

== A 'Round-Robin Pastiche' ==
Conducted by the "Pleasant Places of Fla."
Scion Society of the Baker Street Irregulars
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with an introductory paragraph by L.M.

The Case of The Foreign Cabman

THE CASE OF THE FOREIGN CABMAN

As I look over my notebooks recording the astonishing work of detection undertaken by my associate Mr Sherlock Holmes, I see that this remarkable case with its surprising solution had its beginning on a typical foggy London day in November, 1892.

Mr Holmes had been fidgetty all the afternoon, repeatedly looking at what seemed a printed list of names and addresses, which sometimes he held in ^{his} hand, at arms length, and sometimes laid down with a frown.

Occasionally, I heard him mutter, "I know that name, but where, when?"

I recall at last saying.....

L.M.

"My dear Holmes, what is it that holds your attention for so long? Perhaps I can be of some help."

He continued muttering to himself as if I were not there. Knowing how upset he could become when his concentration was interrupted I continued to read an old medical journal, knowing from our long acquaintance that my dear friend would acknowledge my presence when and if he were ready.

For another hour he continued to peruse his list or jump up to stride nervously to a book shelf to pull down a book or to rumage in that stack of old newspapers which no-one was allowed to disarrange.

The winter sun, never too strong at this time of year, began to fade. It was long past the hour when every good Englishman should have his tea.

Since the fading light on his table was even less bright than that which fell on the journal in my lap I hoped that he would soon find that he no longer would be able to see what he was doing and either have to get up to light the lamp himself or ask me to do it for him. This would interrupt the chain of his thoughts. However, he continued to work, and soon, I must admit, I dozed intermittently over the journal which I had found to be very dull.

I must have dropped off into a sound sleep when, suddenly, I was awakened by a shout from Holmes and found that he was roughly shaking my shoulder.

Joy M.

I was alert immediately. My service in the Afghan War had trained me to awaken with full control of my senses.

"Watson," he cried, "there is not a moment to be lost. Are you free this evening?"

"Why yes, Holmes, what is afoot?"

"I'll tell you as we go on our way. Get your hat and a warm overcoat. It'll be cold tonight."

"Shall I have ^{Mrs. Hudson} ~~order~~ order a cab?"

"No, no, Watson, there is no time. Open the window and call down into the street. At this time of the day there will be one there."

As I did so, Holmes said, "Watson, it might be wise to carry your service revolver... We're dealing with a vicious and unscrupulous adversary who will stop at nothing to further his nefarious scheme. Nothing, Watson, do you understand?"

"Right, Holmes."

I couldn't hear the directions which Holmes gave to the driver, but soon we were dashing through an endless succession of narrow and wet streets. It had not rained, but the moisture from the fog had given them a mud-colored appearance.

As darkness fell the fog lifted somewhat and I could see a star or two through the rifts in the clouds.

"You are a wonderful companion, Watson. I'm sure that, with your help, we shall soon get to the bottom of this sordid case."

"'Pon my word, Holmes, I'm still in the dark about the nature of the case."

"Ah, yes, old friend. I'll describe the situation as clearly as I can."

"Last week," he continued, "last Thursday, to be precise, a memorial plaque was placed with elaborate ceremony on the wall to the right of the entrance to a small club a few doors from

Thos. B. M.

Madam Tussaud's Wax Museum."

"But that is near our flat on Baker Street," I exclaimed.

"Precisely," he answered.

"Then why are we now...."

"In time, Watson," he continued. "Monday morning the plaque was found to have been removed from the club and placed in the 'Chamber of Horrors' exhibit at the museum, cut in half by a very sharp object, with both halves lying in the head basket of a French guillotine. The blade in this device is false, and could not possibly have been used to cut the plaque."

"Amazing," said I.

He continued, "The plaque is made of aluminum, a metal almost as expensive as silver, and is nearly two inches thick. But the most remarkable thing about this whole business is the name of the club in which it was originally installed. It is called

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the Hew Draper Society."

