

Sister Sleuth and the Silver Blaze

A Reading A-Z Level V Leveled Book

Word Count: 2,117

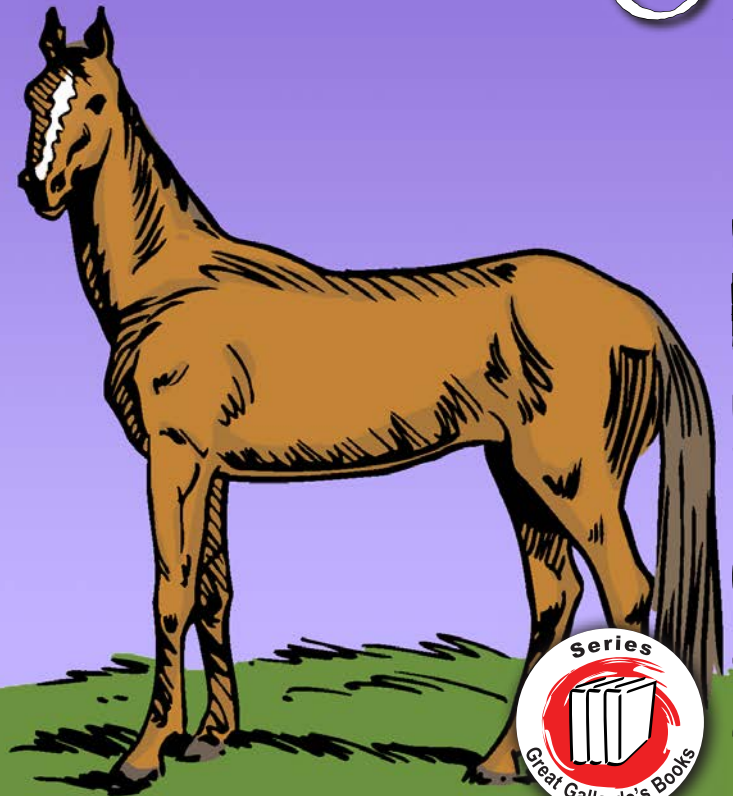



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Sister Sleuth and the Silver Blaze



A Great Gallardo Book Written by Lori Polydoros
Illustrated by David Cockcroft

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Note: *Sister Sleuth and the Silver Blaze* is the third in a continuing series written by Lori Polydoros. Travel with Miguel Ventura and his family as they experience classic adventures.



