

## The Silver Wishbone.



Another queer adventure of Herlock Sholmes, the World's Worst Detective, recorded by his faithful friend, Dr. Jotson.

**M**RS. HATCHETT, gaunt as a sign-post, stood on the landing and swept a beaming hand towards a couple of half-open doors.

"There's your apartments, sirs!" she said. "I'll serve the kippers in the parlour in two shakes of a shrimp's tail!"

My famous friend, Herlock Sholmes, had brought me to Codport for the fishing.

As Mrs. Hatchett ambled down the rickety stairs again Sholmes entered the parlour. He laid a packet of fish-hooks he had bought on the table.

I staggered into the room at his heels with the rest of the baggage. Dropping two portmanteaux and the handbag on the floor, I put the fishing-rods in a corner. Sholmes' violin, cocaine-cask, and a jar of shag I placed on the table. Umbrellas, macintoshes, and a half-packet of ham-sandwiches I laid on the mantelpiece.

"Good!" said Sholmes, rubbing his hands. "Just as well we didn't spend money on a cab from the station. It was quite an easy walk."

"For you!" I puffed. "It's just about broken my spinal vertebrae!"

Footsteps on the stairs brought hope to my heart.

"Ah!" I murmured. "Here comes Mrs. Hatchett with the grille!"

"No, my dear Jotson," said Sholmes. "The footsteps upon the stair are those of a man—and a man who wears number fourteen boots into the bargain."

"Sholmes," I exclaimed, "you astonish me!"

I turned at the thunderous rap on the door. Into the room strode a great, beefy-looking man with a mottled, red face.

"Mr. Sholmes," he said, "pardon this intrusion, but Mrs. Hatchett told me down at the shop some days ago as you were coming!"

"Drat her!" muttered Sholmes beneath his breath.

"Take a seat," I said, indicating the arm-chair. "It is springless, though, I'm afraid."

The plump visitor subsided into the chair. Putting his finger-tips together, the famous sleuth regarded him narrowly.

"You are a pork butcher, sir," he said. The visitor gaped like a deceased codfish. "Jumping polonies! How did you know that, Mr. Sholmes?"

"Simple deduction," replied the master-sleuth. "You have lost three fingers of your left hand, and particles of fresh peas-pudding, veal-and-ham-pie, and black pudding are adhering to the blue apron which is protruding under your waistcoat!"

"Wonderful!" gasped the visitor. "And you will help me, Mr. Sholmes?"

"I will hear the case first," said my famous friend cautiously. "Dr. Jotson and I have come to Codport for a brief fishing holiday. I didn't intend to work."

"But I'll pay you handsomely, Mr. Sholmes. Ask anyone in Codport if Joe Gammon, pork butcher, hasn't got the dibs!"

"Proceed!" said Sholmes.

"Well, it's like this here," said Mr. Gammon. "I've been a hard worker all my life, but for a long time I never did much good for myself. Two years after taking my present shop in Codport my luck changed. It may sound foolish, but I've allus thought it was partly due to a silver wishbone which my rich uncle left me. I started wearing it on my watch-chain. From that time money began to come easy."

"The wishbone was of no great intrinsic value?" said Sholmes.

"No, sir," replied Mr. Gammon. "It couldn't ha' been worth more than fifteen bob at the most. But, as I've said to all my customers and friends in Codport for the last seven year, it was worth a thousand times its weight in gold to me."

"And now you have lost it, Mr. Gammon?"

"That's just it, Mr. Sholmes," said the pork butcher, again startled by Sholmes' perspicacity. "Returning from a dance one night with the missus, I found it was gone."

"You felt no one take it?"

"No, Mr. Sholmes."

"You suspect none of your dancing partners?"

Mr. Gammon punched a lump of horsehair out of the armchair with his mottled fist.

"I suspect 'em all, Mr. Sholmes!" he said heatedly. "There was that Mrs. Todsniff, of the haberdashery; then there was Mrs. Muggins; that plump Miss Leanby; Mrs. Nuggett, of the boot-shop near me; old Mother Giggleswick, and Miss Goldenstein." Sholmes nodded sagely.

"You can remember no more?"

"Nothin'."

At that moment Mrs. Hatchett appeared with a brace of luscious, sizzling, golden-brown kippers.

Herlock Sholmes rose from his chair. "My good friend, Dr. Jotson, and I are about to dine," he said. "The details you have been able to give me are but meagre. However, in any spare time I may have, I will bear your case in mind."