He stared at me as if I should react to this information. "Hew Draper?" I repeated the title in contemplation.

"Forgive me, Watson," he laughed, "Being a practical man as well as a Doctor, you probably have no use of such trivia. Hew Draper once cut a figure in the walls of the Salt Tower in order to cast horoscopes."

"Horoscopes? I take it then that he was sent to the Tower for an accusation of witchcraft?"

"Excellent, Watson, excellent!"

"Is that ominous building then to be our destination?"

"Ah! A fair assumption on your part, my good fellow. No, no -- here we are, in fact."

We dismounted and while my companion paid the cabbie, I studied the group of buildings in front of me. It was obvious that we were in a very rich neighborhood. I turned a questioning look to Holmes.

"That one there, Watson," he pointed with the cane he had brought along. "Number 204, the residents of which are direct descendants of Bess of Hardwick and her husband, Sir William St Lo. Sir William and Lady St Lo were the supposed victims of Hew Draper."

"And you suspect their descendants of the defilement to the Hew Draper Society?"

"On the contrary," he reached out and sounded the knocker, "I fear for their safety."

Just then, we heard a peircing scream followed by a low, inhuman moaning.

It took only one look from Holmes before I joined my shoulder to his against the locked door. With our determined efforts, we were in the house in seconds, but we froze in the foyer, unknowing in which direction to turn.

"There!" Holmes exclaimed, seeing a light under a door to the left.

We rushed in to find

WIB

A terrifying scene of a murder about to be committed. In the corner of the room lay a young lad bound and gagged. Near the center of the room was a huge man was engaged in placing a noose, which hung from a chandelier, around the neck of a ~~third~~ second man, also bound but whose gag had worked itself loose. As we burst into the room, the would-be murderer dropped his human burden and with a look of indescribable hate on his malevolent face, drew his revolver and fired at us. Before I had time to gather my wits and fire my own revolver, which I had drawn as we entered the room, he lept across the room like a crazed animal and hurled heimsself, screaming, through the closed rear window. By the time we reached it, he had disappeared from sight.

We proceeded to undo the ropes binding the young boy and the gentleman who, as I learned later, was his father, John Melville.

"Thank God you arrived when you did," said Melville, "that madman was about to kill us both. But who are you gentlemen and how did you come to arrive at my house when you did?"

"A chain of events," said Holmes, "which dates back to the seventeenth century."

We then introduced ourselves an, took seats, and Holmes proceeded to supply the missing pieces to this most extraordinary mystery.

"Last Tuesday," said Holmes, "Mrs. Hudson brought to me a cryptic message which had been slipped under our front door at Baker Street. The message read

To prevent a double murder linked with Sunday's Draper plaque mystery, hail a cab Wednesday at 6:00 PM.

Urgent this be kept confidential.

What made the message more intriguing was that it had been written in French. Well, to the public, the Hew Draper Society is, as we know, a seemingly harmless group of eccentrics who dabble in astronomy and certain aspects of the occult. Hew Draper, as

our history books tell us, was sent to the Tower and beheaded for the crime of witchcraft. It is also known that this took place because of certain accusations made by a Sir William St Lo.

Less known is the fact that the followers of Draper supposedly took revenge on Sir William and his wife by burning down their home and seeing that the couple perished in the fire. Unknown to Draper's fanatics at the time, ~~was~~ Sir William and his wife escaped the fire, fled their estate and in turn fled England to France, where, with the aid of French friends, they changed their identities in an effort to elude their enemies.

After they died of natural causes, their descendants, John Melville, our present host, a widower with a young son, returned to England to live in this very fine house."

Melville was dumfounded. "How did you learn of these things? I'm well aware of the Draper Society's fanatical membership and went to great lengths to keep the identities of my son and myself a secret."