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Correlation

LEVEL V

Fountas & Pinnell	R
Reading Recovery	40
DRA	40

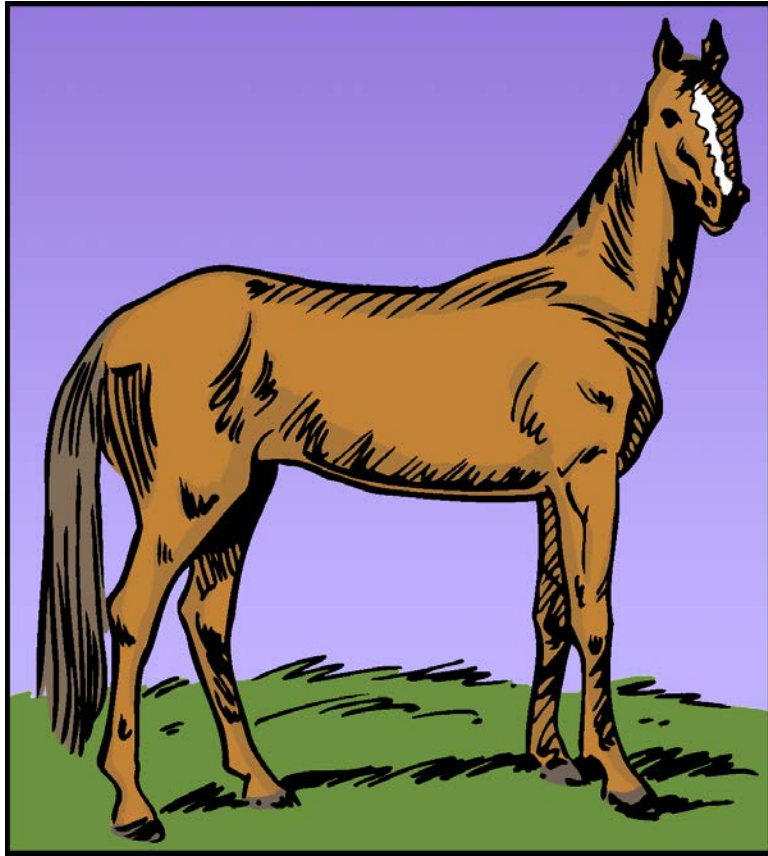


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Summertime Blues

Summer was here. The beaches were blazing hot, the parks were packed, but Miguel was stuck working at his family's sandwich shop. To make it worse, his seven-year-old sister was driving him crazy.

"Teresa!" Miguel shouted. "Get your toys off of the counter. I just cleaned it."

"You're bossy," she said, swiping her figurines into her arms. Teresa was **obsessed** with her horses. "Maybe if you played with me, you wouldn't be in such a bad mood."

"Playing with horses," Miguel said as he stared out the window, "wouldn't make me feel any better."

"You're a meanie," she mumbled, "with no imagination."





Miguel rolled his eyes and glanced around the shop to see his mom chatting with their only customer. Dad was out making deliveries. Teresa was back in horse land. It might be the perfect time for Miguel to take a little trip up to the loft.

During the school year, Miguel had discovered an old chest full of magical books in the loft of the backroom. They belonged to his great-grandfather, a magician called The Great Gallardo. After reading a few of these books, he had been transported into the stories as one of the characters. So far, he'd become Ben Franklin's grandson and Huckleberry Finn. He'd also battled a monster on the moon and rounded up cattle in the Old West. He couldn't wait to see what The Great Gallardo's books had in store for him next!

After scrambling up the ladder, Miguel found a miniature, golden statue of a horse on top of the chest. "Oh no," he whispered. "Could Teresa have found the books too?"

He prayed that she hadn't found them as he carelessly tossed the statue to the floor. It slid across the smooth wood and banged down the ladder. A book from the chest awaited him.

"*The Memoirs of Sherlock Holmes!*" Miguel loved mysteries, and Sherlock Holmes was a famous detective. Miguel read the first paragraph and nothing happened. Usually, the words mixed themselves up just before he mysteriously went into the story. Miguel read the whole first page, but he remained in the loft. He hung his head thinking that maybe the magic was gone.



Mysteries on the Moor

Frustrated, Miguel tossed the book back into the chest. Footsteps padded on the floor below him. He peered down, but saw no one, so he tried to catch a glimpse of the golden horse that he threw from the loft, but saw nothing. The back room was unusually quiet.

Before Miguel could climb down the ladder to check things out, the Sherlock Holmes book opened in front of him. The pages fluttered forward and back, until the book opened to page 185.

"The Adventure of the Silver Blaze!" Miguel read. "I'll try one more time. It's got to work."

Miguel read, "'I'm afraid Watson, that I shall have to go,' said Holmes.

'Go? Where to?'

'To Dartmoor—to King's Pyland.'"

Miguel felt a chilly breeze on his neck as the words began dancing around on the page.

Was my wonder that already up case had extraordinary surprised. I in only mixed this been was Indeed.

Miguel opened his eyes to find a man standing next to him wearing a **tweed** coat, a weird cap with earflaps, and smoking a pipe.

Sherlock Holmes! Miguel thought.

Miguel glanced down at himself, dressed in a gray suit with a black top hat upon his head. He could only guess that he'd become . . .

"Dr. Watson!" Holmes said.

Miguel jumped.

"Still with us?" he asked, as two other men appeared behind him.

Miguel nodded as a train chugging away down the tracks caught his attention.