A relieved smile wreathed Mr. Gammon's chubby face as he bowed himself out of the room backwards and fell down the stairs over the cat.

Together Sholmes and I partook of the meal prepared by our landlady.

Directly after dinner Sholmes, with his huge pipe in his mouth, led the way to the sea-front.

Unfortunately for Sholmes and fortunately for me, we discovered that the tide had gone out a mile or two. A fat and genial boatman informed us that it was not expected back until to-morrow.

"Hide the rods and tackle under that old bathing-hut, Jotson," said Sholmes to me. "Then go and eat worms—I mean, dig worms. They will come in useful for bait when we go out in the rowboat to-morrow."

I groaned and turned to obey. Puffing contentedly on his pipe, Sholmes wended his way up-town. We next met again in the apartments in Trafalgar Villas. The way

that Sholmes was playing leap-frog over the cocaine cask told me that my famous friend was in the best of spirits.

"My dear Jotson," cried Sholmes, as I entered the room, "you will be pleased to know that I have solved the mystery of the missing wishbone."

"I dropped the tin of worms with a clatter. What! Already? You astonish me!"

"The case was even more simple than I had supposed," replied Herlock Sholmes. "The thief undoubtedly was Mrs. Nuggett, the bootmaker's wife."

"Then you have actually found the wishbone?" said I.

"No. But it's as good as found. In the first place, by making inquiries in the town I discovered that Nuggett, the bootmaker, had been jealous of Gammon's success for years. By the simple expedient of throwing a horseshoe over my left shoulder in his shop, I discovered he was superstitious."

"Bless my heart!"

"Yes. He considered that the throwing of a horseshoe over the left shoulder was distinctly unlucky."

"Then you think—"

"Exactly," went on Sholmes. "I think that Nuggett really believes that the silver wishbone was the chief factor in Gammon's success in business. At the dance Mrs. Nuggett removed the charm from Gammon's watch-chain and handed it to her husband."

"And does Nuggett wear it on his watch-chain?"

Herlock Sholmes regarded me with an expression of deep pain.

"That is feeble, even for you, my dear Jotson," said he. "Needless to say, Nuggett would not wear the wishbone on his watch-chain. He would wear it under it. While I was in his shop I accidentally—for the purpose—fell up against him. I could distinctly feel the shape of a hard substance fashioned like a wishbone beneath his waistcoat. How to take it from him is the problem. He's a man six feet two in height and broad in proportion. And, as you know, my dear Jotson, I never seek the assistance of those dunderheads, the official police."

Suddenly he slapped his thigh with great enthusiasm.

"I've got it!" he cried.

I knew it was useless to ask my famous friend to explain his plan. As usual, I should have to exercise patience.

On the following morning Herlock Sholmes sent me to hire a rowboat. I went with the deepest misgivings. Sholmes was an excellent sailor. I was not.

Obedying my orders, I engaged the rowboat, and stowed rods, fishing-tackle, baskets, and worms in the frail little craft.

Presently Sholmes came along. To my surprise, I saw that he was accompanied by a regular giant of a man.

"This is Mr. Nuggett," said Herlock Sholmes, introducing him. "I was in his shop to purchase a pair of shoelaces, and I persuaded him to accompany us on this little fishing trip."

"Ay, and highly honoured I am to come," said Mr. Nuggett.

Sholmes and Mr. Nuggett took their seats in the stern-sheets of the boat. I pushed it off, and rowed them a couple of miles out to sea.

The sea was distinctly choppy. Sholmes put on his favourite pipe. I noticed that he sat to windward of Mr. Nuggett.

Soon, as in a nightmare, I became aware that Mr. Nuggett had joined me at the side of the boat. His face was as green as seaweed, and his hands flapped feebly in the water. By means of his pipe of shag, Sholmes had overcome him with a bad attack of mal de meerschaum.

Herlock Sholmes very kindly loosened his shirt-front. Incidentally, he took a small silver wishbone from a thread which Mr. Nuggett wore round his neck.

It was Sholmes himself who rowed us to the shore. He delivered Mr. Nuggett to the police, and restored the silver wishbone to the gratified Mr. Gammon. But I only discovered this afterwards. Very kindly Sholmes had delivered me to the hospital first.

When I returned to Trafalgar Villas later that day, I found Sholmes sitting down to a table piled with black pudding, veal-and-ham pie, polonies, cuts from the joint, and other delicacies—presents from the grateful Mr. Gammon.

"Better now, Jotson?" mumbled Sholmes, with his mouth full. "Not a bad plan of mine for recovering the wishbone, was it?"

THE END.