John Straker never returned to his wife. The next morning, Ned Hunter was found passed out — someone had drugged his supper. Silver Blaze was missing from the stable. When the other stable boys searched for the missing horse, they found instead the body of their boss, John Straker. He was lying on the moors hundreds of yards from the stable, his skull crushed. He held in one hand a knife, and in the other he carried a scarf belonging to Fitzroy Simpson. And Silver Blaze was gone!

Scene Five

Narrator: It was evening before Holmes and I reached Tavistock, a little town near the scene of the crime. We were greeted there by Colonel Ross and Inspector Gregory, the police detective in charge of the investigation. The four of us got into a horse-drawn cab and soon were rattling through the streets on our way to Straker's house.

Gregory: The net is drawn pretty close about Fitzroy Simpson. We have already arrested him for the murder of Straker.

Holmes: On what evidence?

Gregory: First, he had bet heavily against Silver Blaze, which gave him the motive to steal the horse. He had the opportunity to poison the stable-boy's food. When we found him the day after the crime his clothes were soaked, so he had certainly been out in the rain. He also owns a heavy walking stick, which could be the murder weapon. Finally, Straker held Simpson's scarf in his hand. The evidence is overwhelming.

Holmes (shaking his head): A clever lawyer would tear your case to shreds. First, why would Simpson kidnap the horse? If he wanted to put Silver Blaze out of the race, he would have injured it in the stable. How did he get into the stable after it had been locked for the night? Above all, what did he do with the horse? You still have not found Silver Blaze, have you?

Gregory: No. But that proves nothing, Silver Blaze could be lying dead at the bottom of a bog on the moor. I say that Fitzroy Simpson drugged the stable boy on guard, broke into the stable and kidnapped Silver Blaze. He was making his escape when Straker surprised him. In the struggle that followed, Simpson killed Straker with his stick, then took the horse somewhere and killed it, too.

Holmes: Hmm. Perhaps you are right. Colonel Ross, are there any other stables nearby?

Ross: Indeed there are. My rival Silas Brown has a stable a few miles across the moor. He, too, has a horse running for the Wessex Cup.

Gregory: We have already inspected Brown's stables, and found no trace of Silver Blaze.

Narrator: With that, Sherlock Holmes fell silent. He seemed lost in thought as our cab approached the lonely Straker house.

Scene Six

Narrator: We all left the cab after it stopped in front of the house. All of us except for Holmes, that is. He sat in the cab with a dreamy expression on his face. When I touched his arm Holmes jumped with a start.

Holmes: Excuse me! I was daydreaming.

Narrator: There was a gleam in his eye which told me that Holmes had his hand upon a clue, though I could not imagine where he had found it.

Gregory: Would you like to visit the scene of the crime, Mr. Holmes?

Holmes: I should prefer to stay here a little. I presume you made an inventory of the things in Straker's pockets at the time of his death, Inspector?

Gregory: The things are in the house, if you would like to see them.

Narrator: Gregory led us into the house, where he showed us a pile of objects on a table. There was a box of matches, a two-inch candle, a pipe and tobacco, some coins, a few papers, and a small, delicate knife.

Holmes (examining the knife): This is a singular knife. Watson, this is surely in your line.

Watson: Indeed. It's a doctor's scalpel.

Holmes: A delicate knife for delicate work. A strange weapon for a man to carry.

Gregory: Mrs. Straker says the knife had lain for some days upon the dressing-table, and that Straker picked it up as he left the room. It was a poor weapon, but the best he could lay his hands on at the moment.

Holmes: Very possibly. What are these papers Straker carried with him?

Gregory: Two of them are receipts from a hay-dealer. One of them is a bill from a dress-maker in London for the amount of 37 pounds. It was addressed to William Darbyshire. Mrs. Straker says that Darbyshire was a friend of her husband's, and his mail was sometimes delivered here.

Holmes (inspecting the bill): Well, well, well. Mrs. Darbyshire has very expensive tastes! Come, let us visit the scene of the crime.

Narrator: A short walk across the moor took us to the hollow in which the body had been found.

Gregory (pointing): We found Straker in the bottom of the hollow. His coat was hanging upon that bush.

Holmes: There was no wind that night, I understand. The coat was not blown against the bush, it was placed there.

