

THE ADVENTURE OF THE SIX NAPOLEONS

Dramatis Personæ

Sherlock Holmes – master detective

Dr. John H. Watson – friend to Sherlock Holmes

Inspector Lestrade – Scotland Yard Detective

Harker – Frazzled reporter who finds corpse

Gelder – Businessman, owner of Gelder & Co.

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Holmes lies languidly upon the chair scraping at his violin which lies across his knees. Watson rushes in brandishing a yellow piece of paper.

Watson

Holmes! A telegram from Lestrade! He writes: "An absurd business. Come instantly, 131 Pitt Street, Kensington."

Holmes jumps up and grabs his coat and hat.

Holmes

Come, Watson!

Holmes and Watson join Lestrade.

Lestrade

I know that you have a taste for all that is out of the common, Mr. Holmes. The first case reported was four days ago at the shop in Kennington Road. The assistant had left the front for an instant when he heard a crash. Hurrying in, he found a plaster bust of Napoleon lying shivered into fragments.

Watson

A childish prank, it seems to me.

Lestrade

The second case was more singular. Not far from the shop, there lives a Dr. Barnicot, who some time ago purchased two duplicate plaster casts of Napoleon. One of these he placed in his house and the other on the mantelpiece of his surgery. When Dr. Barnicot came down he was astonished to find that his house had been burgled during the night, but that nothing had been taken save the plaster head from the hall. It had been carried out and had been dashed savagely against the garden wall. When Barnicot arrived at his surgery he found the window open and the broken pieces of his second bust were strewn all over the room.

Holmes rubs his hands.

Holmes

This is certainly very novel.

Lestrade

I thought it would please you.

Holmes

May I ask whether the two busts smashed in Dr. Barnicot's rooms were duplicates of the one which was destroyed in the shop?

Lestrade

They were taken from the same mould.

Holmes

There is a certain method in the gentleman's eccentric proceedings. For example, in Dr. Barnicot's hall, where a sound might arouse the family, the bust was taken outside before being broken, whereas in the surgery, where there was less danger of an alarm, it was smashed where it stood.

Lestrade

The affair has taken a very much graver turn.

Holmes

What has it turned to, then?

Lestrade

To murder.

Holmes looks delighted. Lestrade takes them over to Mr. Harker who looks frazzled.

Lestrade

Mr. Harker, will you tell these gentlemen exactly what has occurred?

Harker

I was sitting in my den about when I was convinced I heard some sounds downstairs. I listened, but they were not repeated. Then about five minutes later there came a most horrible yell--the most dreadful sound that ever I heard. It will ring in my ears as long as I live. I seized the poker and went downstairs. I found the window wide open and the bust was gone. I opened the door, stepping out into the dark, I nearly fell over a dead man with a great gash in his throat and the whole place swimming in blood.

Holmes

Who was the murdered man?

Lestrade

There's nothing to show who he was.
There was no name on his clothing, and
nothing in his pockets save an apple, some
string, a map of London and this
photograph.

Lestrade hands Holmes the photograph. Holmes
studies it carefully.

Holmes

And what became of the bust?

Lestrade

It has been found in the front garden of an
empty house in Campden House Road. It
was broken into fragments. I am going
round now to see it. Will you come?"

Holmes

Certainly. I must just take one look round
first.

Holmes crawls about the floor examining the carpet
and the window sill with his magnifying glass.
Lestrade watches impatiently. Watson watches with
admiration. Holmes stands up.

Lestrade

Well?

Holmes shrugged his shoulders.

Lestrade

Come along then.

Lestrade leads them to the shattered bust. Holmes examines the fragments.

Holmes

We have a long way to go yet. And yet--and yet--well, we have some suggestive facts to act upon. The possession of this trifling bust was worth more, in the eyes of this strange criminal, than a human life. That is one point. Then there is the singular fact that he did not break it in the house, or immediately outside the house.

