

Aha! or The Mystery of the Queen's Necklace

Robert Ervin Howard

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Hawkshaw, the great detective, was smoking a stogy reflectively when the Colonel burst into the room.

“Have you heard—” he began excitedly, but Hawkshaw raised his hand depreciatingly.

“My dear Colonel,” he said. “You excite yourself unduly: you were about to tell me that the Queen’s necklace, valued at fifteen million shillings, was stolen from her boudoir and that so far Scotland Yard has found no trace of the thief although they have ransacked London.”

“You are a wonder, Hawkshaw,” exclaimed the Colonel admiringly. “How did you know that?”

“Deduction, my dear Colonel,” replied Hawkshaw, surreptitiously concealing the newspaper in which was a full account of the robbery.

“Have you been to the palace?” he asked.

“I have,” was the reply. “And I brought the only clew to be found. This cigar stub was found just beneath the palace window.”

Hawkshaw seized the stub and examined it carefully.

“Aha!” he exclaimed. “The man who stole the necklace was a very tall, lank, gangling person, with very large feet and cross-eyed. He wears a number 5 hat.”

“Wonderful!” exclaimed the Colonel, “and how may I ask do you deduce that? How do you even know that a person who smoked that cigar stole the necklace?”

“The stub is flattened on one side. That proves that its smoker had a large foot. He stepped on it and it would take a great deal of weight to even dent a cigar like that. I know that its smoker is the thief because it is a long stub and anyone who could stand one whiff of that cigar would smoke it entirely up. He would be that kind of man. He evidently dropped it in his haste to make his getaway.”

“But that hat? And his tallness and cross-eyes?”

“Any man that would smoke a cigar like that would wear about a number 5 hat. As for the tallness and cross-eyes I will explain later.”

Just then there came a tap at the door. The Colonel opened it and an old man entered. He wore large green glasses, was a great deal stooped and had white hair and a long white beard.

“You are the famous detective?” he addressed Hawkshaw. “I believe I have a clew to this theft. I passed along the opposite side of the street

about the time the robbery was supposed to have taken place. A man jumped out of the palace window and walked rapidly up the street.”

“Umhum,” remarked Hawkshaw, “what kind of man was this?”

“He was about five feet tall and weighed perhaps three hundred lbs.,” was the reply.

“Umhum,” commented Hawkshaw, “would you mind listening to my theory?”

“I would be delighted,” answered the old man as he seated himself in the best chair.

“Well, then!” began Hawkshaw, rising and walking to the middle of the room so that he could gesture without knocking the table over. “At the time of robbery was committed a man was returning home from a fishing trip on the Thames. He carried a fishing pole on his shoulder and as he walked along he looked into the windows of houses he had passed while seemingly gazing straight ahead for he was very cross-eyed.” (Here the visitor started.) Hawkshaw went on, “The gentleman at last arrived in Windsor and passing the palace saw the necklace lying on the mahogany table. The window was open and though it was high off the ground he saw a way to get it. He was (and is) a very tall man and he had a long rod and line. Standing on tiptoes he made a cast through the window as if casting for trout. He hooked the necklace at the first throw and fled, dropping his cigar in his flight. He also stepped on the cigar. He eluded the police easily and thought to elude me by coming to me in disguise and seeking to divert suspicion in another direction.”

And with that Hawkshaw leaped upon the old man and gripped him by the beard and gave a terrific jerk. The old man gave a yell as he was jerked erect and yanked across the floor. Hawkshaw turned pale. He had made a mistake in identity? He placed a foot against the old gentleman’s face and grasping the beard firmly in both hands gave another jerk. Something gave way and Hawkshaw and his victim sprawled on the floor, Hawkshaw holding in his hands the false beard and wig. While the impostor was trying to rise, encumbered by his long coat the detective sprang nimbly up and with great dexterity kicked the huge green glasses from his face.

The “old man” was revealed as a tall, gangling man with huge feet and cross-eyes!

As he rose Hawkshaw advanced toward him with a pair of handcuffs.

“You are under arrest,” he said.

The man stepped back and drew a glittering butter knife from his pocket. "I am a desperate man! Beware!" he said fiercely.

At that moment the Colonel recovered from his amazement enough to push the muzzle of a howitzer against the villain and he was soon handcuffed.

"Call the police, Colonel," directed Hawkshaw, taking the necklace out of the fellow's pocket.

"Curses!" hissed the villain, "tricked, foiled, baffled! Curses!"

"But, Hawkshaw," asked the Colonel a few hours later, after they had collected the enormous reward that had been offered for the recovery of the necklace. "But Hawkshaw, how did you know that was the man?"

"My dear Colonel," answered Hawkshaw as with a smile he lighted a stogy, "I smelt the fish on his hands."

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