"Welcome!" said a small man with long sideburns. "I'm Colonel Ross, and this is Inspector Gregory."

Holmes shook their hands. "Meet Dr. Watson, my closest friend and **colleague**."

Miguel grasped the inspector's hand.

"Watson, you remember I told you of Colonel Ross, owner of the missing champion horse, Silver Blaze?" Holmes said.

Miguel nodded warily.



"I'm in charge of the case here in Dartmoor," said the inspector.

"Nice to meet you." Miguel hoped Holmes didn't expect too much out of him because he didn't have a clue as to what was going on in this book.

As the group bumped down the road in a small **carriage**, Miguel tried to gather a few facts from their conversation.

The Mystery of the Silver Blaze

- Silver Blaze, champion horse and first favorite in the Wessex Cup race, disappeared two nights ago. Owner, Colonel Ross of King's Pyland stables
- John Straker, his trainer, found beaten to death out on the moor the night the horse disappeared. Straker's coat found draped over a bush. Small knife found in his hand.
- Fitzroy Simpson. Arrested for the murder and horsenapping. He had been at the stables that night questioning a stable hand to get information about the horse race.
- The same stable hand was drugged. He was found passed out the next morning.

The carriage stopped. "Taking notes, Watson?" asked Holmes.

"Trying to keep up, sir," Miguel said, as he stepped out, in front of a red brick **villa**.

"Dartmoor, I presume," said Holmes.

The sun began to set, transforming the sloping plain into a golden field, and casting shadows on the faded ferns lining the low curves of the moor.

"What is that cluster of houses to the west, Colonel?" asked Holmes.

"Mapleton Stables," the colonel answered.

"Ah, your competition," Holmes said.

Colonel Ross led the men out across the moor to where the trainer's body was found. Holmes compared the **tracks** in the mud with shoes from the victim, the accused, and the missing horse.

"No tracks anywhere else," said the inspector. "I checked the grounds for one hundred yards in all directions myself."

"I'd still like to take a little walk before darkness creeps upon us," Holmes said.

"We've already alerted the **Gypsies** that live all over this moor about the handsome reward," the inspector said. "But we've heard nothing so far."

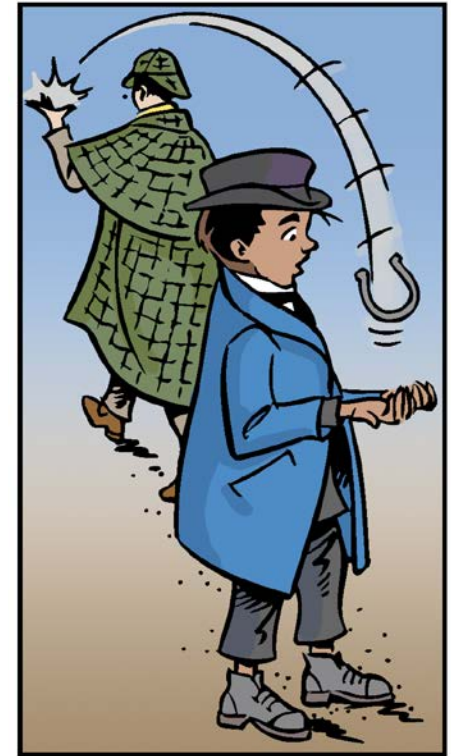
Gypsies? Miguel didn't know anything about Gypsies.

"Follow me, Watson," Holmes said. "Let's imagine what would have become of the horse if he'd broken away after the tragedy. He might have gone back to King's Pyland or to Mapleton Stables instead of running wild on the moor."



Miguel followed Holmes farther onto the darkening moor. "Could the Gypsies have taken him?" Miguel asked.

"They have no interest in a stolen horse, and wish not to be bothered by police," Holmes said. "Now, take this," Holmes said as he tossed Miguel the horseshoe he used to compare to the tracks. "For good luck."



"Imagine there are more tracks out here," Holmes said. "I'm afraid that Inspector Gregory's main weakness is that he does think too much with his imagination."

