

It was not yet seven on a rainy London morning when I was aroused from slumber by a vigorous shaking.

"Come, Watson! The game is afoot!"

My waking eyes perceived the familiar outline of a tall, agitated figure by the bedside with a candle.

"Good Heavens, Holmes, what is it?"

"The morning post, Watson. Our lad Wolfe is a finalist in the Certs Treasure Hunt. The boy lacks only an essay to capture the prize."

"Splendid! So your hunch was correct."

"Hunch?" exclaimed Holmes with apparent irritation. "Nothing of the sort. The solution was evident at a glance; the clues left not the slightest doubt. Trivial, actually."

"I must confess that I found it quite impenetrable. Something about stoves and stars?"

"An elementary application of cryptography," replied Holmes. "The science of codes and ciphers. I once published a monograph on the subject. Kindly fetch the puzzle." A brief search of my scrapbooks produced the advertisements. "Now, Watson, transcribe the initial letters of each word in the verse."

Holmes hovered impatiently at my shoulder as I completed my assignment.

"This, Watson, is an acronymic chart. Scan carefully. What do you see?"

I studied the letters. "Hello, what's this? W -- E -- S -- T."

"Exactly. Where Every Searcher's Trail should lead. The treasure, then, is in the West."

"Look here, Holmes! B -- O -- I -- S -- E. Evidently another important clue."

"A red herring, my good fellow. '...What glitters here may not be gold.' The clue is suspiciously obvious. Look again at your ciphers."

I scrutinized my chart. "By Jove, Holmes, there it is!"

N    E    V

A    D    A

"Precisely," smiled Holmes with evident satisfaction. "Truth often lurks in the shadows of a lie. Remember the case of Wilson the Notorious Canary Trainer, which nearly cost us our lives." Holmes extinguished his pipe. "Now, Watson, look at the treasure map; at Nevada."

"Three curious peaks!" I exclaimed.

"Each state has its pictograph; but those peaks are anomalies."

I brightened. "Las Vegas! Bars and stars!"

"'Beware The Gambler's Guess,' my friend. Here; the atlas. Look elsewhere: between Silver Peak and Gold Point."

"Goldfield. Why, Holmes, that's it! 'A place between a peak, a point: a field.' But what of 'woman's name'?"

"Read on, Watson. 'Let those who seek their fortunes take a seat.' Goldfield is the seat of Esmeralda County. As for

lore and ore: Goldfield is a ghost town, rich with history. Mineral fortunes; prosperity and vitality; heavyweight championships; labor riots. Largest city in Nevada until the gold ran out. Now a mere handful remain."

"Fascinating!" I exclaimed. "But where precisely is the treasure?"

"'A place of bars and stars,' good fellow. Consult your chart."

I looked yet again:

L    A    W

M    A    N

"Jailhouse bars, lawman's star -- the sheriff's office, Watson. No other explanation suffices." He popped a Certs tablet into his mouth.

"Holmes, you do not cease to amaze me."

"Nonsense. I am merely gratified to be of help to the young American chap."

"But the essay, Holmes. What of his essay?"

"That, old friend," said Holmes with a twinkle, "I leave up to you."