Gregory: Yes, it was laid across the bush.

Holmes: You fill me with interest. Now I will take a closer look at things.

Narrator: Holmes got on his hands and knees to inspect the muddy ground in the hollow.

Gregory: We have carefully gone over the ground. I doubt there is anything else to find . . .

Holmes: Halloa! What's this?

Narrator: Holmes held up a mud-covered match.

Gregory (blushing): I can't think how I came to overlook it.

Holmes: It was invisible, buried in the mud. I only saw it because I was looking for it.

Gregory: What! You expected to find it?

Holmes: I thought it not unlikely. Now I would like to take a little walk over the moors before it grows dark.

Ross (scowling): A walk? With my trainer murdered and my horse missing? (to Gregory) Come back to the house with me, Inspector. I need your advice. Should I officially remove Silver Blaze from the coming race?

Holmes: Certainly not! Silver Blaze will be in that race!

Ross: I am very glad to have your opinion, sir. I would much rather have my horse!

Scene Seven

Narrator: Holmes and I slowly walked across the moor. The sun was setting behind the distant buildings of Silas Brown's stables. But the beauty of the landscape was lost on my companion, who was sunk in the deepest thought.

Holmes: We may leave for the moment the question of who killed John Straker. Let us concentrate on what happened to the horse. Now, supposing he broke away during or after the murder, where would he have gone? A horse is a gregarious animal — it wants to be with other horses. He would either return to Colonel Ross's stables, or he would head for Silas Brown's stables. Since Silver Blaze is not at Ross's stable, he must be at Silas Brown's.

Narrator: Soon we came to the gates at Brown's stable. A fierce-looking elderly man strode through the gate with a hunting crop swinging from his hand.

Brown: What's this? What the devil do you want here?

Holmes (sweetly): Ten minutes talk with you, my good sir.

Brown: I've no time to talk to every gadabout. We want no strangers here. Be off, or you will find a dog at your heels!

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**Narrator:** Holmes leaned forward and whispered something in Brown's ears. The man started violently and flushed to the temples.

**Brown:** It's a lie! An infernal lie!

**Holmes:** Very good! Should we argue about it here, in public, or talk it over in your home?

**Brown:** Oh, come in if you wish to.

**Narrator:** Holmes followed Brown into the house. When they returned twenty minutes later, Brown's bullying manner was gone. He cringed along at Holmes's side like a dog with its master.

**Brown:** Your instructions will be done. It shall be done!

**Holmes (threatening):** There must be no mistake!

**Brown (wincing):** Oh, no. There shall be no mistake! You can trust me! You can trust me!

**Narrator:** With that, Holmes and I began the walk back to Ross's stable.

**Holmes:** I have never met a more perfect compound of the bully, coward, and sneak than Mr. Silas Brown.

**Watson:** He has Silver Blaze, then?

**Holmes:** He tried to bluster his way out of it. But I described his exact actions to him — how he saw the strange horse wandering on the moor. How he was shocked to discover it was Silver Blaze, his main competition for the coming race. And how he had sneaked Silver Blaze into his own stables and painted over the horse's white markings so that the police would never recognize the animal. Now Brown is convinced I was watching, and saw the whole thing!

**Watson:** Aren't you afraid to leave the horse with him?

**Holmes:** My dear Watson, he will guard it like the apple of his eye. Brown knows his only hope of mercy is to produce it safe.

**Watson:** Colonel Ross will be pleased to hear that his horse is found.

**Holmes:** Hmmm. Perhaps you noticed that Colonel Ross has been a trifle disrespectful of me. I would like to have a little fun at his expense. Say nothing to him about the horse.

**Watson:** Certainly not — not without your permission.

**Holmes:** And, of course, the matter of the horse is minor compared with the question of who killed John Straker.

**Watson:** And you will devote yourself to that?

**Holmes:** On the contrary. We will return to London by the night train.

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Scene Eight

Narrator: I was thunderstruck by my friend's words. I could not understand why he would abandon an investigation that had begun so brilliantly. Not a word more would he say as we headed back to Straker's house. It was dark by the time we joined Colonel Ross and Inspector Gregory there.

Holmes: Watson and I return to London by the midnight train.

