

THE ADVENTURE OF THE BLUE FLAME

OF THE "GLORIA SCOTT"

BY SIR ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE

"I HAVE some papers here," said my friend Sherlock Holmes, as we sat one winter's night on either side of the fire, "which I really think you will find of interest. These are the documents in the extraordinary case of the Gloria Scott, and this is the message which struck Justice of the Peace Trevor dead with horror when he read it."

He had picked from a drawer a little tattered cylinder, and unrolling the tape he handed me a short note scrawled upon a half sheet of slate-gray paper.

"The supply of game for London is going steadily up," it ran. "Head-keeper Hudson, believe me, has been now told to receive all orders for fly-paper and for preservation of your hen pheasant's life."

As I glanced up from reading this enigmatical message, I saw Holmes chuckling at the expression upon my face.

"You look a little bewildered," said he.

"I cannot see how such a message as this could inspire horror. It seems to me to be rather grotesque than otherwise."

Very likely. Yet the fact remains that the reader, who was a fine, robust old man, was knocked clean off his feet as if it had been the butt end of a pistol.

"You arouse my curiosity," said I. "But why did you say just now that there were very particular reasons why I should study this case?"

"Because it was the first in which I was ever engaged."

I had often endeavored to elicit from my companion what had first turned his mind in the direction of criminal research, but had never caught him before in a communicative mood. Now he sat forward in his armchair and spread out the documents upon his knees. Then he lit his pipe and sat for some time smoking and turning them over.

"You never heard me talk of Victor Trevor?" he asked. "He was the only friend I made during the two years I was at college. He was never a very sociable fellow. Watson—always rather fond of moping in my rooms and working out my own little methods of thought, so that I never mixed much with the men of my year. But Trevor and I were close friends. He was a healthy, full-blooded fellow, full of spirits and energy, the very opposite to me in most respects, but we had some subjects in common. I was never a bond of union when I found that he was as friendly as I. Finally, he invited me down to his father's place at Donnington, in Norfolk, and he was hospitable for a month of the long vacation."

"Old Trevor was evidently a man of some wealth and consideration, a J. P., and a landed proprietor. Donnington is a little hamlet just to the north of Langmere in the county of the Broads. The house was an old-fashioned, red-brick, oak-beamed, brick building, with a fine line of avenue leading up to it. There was excellent wild duck shooting in the fens, remarkably good fishing, a small but select library, and a fine garden. Trevor was a former occupant, and a tolerable cook, so that he would be a fastidious man who could not put in a pleasant month there."

"Trevor senior was a widower, and my friend his only son."

"There had been a daughter, I heard, but she had died young. The father interested me extremely. He was a man of little culture, but with a considerable amount of shrewdness, both physically and mentally. He knew hardly any books, but he had traveled far, had seen much of the world and had remembered all that he had seen. He was a thickset, burly man, with a shock of grizzled hair, a brown, weather-beaten face and blue eyes which were keen to the bottom. He was a man of a reputation for kindness and charity on the countryside and was noted for the leniency of his sentences from the bench."

"One evening, shortly after my arrival, we were sitting over a glass of port after dinner, when young Trevor began to talk about these habits of observation and inference which I had already formed into a system, although I had not yet appreciated the part which they were to play in my life. The old man was exaggerating in his description of one or two trivial facts which I had performed."

"Come, now," Mr. Holmes said, "laughing good humoredly. 'I'm an excellent subject for you can deduce anything from me.'"

"I fear there is not very much," I answered. "I might suggest that you have gone about in fear of some personal attack within the last twelve months."

"The laugh faded from his lips, and he stared at me in great surprise."

"Well, that's true enough," said he. "You know, Victor, turning to his son, 'when we broke up that coaching gang, they swore to kill us, and Mr. Edward Holly has actually been attacked. I've always been on my guard since then, though I have no idea how low they know.'"

"You have a very handsome stick," I answered. "By the inscription I observed that you had not taken such a year, that you have taken some pains to bore the head of it and pour melted lead into the hole, so as to make it a formidable weapon. I argued that you would not take such a precaution unless you had some danger to fear."

"Anything else?" he asked, smiling. "You have boxed a good deal in your youth."

"Right again. How did you know it?" I asked. "It is your ears. They have the peculiar flattening and thickening which mark the boxing man."

"Anything else?" he asked, smiling. "You have a good deal of disfigurement by your callosities."

"Made all my money at the gold fields."

"You have been in New Zealand."

"Right again."

"You have visited Japan."

"Quite true."

"And you have been most intimately associated with some one whose initials were J. A. and whom you afterwards were eager to forget entirely."

"Mr. Trevor stood slowly up, fixed his large blue eyes upon me with a strange, wild stare, and then pitched forward, with his face among the nut-

shells which strewn the cloth, in a dead faint."

"You can imagine, Watson, how shocked both his son and I were. His attack did not last long, however, for when we undid his collar, and sprinkled the water from one of the finger glasses over his face, he gave a gasp or two and sat up."

"Ah, boys," said he, forcing a smile. "I hope I haven't frightened you. Strong as I look, there is a weak place in my heart, and it does not take much to knock me over. I don't know how you manage this, Mr. Holmes, but it seems to me that all the detectives of fact and fancy would be children in your hands. That's your line of life, sir, and you may take the word of a man who has seen something of the world."

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saw you last. Here you are in your house, and me still picking my salt meat out of the harness case."

"But you will find that I have not forgotten old times," cried Mr. Trevor, and, walking towards the sailor, he said something in a low voice. "Go into the kitchen," he continued out loud, and you will get food and drink. I have no doubt that I shall find you a situation."

"Thank you, sir," said the seaman, touching his forehead. "I'm just off a two-yearer in an eight-knot tramp, short-handed at that, and I want a rest. I thought I'd get it either with Mr. Beddoes or with you."