Miguel wondered if maybe Holmes suffered from an **overactive** imagination, like his sister Teresa. Holmes went off to the left, Miguel to the right. As the skies went black, a chill crawled down Miguel's spine like a spider. Owls screeched, the wind howled, someone screamed.

Imagining Tracks

Miguel froze in the ringing silence of the night. That scream—that low, deep scream still echoed through his mind. *Which way had it come from?* The moor was quieter than any place he'd ever been, and the darkness crept in more fully, leaving Miguel alone and lost. Leaves rustled to his left, and shadows stole toward him from the right. Miguel's throat tightened. "Mr. Holmes?" he squeaked. "Is that you?"

The sounds stopped cold. Miguel strained his eyes and ears, but he could hear nothing but a faint moan. *Was it human or just the wind?* Not willing to find out, Miguel shot off in the opposite direction. Sweat built up under his heavy coat. "Mr. Holmes!" he cried out. "Where are . . ."



Before he could finish, Miguel tripped into a **depression** in the moor and twisted his ankle. He cried out in pain. A light flickered off in the distance. Miguel crawled up the soft, mushy ground, his ankle throbbing. There was definitely something . . . or someone, coming. He had to get out of there!

After struggling onto flat ground, Miguel fell to his back. His ankle felt tight inside his boot. There was no way he could run, or even walk, back to the stables. He closed his eyes, afraid.

"OUCH!" Someone trounced right over his good ankle.

"Oh, sorry," a boy holding a lantern said. "What're you doing down there, sir?"

"Twisted ankle," Miguel moaned.

"Let me help you," he said, pulling Miguel to his feet. "Why are you on the moor so late?"

The young man's dark eyes looked vaguely familiar, Miguel thought, before he said, "Searching for horse tracks."

"Sir?" the boy asked.

"Mr. Sherlock Holmes and I were searching for evidence that Silver Blaze might have run off the night of his trainer's murder."



"Why sir, I love horses more than anything," the boy said. "I shall be glad to assist you."

"No," Miguel said as he shook his head from side to side. He didn't need another kid hanging around like his sister. "I shall manage, as soon as I find Mr. Holmes."

"You are in no condition to be out on the moor alone at night," the boy said. "And I've got quite an imagination for such work."

"Imagination?" Miguel asked. "Have we met before?"

"One too many times," said the boy laughing. "Don't you recognize me?"

Miguel cocked his head and said, "Teresa, is that you?"



Sister Sleuth

"Teresa!" Miguel stepped back. "You're a boy!"

"So?" she said. "You're Dr. Watson, a smart man!"

"How did you get out here?"

"Same way you did."

"You found the books?"

"Thanks to you!" she laughed. "When I saw the magic happen, I opened the book to follow you. Nothing happened so I kept reading until I realized that I had to read the beginning of the story to get the words to swirl around."

"I can't believe you were spying on me!" Miguel folded his arms and sat down. These books were supposed to be only his.

"The Great Gallardo would want both of his great-grandchildren to have adventures in the books, don't you think?" Teresa said.

Miguel shrugged.

"Now get up," she insisted. "Silver Blaze's tracks have got to be out here somewhere!"

"It's too dark," Miguel said. "We'll never find them."

"Use your imagination, Dr. Watson," Teresa said. "Besides, Holmes is missing, right?"

Miguel nodded.

"If we don't hurry, they might not find Silver Blaze in time for the big race!" she said.

"How do you know the horse competes in the big race?"

"I read ahead in the story before I realized that I needed to go back for the magic to happen."

Miguel's mind raced. Maybe the magic only happened on certain pages. Looks like he had a mystery of his own to solve at home.

"Let's go!" Miguel said.



Teresa got a big branch for Miguel to use as a walking stick. Together, with the light of her lantern, they searched the moor.

Under some ferns, Teresa found horse tracks plainly outlined in the soft earth.

Miguel pulled out the horseshoe from his pocket, and it matched up perfectly to the tracks in the mud. “You did it, Teresa!”



