



The Adventure of Black Peter

Simplified for CEFR A2 Readers

Part 1: A Strange Morning

My name is Dr. Watson. My friend Sherlock Holmes is the most famous detective in London. In 1895, many important people came to our flat at 221B Baker Street to ask for his help. Holmes did not care about money. He only took cases that were interesting to him.

One morning in July, Holmes left the flat very early. When I sat down for breakfast, he came back carrying a large spear — the kind sailors use to hunt whales. This tool is called a harpoon.

"Holmes!" I said. "Have you been walking through London with that?"

"I drove to a butcher's shop," he said. A butcher is a person who sells meat. "I was stabbing a dead pig with the harpoon. I wanted to know how much strength it needs."

Soon after, a young police inspector called Stanley Hopkins knocked at our door. In Victorian England, inspectors from Scotland Yard — London's famous police headquarters — often asked Holmes for help. Hopkins looked very worried.

"I have failed completely, Mr. Holmes," he said. "Please come and help me."

Part 2: The Story of Black Peter

Hopkins told us about the dead man. His name was Captain Peter Carey. He was fifty years old. For many years, he sailed ships to hunt seals and whales in the cold Arctic seas. In 1883, he was the captain of a steam ship called the *Sea Unicorn*, which sailed from the Scottish city of Dundee.

In 1884, Captain Carey stopped sailing. He bought a small house called Woodman's Lee, in the county of Sussex in the south of England. He lived there for six years.

Captain Carey was a very frightening man. He drank too much alcohol, and when he was drunk, he was dangerous and violent. He often chased his wife and daughter out of the house in the middle of the night. The people in the village were afraid of him. They called him "Black Peter" — not only because of his dark beard, but because of his dark and terrible moods.

Near his house, Carey had built a small wooden hut. He called it his "cabin," like a room on a ship. He slept there every night. Nobody else was allowed inside.

One Wednesday night, Carey's daughter heard a terrible scream from the hut. But she was used to her father shouting, so she did nothing. The next morning, a servant found the hut door open. Everyone was too scared to look inside until lunchtime.

Inside, they found Captain Carey dead. A harpoon had been pushed through his chest and into the wooden wall behind him. On the table, there were two dirty glasses and a bottle of rum — the strong alcohol that sailors often drink. Near the door, the police found a tobacco pouch made of sealskin, with the letters "P.C." on the inside.

Part 3: The Notebook

Hopkins showed Holmes a small, old notebook found on the floor of the hut. The first page had the initials "J.H.N." and the year "1883." Inside were lists of numbers.

"These look like shares — investments in railway companies and countries in South America," said Hopkins.

"Try the Canadian Pacific Railway," said Holmes quietly.

Hopkins hit the table. "Of course! So 'J.H.N.' are the initials of the person who owned these shares. This could be the killer."

Holmes agreed to travel to Sussex and look at the hut.

Part 4: A Night Visitor

When Holmes, Watson, and Hopkins arrived at the hut, they saw fresh scratches on the door and window. Someone had tried to break in very recently.

Holmes smiled. "This person will come back tonight. Let us wait for them."

That night, the three men hid in the bushes near the hut and waited in the dark and rain. Victorian detective work often meant long, uncomfortable waits in the English countryside.

After midnight, a young man crept to the hut, opened the door with a knife, and went inside. He lit a candle and opened one of the captain's old ship's logbooks — the daily records that all sea captains had to keep. He looked angry when he found some pages were missing. Then Hopkins grabbed him.

The young man's name was John Hopley Neligan. He was very frightened.

Part 5: Neligan's Story

Neligan said his father was a banker. Years ago, his father's bank had failed and many families in Cornwall — the county in the far west of England — had lost their money. People said his father had stolen the money and run away. But Neligan believed his father was innocent.

His father had sailed from England to Norway on a small yacht, carrying some bank documents called securities — papers that are worth money. He never arrived. The yacht disappeared.

Recently, Neligan's family had discovered that some of those securities had appeared for sale in London. The seller was Captain Peter Carey. Neligan came to Sussex to confront the captain and ask him what had happened to his father. But when he arrived, the captain was already dead.

He came to the hut to look at the logbooks of the *Sea Unicorn* for August 1883. He wanted to know if the ship had met his father's yacht. But the important pages had been torn out.

When Hopkins showed Neligan the notebook with his initials and a bloodstain on the cover, Neligan could not speak. Hopkins arrested him for the murder.

Part 6: Holmes Is Not Happy

On the train back to London, Watson asked Holmes what he thought.

"Hopkins made a mistake," said Holmes. "He found one answer and stopped looking for other possibilities. But young Neligan is thin and weak. Could he really push a harpoon so hard that it went through a man and deep into a wooden wall? No. The killer was someone much stronger."

Back in London, Holmes received a letter. He sent two telegrams — the quick written messages that people used before telephones were common. One was to a shipping agent in the East End of London. The other was to Hopkins: *Come to breakfast tomorrow at nine-thirty.*

Part 7: The Trap

The next morning, Hopkins arrived at Baker Street and told Holmes that he was sure Neligan was the killer.

Holmes disagreed. "Your explanation has one big problem. A weak young man cannot throw a harpoon that hard."

Then Mrs. Hudson — Holmes and Watson's landlady — said three men were downstairs. They all wanted to speak to "Captain Basil." This was a false name Holmes had used to place job advertisements for experienced harpooners willing to join an Arctic expedition.

Holmes spoke to each man one by one. The first two were sent to wait in another room. The third man was very different. He was large and strong, with wild hair and a thick beard. His name was Patrick Cairns. He said he had worked on twenty-six voyages as a harpooner, mostly sailing from Dundee.

When Cairns bent over to sign the job agreement, Holmes snapped a pair of handcuffs onto his wrists. Cairns fought hard — he was enormously strong — but Watson pressed a revolver to his head, and he stopped.

Part 8: The Truth

Cairns told the truth.

In August 1883, Cairns was a harpooner on the *Sea Unicorn* under Captain Carey. Their ship found a small yacht in bad weather north of Scotland. There was one man on it — a stranger. The rest of the yacht's crew had already left in a small boat to reach the Norwegian coast, and they were probably drowned.

The stranger came aboard the *Sea Unicorn*. He spoke privately with Captain Carey and had one tin box with him. Two nights later, Cairns saw Captain Carey push the man over the side of the ship into the dark sea. They were two days from the Shetland Islands — a group of islands in the far north of Scotland.

Nobody asked questions. A stranger had "fallen overboard." Captain Carey retired from the sea soon after, and Cairns believed he had kept the tin box and the valuable securities inside it.

Years later, Cairns found where Carey was living and visited him to demand money. Carey seemed willing at first. But on the second visit, Carey was drunk and attacked Cairns with a knife. Cairns grabbed the harpoon from the wall and killed him in self-defence.

"You can call it murder," said Cairns. "But it was him or me."

Cairns took the tin box, but found only papers inside — no money. He left London and went to look for work as a harpooner, which is how Holmes found him.

Part 9: The End

"Well, well," said Holmes kindly to Hopkins. "We all learn from experience. Your lesson today is: always look for other possible answers. You were so focused on Neligan that you forgot to think about Patrick Cairns — the real killer."

Holmes told Hopkins to free young Neligan and apologise to him. The tin box of securities needed to be returned, though much of the money was already gone.

"If you need me for the trial," Holmes said, "Watson and I will be somewhere in Norway. I'll write to you with details."

The Adventure of Black Peter was written by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and first published in 1904. Sherlock Holmes stories are set in the 1880s and 1890s in Victorian England.