

Better Holmes and Watson

The Granada Series Reviewed

THE BLUE CARBUNCLE
Adaptation: Paul Finney
Direction: David Carson

"... It already has a sinister history. There have been two murders, a vitriol-throwing, a suicide, and several robberies brought about for the sake of this forty-grain weight of crystallized charcoal."

Given this grim description (by Sherlock Holmes himself) of the infamous blue carbuncle, one might readily expect the blood-soaked stone to draw the Great Detective and his companion, Dr. John H. Watson, down fog-filled byways strewn with the victims of the "Carbuncle Curse." But, no, it never becomes necessary for our heroes to traverse the mean streets of 19th-century London, because the accommodating carbuncle comes to them.

On Christmas Eve.

In a goose.

Perhaps more profoundly than in the original short story by Sir Arthur Conan

Doyle, which was first published in the January 1892 edition of *The Strand Magazine*, Granada TV's *THE BLUE CARBUNCLE* is, literally, a Dickens of a tale. A Dickensian atmosphere, reminiscent of the beloved author's Christmas books, and a subtle emphasis on comedy—the stolen gem of the title is hidden, after all, in that goose—leads the production a warm Yuletide glow, easily making it one of the most charming episodes of *THE ADVENTURES OF SHERLOCK HOLMES*. No simple murder case, this, *CARBUNCLE* is a deft puzzle in which the Master Sleuth must deduce the manner by which the Countess of Morcar's missing bauble has found its way into Henry Baker's bird. An innocent ex-convict, John Horner (Desmond McNamara), stands accused by the Countess (Rosalind Knight) of the jewel's theft, and Holmes and Watson set matters straight without once meeting the man who benefits most by their intervention.

Three scenes in particular blend Dickens and Conan Doyle to perfection. In



Jeremy Brett

the first, Horner and his wife, Jennie (Amelda Brown), stand before a toy-shop window, choosing gifts they can ill afford for their offspring and behaving very much like the Cratchits in *A Christmas Carol*, until Conan Doyle's Inspector Bradstreet (Brian Miller) appears on the scene to arrest the former jailbird. In the second, Henry Baker (Frank Middlemass), a wholly sympathetic eccentric who has fallen on hard times, relates the tale of the goose to an inquisitive but cool Sherlock Holmes. In the last, Horner is reunited with his wife and children on a snow-covered London street for a final image that happily recalls the closing shot (in which Tiny Tim runs to the eager arms of a reformed Scrooge) of the splendid 1951 production of *A CHRISTMAS CAROL*.

For those who prefer a touch less sentiment and a tad more detection in their detective stories, *THE BLUE CARBUNCLE* is the adventure wherein Holmes "constructs" a man solely by the evidence found on the gentleman's hat.

"What do you gather from that battered old felt?" asks a bemused Watson, who plainly sees nothing beyond the fact that the initials "H.B." upon the headband stand for Henry Baker, a name attached by tag to the goose that accompanied the bowler to Baker Street.

Holmes smiles.

"That the man is highly intellectual is, of course, obvious," claims the detective, "and also that he was very well-to-do within the past three years, although now he has fallen upon evil days. He has foresight, but less now than formerly, pointing to a moral retrogression which, when taken with the decline in his fortunes, seems to indicate an evil influence—probably



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ABOVE: What better place to hide a priceless gem than inside a—goose? Frank Mills, Jeremy Brett, and feathered friend in *THE BLUE CARBUNCLE*. NEXT PAGE: It's a busy day in the neighborhood for Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson (Jeremy Brett and David Burke).