Ross (sneering): So, you don't think you can arrest the murderer of poor Straker?

Holmes (shrugging): There are certain difficulties in the way. Inspector Gregory, do you have a photograph of John Straker?

Gregory (handing Holmes an envelope): Right here.

Holmes: Excellent!

Narrator: As we left the house, Holmes glanced over at a nearby pen which held a dozen or so sheep. A stable boy stood at the pen. A sudden idea seemed to strike Holmes.

Holmes (calling): Boy! Have you noticed anything wrong with the sheep lately?

Boy: Not really, sir. But three of them have gone lame.

Holmes (chuckling): A long shot, Watson. A very long shot!

Gregory (confused): You think the fact that the sheep have become lame is important?

Holmes: Very much so.

Gregory: Is there any other point that you think is important?

Holmes: Yes. The curious behavior of the guard dog on the night Silver Blaze was kidnapped.

Gregory: But the dog didn't do anything!

Holmes: That was the curious behavior.



Stop! Match wits with Sherlock Holmes!

Holmes has uncovered all of the clues you need to solve the mystery of Silver Blaze.

- ◆ Who kidnapped Silver Blaze?
- ◆ Who killed John Straker?
- ◆ What exactly happened that fateful night?

Do you have the answers? Then read on to see if you are right!

Scene Nine

Narrator: Four days later, Holmes and I were again on the train to Dartmoor. We were off to see the race for the Wessex Cup. Colonel Ross met us at the train, and drove us to the racetrack.

Ross: I have seen nothing of my horse.

Holmes: I suppose you would know him if you saw him?

Ross (angry): I have owned racehorses for 20 years, and was never asked such a stupid question! A child would recognize Silver Blaze with his white forehead!

Narrator: Holmes, Colonel Ross, and I arrived at the track. The Colonel was surprised to see a horse take his place at the starting gate. He was even more shocked when the horse easily won the race! We went to the track and joined the winning horse and jockey.

Ross: Is it — could it be Silver Blaze?

Holmes: You have only to wash his face and you will see the same Silver Blaze as ever. I found him in the hands of a faker and took the liberty of having him sent over in time for the race.

Ross: My dear sir, you have done wonders. I owe you a thousand apologies. You have done me a great service by finding my horse. You would do me a greater service by finding the murderer of poor John Straker.

Holmes (quietly): I have done so.

Ross: You have got him? Where is he?

Holmes: He is here.

Ross: Here! Where?

Holmes: In my company at the present moment.

Ross (angry): What? You suspect me?!

Holmes (laughing): Of course not, Colonel. The real murderer is standing just behind you.

Narrator: With that, Holmes placed his hand upon the glossy neck of Silver Blaze.

Ross and Watson: The horse!

Holmes: Yes, the horse. And might I add that it was in self-defense, and that Mr. John Straker was not a trustworthy man!

Scene Ten

Narrator: Holmes, Colonel Ross, and I had a train car to ourselves on the trip back to London. During the journey Holmes explained how he had unraveled the mystery.

Holmes: I must confess that at first I agreed with Inspector Gregory. It seemed likely that Fitzroy Simpson was the culprit, but I knew that the case was far from complete. It was when I learned that Silas Brown's stable was so close at hand that I began to consider other solutions to the crime. Then, when I saw what Straker was carrying when he was murdered, I grew convinced that there was more to the case than met the eye.

Ross: What raised your suspicions?

Holmes: The first thing was the knife Straker carried that night. As Watson pointed out, it was a knife used by doctors — not a weapon. It struck me that it was just the sort of knife a man would carry if he were planning to knick the back of a horse's leg, thus making it lame.

Ross: Villain! Scoundrel!

Holmes: When I saw that Straker carried another man's bills in his pockets, I grew even more suspicious. As a man of the world, Colonel, you know that men do not carry other men's bills. It seemed likely to me that Straker was leading a double-life, and keeping a second household in London. This provided a financial motivation for his actions. Straker had bet against Silver Blaze, and was about to cripple the animal when it struck him down.

Watson: But exactly what happened that night, Holmes?

Holmes: First, Straker drugged his stable-boy's supper. Then, in the middle of the night, he sneaked down to the stable and led Silver Blaze from its stall. The dog, which knew Straker, did not bark, as it would have done if Fitzroy Simpson had broken in.