Lestrade

He was rattled and bustling by meeting this other fellow. He hardly knew what he was doing.

Holmes

Well, that's likely enough. But I wish to call your attention very particularly to the position of this house, in the garden of which the bust was destroyed.

Watson

It was an empty house, and so he knew that he would not be disturbed in the garden.

Holmes

Yes, but there is another empty house which he must have passed before he came to this one. Why did he not break it there?"

Lestrade

I give it up.

Holmes points to the street lamp above.

Holmes

He could see what he was doing here.

Watson

By Jove! That's true!

Lestrade

Dr. Barnicot's bust was broken not far from his red lamp. Well, Mr. Holmes, what are we to do with that fact?

Holmes

To remember it--to docket it. We may come on something later which will bear upon it. I should like to keep this photograph, found in the dead man's pocket.

Holmes, Watson and Lestrade go to the offices of Gelder & Co..

Holmes

What about the busts? How many of them were made?

Gelder

There were six made at once. They are all sold now.

Holmes

To whom?

Gelder

Oh, I daresay by consulting our sales book I could tell you. One to Mr. Harker, one to Mr. Josiah Brown, of Chiswick, and one to Mr. Sandeford, of Reading.

Holmes shows Gelder the photograph.

Gelder

Ah, the rascal! Yes, indeed, I know him very well. It was more than a year ago now. He knifed another Italian in the street, and then he came to the works with the police on his heels, and he was taken here. Beppo was his name.

Holmes

What did he get?

Gelder

The man lived and he got off with a year. I have no doubt he is out now, but he has not dared to show his nose here.

Holmes

When you referred in your ledger to the sale of those casts I observed that the date was June 3rd of last year. Could you give me the date when Beppo was arrested?

Gelder

I could tell you roughly by the pay-list.
Yes, he was paid last on May 20th.

Holmes

Do you have any Italians on the staff?

Gelder

Yes, sir, we have several among our
workpeople and cleaners.

Holmes

Could they get a look at this book?

Gelder

I daresay they might get a peep at that sales
book if they wanted to.

Holmes

Thank you, I don't think that I need
intrude upon your time and patience any
more.

Holmes

Now gentlemen we are off to Chiswick.
There is not a moment to lose!

Holmes, Watson and Lestrade wait in hiding. As they watched BEPPO rushes up the garden path, crawls in a window and quickly crawls out again. As the figure comes out they dive for him, Lestrade grabs at the man but Holmes grabs the white object he holds. They struggle and the bust falls upon the ground and breaks into fragments. Holmes bends eagerly over the shattered remains. Then with a shout of triumph he holds up one splinter, in which a round dark object is fixed like a plum in a pudding.

Holmes

Gentlemen, let me introduce you to the famous black pearl of the Borgias. You will remember, Lestrade, the sensation caused by the disappearance of this valuable jewel. Suspicion fell upon the maid of the Princess, who was an Italian. I found that the disappearance of the pearl was exactly two days before the arrest of Beppo in the factory of Gelder & Co., at the very moment when these busts were drying. He HAD the pearl on his person when he was pursued by the police. In an instant he made a small hole in the wet plaster, dropped in the pearl, and covered it over. While Beppo was in prison the six busts were scattered over London. Only by breaking them could he tell which contained his treasure.

Watson

But why did he kill the man?

Holmes

He was dogged by his confederate, who held Beppo responsible for the loss of the pearl, and he stabbed him in the scuffle which followed.

Lestrade

Well, 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.

Holmes

Thank you!

--The End --

Adapted by Darlene A. Cypser from The Adventure of the Six Napoleons by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. First performed on January 24, 2009 in Denver, Colorado for the annual dinner of Dr. Watson's Neglected Patients by Macleish Day (Sherlock Holmes), Adrian Hart (Dr. Watson), T. David Rutherford (Inspector Lestrade) and Bob Webb (Harker and Gelder.) This script is considered to be in the public domain like the short story it was derived from.