

# The Pleasant Places of Florida



## "THE CASE OF THE THREE MERRY DEBS"

Another Spine-Tingling Round-Robin  
Holmesian Pastiche by Members of  
the P. P. of F.

OCTOBER - 1980

Preface . . . .

**T**his is the "lucky seventh" Holmesian pastiche produced by the dutiful irregulars of the "Pleasant Places". As a matter of record, it has nothing whatsoever to do with "luck" - but, rather, ingenious hard work & good fun!



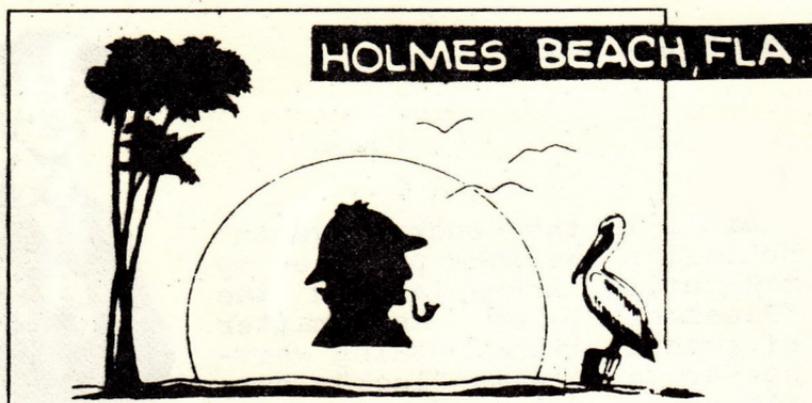
The Pleasant Places of Florida appears to be unique in this sort of endeavor. We are honoured to provide this small slice of the Hudsonian pie - ever 'keeping green' the memory of the Master. Leslie Marshall, God rest his S'ian Soul, would have been "pleased as (Criterion) punch!

Now . . . sit back . . . light your bowl of shag from the slipper (we sha'n't mention its origin) . . and enjoy the "3 Merry Debs".

(The Rev. Dr.) Ben Wood, BSI  
 "Scandal in Bohemia II"  
 Recorder - P. P. of F.

\* Sherlock Holmes, master of disguise, as an amiable and simple-minded Non-conformist clergyman in "A Scandal in Bohemia".





Other Round-Robin Pastiches by  
Members of

THE PLEASANT PLACES of FLORIDA

"The Case of the Foreign Cabman" (1975)\*

"The Adventure of the Lost £'s" (1976)\*

"The Adventure of the Second Stein" (1977)

"The Singular Adventure of  
the Solitary Balloonist" (1977)

"The Curious Affair of the  
Witch's Brougham (1978)

"The Adventure of the Florid Ians" (1979)

- also -

"Exercises in Ratiocination &  
Mental Gymnastics" (1977)  
(A booklet of mind-jogging conundrums for  
the Sherlockian brain.)

"A Tribute to Leslie Marshall, B.S.I." - A  
fitting tribute to the Founder of the PPofF.  
(\* - contains reprints of first 2 pastiches)

The Case of the Three Merry Debs



Introduction

by George Tullis  
of Deltona, Fla.

**I**t was by way of celebration that I had invited my friend, Mr. Sherlock Holmes, to accompany me to the Christmas pageant, "A Tribute to Gilbert & Sullivan" being presented by a group of talented amateurs, as it happened, in the auditorium of the Theosophical Society of Imperial Arcade at Ludgate Circus. My second book of reminiscences, "On Women of Many Nations & Three Continents" had just been published pseudonymously, through the good offices of a fellow physician whom I had met in London literary circles. Three volumes - elephant folio.