Ross: Of course! We have been blind. That's what you meant by the dog's curious behavior.

Holmes: What else could I have meant? As Straker led Silver Blaze out onto the moor, he came across Simpson's scarf, which the unlucky man had dropped earlier. Straker picked it up, possibly thinking he could later use it to bind the horse's wound. When he got to the hollow, Straker removed his coat and placed it on the bush. He then struck a match in order to light his candle. Silver Blaze, frightened at the sudden glare, lashed out. Its metal shoe struck Straker a fatal blow. Do I make it clear?

Ross: Wonderful! You might have been there!

Holmes: My final shot was, I confess, a long one. It struck me that Straker may have practiced before trying to cripple Silver Blaze. When the stable boy told me a few of the sheep had come lame, I was certain of Straker's guilt. The next day I showed his photograph at the dress-maker's shop in London. They told me he was an excellent customer, known to them as Darbyshire, who had a very dashing wife with expensive tastes. I have

no doubt this woman plunged Straker over head and ears in debt. That forced him into this desperate plot.

Ross: Excellent work, Mr. Holmes.

Holmes: The case was simple, once I had possession of the facts. We will be in London soon. If you would care to join us at dinner, Colonel Ross, I would be happy to give you any other details of the case which might interest you.



Sir Arthur Conan Doyle...

...is best known for creating Sherlock Holmes, perhaps the most popular character in English literature.

Doyle was born in Edinburgh, Scotland, on May 22, 1859. He attended medical school in Edinburgh, where one of his teachers, a keen-eyed, hawk-nosed doctor named John Bell, amazed his students with his amazing ability to deduce facts from seemingly random clues.

In 1887, Doyle, who was a practicing physician in London, published a short novel, *A Study in Scarlet*, featuring Sherlock Holmes and his sidekick, Dr. Watson. (Holmes was modeled on Doyle's old teacher, Dr. Bell.) It would be another three years before Doyle would publish *The Sign of Four*, the second mystery story starring Holmes. Soon, though, Holmes became a phenomenon throughout the English-speaking world.

Starting in 1890, a new magazine, *The Strand*, published a series of short stories starring Holmes and Watson. The duo caught the public imagination. Soon, Doyle had abandoned his medical practice altogether and was writing full-time. "Silver Blaze," written 1892, was

FURTHER READING

Students who enjoyed this story are in for a treat — the 56 short stories and four novels featuring Sherlock Holmes that Doyle wrote in his career! Holmes was perhaps at his best in the first two collections of stories — *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* and *The Memoirs of Sherlock Holmes*. The novel *The Hound of the Baskervilles* is probably the finest of all Holmes stories.

Readers who enjoy Holmes may also like to meet his counterpart — Raffles. This character, a reformed thief who uses his skills for good, stars in a series of stories written by E.W. Hornung.



Fans looking for more puzzling British mysteries will enjoy the Father Brown short stories by G.K. Chesterton.

ACTIVITIES

Unusual Suspect

As he was writing "Silver Blaze," Arthur Conan Doyle bet his wife that she would not guess the killer's identity. He won his bet!

Ask students if they suspected the horse as the killer. Then have them go back and pick out the clues pointing to the true solution of the crime (such as the dog not barking as Silver Blaze was stolen from the stable, the scalpel in Straker's hand, the match buried in the mud, Straker's coat draped across the bush, and so on).

Tell students to imagine that Sherlock Holmes had not been around to solve the case. Challenge them to describe a "solution" to the case naming either Fitzroy Simpson or Silas Brown as the killer. Tell them their solutions must take into account all of the clues pointing to the killer. Discuss how ingeniously Conan Doyle structured the story, leaving only one possible solution that still comes as a complete surprise to the reader.

Extra! Extra!

"For days, the newspapers were filled with the strange case of Silver Blaze..."

Newspapers in Victorian England were known for their sensational reports of crimes. They were very similar to today's "tabloid TV" programs and supermarket-checkout magazines.

Have students pretend that they are newspaper reporters covering the Silver Blaze case, and their assignment is to write a newspaper account of Sherlock Holmes's solution of the mystery. Point out that their challenge is to attract as many readers as