She smiled.

Branches broke behind them, and Miguel turned his head slowly to see a group of people standing around a cart pulled by a horse. Gypsies!

An older man walked toward Miguel. He held something very familiar in his hands—Sherlock Holmes’s cap!

Miguel’s heart raced. *Had they hurt Mr. Holmes?* He turned to grab Teresa when the man called out. “Do not fear us,” he shouted. “Mr. Holmes is safe.”

Miguel let out his breath and held up Teresa’s lantern. There was Holmes, spread out on the cart. “My dear Watson!”

“I thought you’d disappeared,” Miguel said, relieved, as he ran over to Holmes.



“No, my friend, these lovely people assisted me when I injured myself out on the moor. They agreed to take me back to King’s Pyland.”

Miguel looked at all the Gypsies’ smiling faces. He’d been afraid for no reason at all. “Wait until you see,” Miguel shouted. “We found the tracks!”

“We?” Holmes asked.

“Well, my sis . . . er . . . my friend found the tracks!” Miguel pointed to Teresa as she waved.

"I knew you could imagine the tracks. Now, let's take a **detour** and see where they lead," Holmes said as the carriage headed west, with Miguel and Teresa guiding them.

Track by track, the trail led right to Mapleton Stables! Upon arriving there, Holmes said, "It is here we will find our beloved Silver Blaze."

"The horse is here?" Miguel asked.

"Oh yes, I will discuss the matter with the owner," Holmes said. "I'm sure he'll do whatever I wish, now that we know the truth."

"The truth?"

"The owner of the horse favored second in the race found Silver Blaze on the moor. He **disguised** him and kept Silver Blaze here so he'd be out of the race," Teresa said.

"Smart boy," said Holmes, pointing at Teresa, who giggled.



"Watson, you and your friend may head back to King's Pyland," said Holmes, "now that we're back on track."

Miguel and Teresa said their goodbyes and took the first carriage back to the King's Pyland stables. As the cool air brushed against Miguel's face, he closed his eyes. When he opened them, the familiar aroma of bread tickled his nose.

"We're home!" he said.

"Here we are," Teresa said. "Holmes said the story was back on track."

"But what about the rest of the case?" Miguel questioned. "Who murdered the trainer and stole the horse?"



"It's all in here, my dear Watson," said Teresa as she tossed the book to Miguel. "But how can we go into books? How does the magic work?" Teresa asked.

"I think that only certain pages are magic at certain . . ."

"Times!" Teresa finished for him.

"Yeah, we both read different pages and nothing happened. So I think . . ." Miguel opened the book to the Silver Blaze story. "The magic happened only on page 185, so if my theory is correct, then today should be . . ."

He carefully climbed down the ladder with Teresa trailing behind. Miguel snatched his mother's favorite calendar from the wall. It said in tiny italic print that today was the 185th day of the year.

"So that's how it works," Teresa said. "Pretty good detective work, Dr. Watson. Way to use your imagination to solve the case."

"Yeah, thanks." He smiled at Teresa. "You're not so bad yourself."

Solving mysteries this summer with Teresa might actually be pretty fun!

Glossary

carriage	a vehicle with wheels, often pulled by horses or other animals, to carry people (p. 9)
colleague	a person with whom another works (p. 8)
depression	a low, hollow place (p. 14)
detour	a roundabout route that usually replaces a more direct way (p. 21)
disguised	changed the looks of to hide identity (p. 21)
Gypsies	members of a group of people who migrated from India to Europe long ago and live a wandering life (p. 11)
memoirs	written accounts of personal experiences (p. 6)
moor	an area of open, wet, poor land that cannot be used for farming (p. 10)
obsessed	to have occupied the mind completely (p. 4)
overactive	active more than normal (p. 12)
tracks	marks left by something that has traveled by (p. 11)
tweed	a rough, woolen cloth often used in suits and jackets (p. 8)
vaguely	not clearly (p. 14)
villa	a large, expensive home often found in the country (p. 10)