"I must confess," confided Holmes, "that a great deal of the events surrounding the Draper Society and your true identity were furnished to me by my brother Mycroft, who shares an interest with me in such matters and on occasion has at his disposal greater information-gathering resources than I. Watson, that list of names you noticed me studying intently was a list of names and addresses of known members of the Draper Society. The society, although ostensibly harmless though eccentric, is actually of great interest to Her Majesty's government for reasons I will not go into at present. Their leader, a Count Alucard is perhaps the third most dangerous man in England. It is he who learned of Melville's return and swore vengeance on both him and his son.. The Draper plaque was desecrated and placed in the head basket of a French guillotine at Tussards to show that apparently someone was seeking revenge against the society. The significance of the guillotine was, of course, that later the act of desecration would be connected with Melville and his French lineage dating back to Sir William's forced exile.

There was someone, however, who was aware of Alucard's entire plan, and who for one reason or another decided to thwart it. This person, I believe, was one of Alucard's followers who could not hold to his plan of double murder, including a child. It was he who put the note under our door and this person had to be the cabman who was awaiting us in front of our flat at the appointed hour. I was not giving him instructions where to take us as you might have thought, my dear Watson, just assuring him that his secret and his identity would be safe with me. I spoke to him in French, of course, as that is his only language. By then, of course, I knew who he was. He took us to the place of the proposed murders, with little time to spare, I might add. Now, Melville, it is time for you to fill in the missing details of just what Alucard's plan was and how he intended to make you

appear the villain in this little drama, and how he would be made to seem the innocent victim of your revenge for the wrongs done to your ancestors. I've no doubt but that he confided his evil plans to you before he attempted to kill you. A man of his ego would not permit you to die without knowing how you yourself would appear the guilty one."

"You're absolutely right," exclaimed Melville. "His devious plan was simple enough and would have made me appear the villain to the authorities. As you have already said, the desecration of the plaque and the French connection were meant to link that deed and the deed to follow to me - after my body and that of my son were discovered."

Count Alucard planned a large meeting of the society for tomorrow. He placed a bomb in a concealed place at the meeting which was deliberately fixed by him to misfire. Tonight, the night before the meeting, it would appear that I, after having destroyed the Draper plaque and after having placed a bomb which would apparently kill nearly fifty people, in a crazed and vengeance-satisfied condition, had therefore decided to take my life as well as that of my son. That the apparent facts should not be missed by Scotland Yard was insured by the suicide note I was to leave. This I readily wrote when Alucard burst in upon us and threatened the life of my son on the spot if I did not comply with his wishes. Then the chain of events would be complete: the apparent deaths of my ancestors at the hands of Draper's followers, my emergence from exile and crazed destruction of their plaque, my attempt to kill the members of their group en masse, and finally the destruction of myself and my son after I thought that my mission had been completed."

"Ah yes, now all the pieces do fit into place, indeed. I fear, however, that we have not seen the last of Alucard and I also fear for the life of both yourself, Melville, and for your son. I'm afraid that you must ~~enee~~-again disappear ~~as-you-a~~ just as suddenly as you appeared and make every effort to once again conceal your true identity. Crazed fanatics such as Alucard are not easily thwarted."

"Holmes," exclaimed Watson, "this was indeed a most bizarre affair. But what of the cabman? How did you know his identity and what has become of him?"

"To answer your last question first, Watson, I'm sure he is many miles from here by now. I promised to keep his role in this matter confidential and I am a man of my word. As to our foreign cabman's identity, that was really quite simple. The list of members given to me by Mycroft contained only one French name - LaFarge. Our note was written in French, of course, and there did not appear to be any reason for the writer having done so except that he could only write in French. As to why he decided to betray Alucard and therefore seal his death warrant or become a fugitive for life.....well.....Tell me Melville, you married a French woman and are now a widower. What was your late wife's maiden name?" "What a coincidence," said Melville, "it was LaFarge!" - FVG