I paid the swarthy Hindoo at the box office for our tickets and we proceeded to take our seats in the Hall. Soon, after a rousing overture which was appropriately applauded, the orchestra struck up a gay introduction, and 3 young ladies entered from the left wing with graceful sidesteps, in the manner of a chorus line. It was obvious that the girls were triplets, that they were of extraordinary beauty, and that they were portraying Yum-Yum, Peep-Bo, and Petti-Sing, from "The Mikado". It was also notable that they were clad in the modest quasi-Turkish outfit popularized in America by Mrs. Dexter C. Bloomer, with full pastel-coloured trousers gathered at the ankles and generous silken belts and cuffs on flowing tunics - the only Japanese touches being their high hair-dos

secured by jewelled straight-pins and Oriental fans held in their right hand. The bright foot-lights seemed to strike sparks from the bejewelled rings which they wore on each of their hands. At the moment, however, I was most struck by the clarity with which they enunciated the lyrics, "Three little maids from school are we,/Pertas a schoolgirl well can be,/Fill'd to the brim with girlish glee,--/Three little maids from school!/Ev'rything is a source of fun./Nobody's safe, for we care for none!/Life is a joke that's just begun!/Three little maids from School!" . . and so on.

I knew who they were, of course. They were the daughters of Lord and Lady Dimick - Dolly, Molly and Polly - recent debutantes, and their pictures had added a certain 'je ne sais quoi' to the society pages of late.

My companion seemed as taken as I was by the singing and dancing, his two hands joining as he involuntarily beat time with both. The girls exited to the right wings.

Presumably to permit a change of scenery, the next turn was performed before the drawn curtain. It was by one of the guiding spirits of the pantomine, Lady Fanny Pembroke, who, not coincidentally, was the debutantes' maternal aunt. Unlike her nieces, Lady Pembroke was attired altogether consistently with her role, which was Little Buttercup from "The Pirates of Penzance", her costume consisting of a long print dress, large peasant apron, flower-bestrewn bonnet, and woven basket filled with trinkets. It was said that this buxom dame was hopeful of making her mark in the world of the occult, the concert hall, the theatre or, failing all else, the variety circuit.

I was pleasantly surprised at her vocal technique as she launched into the aria which commences: "I'm called Little Buttercup,/Dear

Little Buttercup,/Though I could never tell why," and concludes with the climax, "So buy of your Buttercup,/Poor Little Buttercup,/Come of your Buttercup buy."

We were never to see the harlequinade which had been scheduled for later in the program as the pantomime, and Lady Pembroke herself, came to an untimely end at that instant - the terminal note of her song. She had backed into the blue velvet curtain on the first "buy", and on the final "buy" she dropped forward like a plump log, the contents of her basket flying helter-skelter, she ending up with her head lolling over the hot footlights. The orchestra stopped playing with a discordant note.

Holmes and I were on our feet in an instant!



Continuation I

by Helen Swift  
of HOLMES Beach, Fla.

I cleared the row and dashed down the aisle toward the orchestra pit with Holmes loping behind. Two of the stage hands had come from the right wings and were attempting to lift the fallen Buttercup. With the statement that I was a physician, I requested that Lady Pembroke be carried to the nearest dressing room. There was no need for any resuscitative measures for the would-be actress was dead and I was prepared to so certify. Holmes remained at my side, saying little but observing my examination. I could find no obvious

cause of death and it was evident that further investigation would be needed.

Crowded around the door from the dressing room to the narrow passageway were the Dimick triplets, the director of the amateur company and, picking her way along, the imposing figure of Lady Dimick, Fanny Pembroke's older sister. Holmes went to the door, spoke to the director who was near hysteria, suggesting that the audience be dismissed and that both Scotland Yard and Lady Pembroke's personal physician be notified.

Holmes then quietly ushered the triplets and their mother into the director's office. I remained with the body of Lady Pembroke. Holmes conveyed to me later the gist of their conversation which was of no help in ascertaining the reason for Fanny Pembroke's sudden demise.

On the morning of the second day after the tragedy, a message was delivered to 221B Baker Street from Inspector Lestrade, requesting that Holmes review some reports that would soon be arriving. It seemed that Lady Pembroke had been in excellent health, a bit overweight, and that her death had been caused by the action of curare which had paralyzed the respiratory system. The drug had been administered through a tiny puncture just below the right shoulder blade. It was murder!

