



The Adventure of the Six Napoleons

B1 Version

Part 1: A Strange Madness

Inspector Lestrade called at Baker Street one evening with what seemed, at first, an almost laughable case. Across London, someone was breaking plaster busts — small decorative statues — of the French Emperor Napoleon. The first incident was at a shop in Kennington Road, where a bust was smashed on the counter. Then two more belonging to a local doctor were destroyed: one carried out of his house and dashed against a garden wall, the other broken where it stood in his surgery. A surgery is the place where a doctor sees patients.

Holmes listened carefully while Lestrade and Watson discussed the obvious explanation: a lunatic with an obsessive hatred of Napoleon. Holmes pointed out a more interesting detail. All three busts had come from the same manufacturer — a firm called Gelder and Co. in Stepney, east London. Out of the hundreds of Napoleon statues in London, a random madman would be extraordinarily unlikely to choose three from the same mould. There had to be a specific reason.

Part 2: Murder Enters the Picture

The next morning Lestrade telegraphed with urgent news. The case had become far more serious. A fourth bust had been stolen from a journalist's house in Kensington,

and on the front doorstep the body of a man had been found — throat cut with a curved Indian dagger taken from a trophy on the wall. The dead man was identified as Pietro Venucci, a Neapolitan criminal connected to the Mafia — a secret Sicilian criminal organisation that enforced its rules through violence. Lestrade was now convinced the matter was a Mafia dispute and the bust-breaking merely incidental.

Holmes was not so sure. He spent the day tracing the route of the busts. Gelder and Co. had sold the batch of six to two London retailers — three to Morse Hudson in Kennington and three to Harding Brothers in Kensington. By consulting the sales records at Harding Brothers he established the names and addresses of the three buyers. Meanwhile the photograph found on the dead man's body was identified by the manager at Gelder and Co. as Beppo, a skilled Italian workman who had worked there before being arrested for stabbing a man in the street, and had served a year in prison.

Part 3: The Borgia Pearl

Holmes invited Lestrade to Baker Street that evening to witness the conclusion of the case. He had already sent a letter to the owner of the last intact bust, a Mr. Sandeford of Reading, offering to buy it for ten pounds — a very fair price for something worth only a few shillings. Sandeford arrived with the bust, accepted the money, and signed a receipt.

The moment Sandeford left, Holmes placed the bust on a white cloth, picked up his hunting-crop — a short heavy riding whip — and struck it sharply. It shattered. Holmes bent over the pieces and gave a shout of triumph, holding up a splinter of plaster in which a round, dark object was embedded like a plum in a pudding. It was a pearl — but not just any pearl. It was the famous black pearl of the Borgias, a priceless jewel that had disappeared from a hotel room months earlier.

Holmes explained the sequence of events. Beppo had somehow come into possession of the stolen pearl — perhaps by theft, perhaps as a go-between for the thief. When the police came for him at the Gelder and Co. factory over the stabbing, Beppo had only seconds to hide the pearl. Six plaster Napoleon busts were drying in the passage, one of them still soft. He pressed the pearl inside, smoothed the plaster over, and was taken away. When he came out of prison a year later, the six busts had been sold and scattered across London. Since he could not know which one contained his treasure, he had to find and break every single one.

Pietro Venucci had been tracking Beppo — probably as an agent of whoever owned the pearl. Beppo stabbed him on the doorstep before he could interfere. The last bust was in Reading, which was why Beppo had not yet reached it. Holmes had bought it first.

Lestrade, overcome with admiration, shook Holmes's hand warmly and said that not a man at Scotland Yard would fail to congratulate him. Holmes, who rarely showed emotion, flushed with genuine pleasure at the praise.