

Missing Links

by Andrew Bromberg



Remember, Sherlock," Amanda reminded her brother for the tenth time, as they pushed through the doors of the department store, "we came here *just* to buy Dad a tie, *not* for you to spend hours playing with all those computer games."

"Okay, okay," he answered, moving quickly down the crowded aisle, only to discover moments later that his sister was no longer in sight. "Amanda," he called in a slightly louder than normal voice, "where are you?"

"Over here. By the jewelry counter."

"Well, really," Sherlock growled after he'd retraced his steps. "I thought you told *me* not to waste time."

"I know, I know," Amanda apologized. "But I just had to stop at the jewelry counter. Look at that man's sapphire ring. I noticed it when I was passing by. Isn't it beautiful?"

Sherlock glanced at the counter, which also held a whole assortment of men's tie pins and cuff links, and had to agree that the ring was beautiful. "But a little too expensive for us." He laughed. "So let's get over to the tie counter."

Finally, they hurried off together to the next aisle, where the ties were kept, while the jewelry salesman stared after them, and then glanced at his watch.

For Amanda and Sherlock, buying a tie for their father was not as simple as it might sound. Amanda wanted to get one in dark red with narrow blue stripes, while Sherlock favored one with a green background and tiny horses' heads woven into the silk. This happened every time they went to buy a gift together. It seemed to take hours before they could agree on anything.





Sherlock was just bending down to get a better look inside the glass display case, when he suddenly felt something unpleasantly wet on the back of his neck. He straightened up in surprise, only to see that the fire sprinklers all over the main floor of the store had gone off at once.

Alarm bells started ringing, and the entire store was instantly in a state of panic and confusion. Salespeople were racing back and forth, trying to protect their merchandise. Customers were ducking their heads and pulling up their collars, hoping to stay dry. Amanda and Sherlock, once they'd recovered from the shock, began to help the salesman stuff



his ties under the glass top of the counter before they were completely soaked. Just as they had the last tie tucked safely away, the bells stopped ringing and the sprinklers stopped as suddenly and mysteriously as they'd started.

"Whew," said Sherlock in the welcome silence, "I'm certainly glad that's over, but we're both soaked."

Amanda was about to suggest that they go right home and come back for the tie the next day, when they both heard frantic cries of "Help! Thief!" coming from the direction of the jewelry counter.

Their wet clothes forgotten, Amanda and Sherlock rushed to see what was going on.

Behind the jewelry counter, the salesman was waving his arms in a state of total distraction. The case that Amanda had been looking into just a few minutes before was now smashed and almost empty. All the cuff links, the tie pins, and the beautiful ring were gone.

“What happened?” Amanda asked the salesman excitedly.

“I don’t know, I don’t know. I must have been putting some ladies’ jewelry away in the next counter . . . there was so much confusion . . . I just didn’t see . . . but I haven’t been near the case. I know you’re not supposed to touch anything. The police will probably want to check for fingerprints.”

Sherlock, apparently, was already doing just that. He had his magnifying glass out and was peering intently into the shattered display case.

Amanda thought that the salesman certainly looked upset, and his clothes were in even worse condition than hers and Sherlock’s. “Oh, dear, you do look terrible,” she couldn’t help blurting out. “There’s a big white spot on your chin, and a kind of rusty spot on your tie.”

“My chin—I don’t know—it must be some plaster that fell down when the sprinklers went off. And my tie—I guess I spilled ketchup on it at lunch yesterday. I must not have realized when I put it on this morning. And now this! It’s so awful.”

Amanda was embarrassed to see that Sherlock now seemed to be using his magnifying glass to study the spot on the salesman’s tie. But the poor man was so upset that he didn’t even notice.



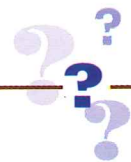
Both Amanda and Sherlock would have loved to be there when the police arrived. Neither one of them could ever resist a good mystery. But this one would just have to be solved without them. They'd promised their mother to be back by noon with two loaves of bread from the bakery department for her luncheon party, and it was already after eleven o'clock.

Finally, by promising him a chocolate éclair to eat on the way home, Amanda managed to lure her brother away from the scene of the crime.

They rushed off to take the escalator down to the lower level where all the food was sold, and as they reached the bottom they both noticed a door marked EMERGENCY EXIT AND SPRINKLER CONTROL ROOM. Seeing the sign reminded Amanda of her soggy blouse, and she shivered slightly as she moved toward the bread counter. Sherlock, of course, headed immediately for the pastries to make his selection.

The warm, fresh-baked bread smelled wonderful, and Amanda wondered how she'd be able to resist breaking off a piece and eating it right then and there. She pointed out what she wanted, and was hardly even paying attention as the baker took the two loaves she'd selected from the counter. He weighed the first one and marked the price on a paper bag, and then he weighed the second. By this time Sherlock had come back, munching on his éclair.

All of a sudden a worried look crossed the baker's face. "I'm so sorry, Miss," he apologized, "but you'll have to make another choice. This loaf doesn't seem to be baked properly and I'm afraid it might have been damaged by the water."



"It looks all right to me," Amanda insisted, and Sherlock nodded energetically.

"No, no, please, your mother would be very angry if I sold you a damaged loaf."

By now she was really worried about the time, and too uncomfortable in her damp clothes to argue, so Amanda hurriedly pointed out another loaf and turned to ask Sherlock for a bite of his éclair. The baker weighed and wrapped the bread and carefully laid the package on the counter with both hands.

He had just said, "That will be two dollars and twenty-five cents, please," when Sherlock and Amanda looked at each other in amazement, realizing that they had just solved the mystery.

The solution to this mystery is on the next page.