"Ah!" cried Mr. Trevor. "You know where Mr. Beddoes is?"

"Bless you, sir, I know where all my old friends are," said the fellow with a sinister smile, and he stooped off after the maid to the kitchen. Mr. Trevor mumbled something to us about having been shipmate with the man

who had not a peaceful hour since—

not one. The governor has never held up his head from that evening, and now the life has been crushed out of him and his heart broken, all through this accident of Hudson."

"What power had he, then?"

"Ah, the life that I would give so much to know. The kindly, charitable, good old governor—how could he have fallen into the clutches of such a rascal? But I am so glad that you have come, Holmes. I trust very much to your judgment and discretion, and I know that you will advise me for the best."

"We were dashing along the smooth white country road, with the long stretch of the Broads in front of us, glimmering in the red light of the setting sun. From a grove upon our left I could already see the high chimneys and the flagstaff which marked the squire's dwelling."

"My father made the fellow garden-er," said my companion, "and then, as that did not satisfy him, he was promoted to be butler. The house seemed to be at his mercy, and he wandered about and did what he chose in it. The maids complained of his drunken habits and his vile language. Then he said they were all round to recompense them for the annoyance. The fellow would take the boat and my father's best gun and treat himself to little shooting trips. And all this with such a sneering, leering, insolent face that I would have knocked him down twenty times over if he had been a man of my own age. I don't know, I have had to keep a tight hold upon myself all this time; and now I am asking myself whether, if I had let myself go a little more, I might not have been a wiser man."

"Well, matters went from bad to worse with us, and this animal Hudson became more and more intrusive, until at last, on the morning of the 15th, he replied to my father in my presence one day. I took him by the shoulders and turned him out of the room. He slunk away with a sullen, angry look, and I felt that he was up to no good. He would mind apologizing to Hudson. I refused, as you can imagine, and asked my father how he could allow such a wretch to take such liberties with himself and his household."

"Ah, my boy," said he, "it is all very well to talk, but you don't know how I am placed. But you shall know, Victor. I'll see that Hudson is punished, come what may. You wouldn't believe harm of your poor old father, would you, lad?" He was very much moved, and he put his arm round my neck, and I felt that he was up to no good. He would mind apologizing to Hudson. I refused, as you can imagine, and asked my father how he could allow such a wretch to take such liberties with himself and his household."

"That evening there came what seemed to me to be a grand release, for Hudson told us that he was going to leave us. He walked into the dining-room as we sat after dinner, and announced his intention in the thick voice of a half-drunken man."

"I've had enough of Norfolk," said he. "I'll run down to Mr. Beddoes in Hampshire. He'll be as glad to see me as you are, I dare say."

"You're not going away in an unkind spirit, Hudson, I hope," said my father, with a tameness which made my blood boil."

"I've not had my 'polo,' said he, sulkily, glancing in my direction."

"Victor, you will acknowledge that you have used this worthy fellow rather roughly," said the dad, turning to me."

"On the contrary, I think that we have both shown extraordinary patience towards him," said he, snarled."

"Very good, mate. We'll see about that!"

"He slouched out of the room, and half an hour afterwards left the house, when we entered the house, we found him stretched dead drunk upon the dining-room sofa. The whole incident left a most ugly impression upon my mind, and I was not sorry next day to leave Donnington behind me, for I felt that my presence must be a source of embarrassment to my friend."

"All this occurred during the first month of the long vacation. I went up to my London rooms, where I spent seven weeks working out a few experiments in organic chemistry. One day, however, when the autumn was far advanced and the vacation drawing to a close, I received a telegram from my friend imploring me to return to Donnington, and saying that he was in great need of my advice and assistance. Of course I dropped everything and set out for the north once more."

"He met me with the dearest at the station, and I saw at a glance that the last two months had been very trying ones for him. He had grown thin and careworn, and had lost the loud, cheery manner for which he had been remarkable."

"The governor is dying," were the first words he said."

"Impossible!" I cried. "What is the matter?"

"Apoplexy. Nervous shock. He's been on the verge all day. I doubt if we shall find him alive."

"I was, as you may think, Watson, horrified at this unexpected news. I was, as you may think, Watson, horrified at this unexpected news. I was, as you may think, Watson, horrified at this unexpected news."

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"Ah, that is the point. Jump in and we can talk it over while we drive. You remember that fellow who came upon the evening before you left us?"

"Perfectly."

"Do you know who it was that we let into the house that day?"

"It was the devil, Holmes," he cried. "I stared at him in astonishment."

"Yes, it was the devil himself. We

let him in."

"What is his name?" asked my host.

"He would not give any."

"What does he want, then?"

"He says that you know him, and that he only wants a moment's conversation."

"Show him round here," an instant afterwards there appeared a little wizened fellow with a cringing manner and a shambling style of walking. He wore an open jacket, with a splootch of tar on the sleeve, a red and black check shirt, dungaree trousers, and heavy boots badly worn. His face was thin and brown and crafty, with a perpetual smile upon it, which showed an irregular line of yellow teeth, and his crinkled hands were half closed in a way that is distinctive of sailors. As he came slouching across the lawn I heard Mr. Trevor make a sort of hiccupping noise in his throat, and, jumping out of his chair, he ran into the house. He was back in a moment, and I smelt a strong reek of brandy as he passed me."

"Well, my man," said he, "what can I do for you?"

"The sailor stood looking at him with puckered eyes and a grimace, and he looked up at me with a face."

"You don't know me?" he asked.

"Why, dear me, it is surely Hudson," said Mr. Trevor in a tone of surprise.

"Hudson it is, sir," said the seaman. "Why, it's 30 years and more since I

saw you last. Here you are in your house, and me still picking my salt meat out of the harness case."

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