

The Adventure of Black Peter.

(Continued.)

cried Hopkins, as he held up the galling notebook, with the initials of our prisoner on the first leaf and the blood stain on the cover.

The wretched man collapsed. He sank his face in his hands and trembled all over.

"Where did you get it?" he groaned. "I did not know. I thought I had lost it at the hotel."

"That is enough," said Hopkins sternly. "Whatever else you have to say, you must say in court. You will walk down with me now to the police station. Well, Mr. Holmes, I am very much obliged to you and to your friend for coming down to help me. As it turns out, your presence was unnecessary, and I would have brought the case to this successful issue without you; but, none the less, I am grateful. Rooms have been reserved for you at the Brambletye hotel, so we can all walk down to the village together."

"Well, Watson, what do you think of it?" asked Holmes as we traveled back next morning.

"I can see that you are not satisfied."

"Oh, yes, my dear Watson; I am perfectly satisfied. At the same time, Stanley Hopkins' methods do not commend themselves to me. I am disappointed in Stanley Hopkins. I had hoped for better things from him. One should always look for a possible alternative and provide against it. It is the first rule of criminal investigation."

"What, then, is the alternative?"

"The line of investigation which I have myself been pursuing. It may give us nothing. I cannot tell. But at least I shall follow it to the end."

Several letters were waiting for Holmes at Baker street. He snatched one of them up, opened it and burst out into a triumphant chuckle of laughter.

"Excellent, Watson! The alternative develops. Have you telegraph forms? Just write a couple of messages for me: 'Summer, shipping agent, Ratcliff highway. Send three men on to arrive 10 tomorrow morning. Basill.' That's my name in those parts. The other is: 'Inspector Stanley Hopkins, 46 Lord street, Brixton. Come breakfast tomorrow at 9.30. Important. Wire if unable to come. Sherlock Holmes.' There, Watson, this infernal case has haunted me for ten days. I hereby banish it completely from my presence. Tomorrow I trust that we shall hear the last of it forever."

Sharp at the hour named Inspector Stanley Hopkins appeared, and we sat down together to the excellent breakfast which Mrs. Hudson had prepared. The young detective was in high spirits at his success.

"You really think that your solution must be correct?" asked Holmes.

"I could not imagine a more complete case."

"It did not seem to me conclusive."

"You astonish me, Mr. Holmes. What more could one ask for?"

"Does your explanation cover every point?"

"Undoubtedly. I find that young Neligan arrived at the Brambletye hotel on the very day of the crime. He came on the pretense of playing golf. His room was on the ground floor, and he could get out when he liked. That very night he went down to Woodman's Lee, saw Peter Carey at the hut, quarreled with him and killed him with the harpoon. Then, horrified by what he had done, he fled out of the hut, dropping the notebook which he had brought with him in order to question Peter Carey about these different securities. You may have observed that some of them were marked with ticks and the others—the great majority—were not. Those which are ticked have been traced on the London market, but the others presumably were still in the possession of Carey, and young Neligan, according to his own account, was anxious to recover them in order to do the right thing by his father's creditors. After his flight he did not dare to approach the hut again for some time, but at last he forced himself to do so in order to obtain the information which he needed. Surely that is all simple and obvious?"

Holmes smiled and shook his head.

"It seems to me to have only one drawback, Hopkins, and that is that it is intrinsically impossible. Have you tried to drive a harpoon through a body? No? Tut, tut, my dear sir, you must really pay attention to these details. My friend Watson could tell you that I spent a whole morning in that exercise. It is no easy matter and requires a strong and practiced arm. But this blow was delivered with such violence that the head of the weapon sank deep into the wall. Do you imagine that this anaemic youth was capable of so frightful an assault? Is he the man who hobnobbed in rum and water with Black Peter in the dead of night? Was it his profile that was seen on the blind two nights before? No, no, Hopkins, it is another and more formidable person for whom we must seek."

The detective's face had grown longer and longer during Holmes' speech. His hopes and his ambitions were all crumbling about him. But he would not abandon his position without a struggle.

"You can't deny that Neligan was present that night, Mr. Holmes. The book will prove that. I fancy that I

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F. M. CHRISMAN, Administrator.
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