Inasmuch as Holmes and I had been at the theatre, Holmes' observations might be of use. After learning the time for the funeral services, Holmes decided he would request an appointment with Lady Dimick and her daughters immediately thereafter. On that day, Friday, the seventh of November, as it happened, just before Holmes was readying to leave, a message came with the startling news that Dolly Dimick had collapsed at the close of the services, and a few minutes later, expired!

Inspector Lestrade had been summoned by Lord Dimick himself. After Holmes' involuntary exclamation of surprise, he lapsed into silence and I hesitated to intrude upon his ratiocinating processes.

We awaited Lestrade's further communication. I, in particular, was very curious about the cause of merry Dolly's death. Of course no further thought was given to calling upon the Dimick family that day. Holmes and I decided to forego Mrs. Hudson's evening offering and went to Simpson's-in-the-Strand instead. Returning home, we were disappointed to find no further word and went to bed still curious. A message came the following day that Dolly had died, not from the effects of curare, not from natural causes, but from . . . . .

## Continuation II

by Bill Ward  
of St. Pete, Fla.



. . . . . **t**he insidious use of another rare Amazonian poison which had been impregnated into her hankie. In the throes of grief, she had pressed the hankie to her nose and mouth. The fumes had gradually overcome her, causing her collapse. The use of salts in attempting to revive her had hastened the

effects of the poison already inhaled.

The message further stated that Lady Dimick and her two remaining daughters had understandably been taken with hysterics. Justifiably suffering from paranoia, after their return to the manor house, they had locked themselves in Lady Dimick's chambers and were refusing admission to all. They had accepted neither food nor drink since the previous evening.

Holmes received all of this latest communication with uncharacteristic calm. He strolled stoically to the mantle, filled his clay pipe with shag from the Persian slipper, and, carrying the slipper and a handful of vestas to his chair, slumped in that tell-tale attitude of meditation.

I had noted, with increasing discomfort, Holmes' peculiar departure from his normal methods. He had poured over the well-trapped stage on hands and knees, delving into every crevice with his glass, or scrambled through the flies searching flats from teaser to tormentor, I would have perceived it to be perfectly normal.

His failure to make even the most cursory review of the curtain, through which Lady Pembroke was obviously stabbed . . . as well as his lack of participation in the ensuing search for the villain who had committed the foul deed, was lost in the confusion to all but me.

His lassitude during the day following the tragedy was only mildly broken by his nonchalant decision to trek to the Dimick ancestral home. This was put off by the news of Dolly's demise. And, now, this submersion into the trancelike state which I knew from long experience nothing short of an appearance by Professor Moriarty was likely to dispel. I longed for the cry of, "Quick, Watson! The game's afoot!",

followed by a pell-mell dash through the foggy streets to Victoria Station!

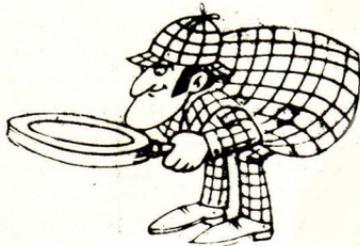
In my agitation, I am afraid I stormed from the room much as a petulant child. As I barged down the stairs, I almost collided headlong with the gentle Mrs. Hudson on her way to announce the arrival of Mr. Joseph Davies, of Scotland Yard. I made my apologies, and asked Mr. Davies to join me, as Holmes was not presently receiving. I had last seen Davies during our extraordinary adventure in Swansea. He had proved a most unflappable individual, and had elicited some mild compliments from Holmes himself for his deportment on the side of the craggy mountain. He now seemed more agitated than I had ever seen him during our most harrowing moments there.

As we had previously shared confidences, and he knew the closeness with which Holmes and I collaborated, he waited only for Mrs. Hudson to leave the room. He then began to unfold the most startling chain of events which I had encountered in my entire association with Sherlock Holmes!

He had no cause to recount the atrocious murders of those two flowers of English gentility. Only an hour previous, however, he had received a shocking message from Lestrade commencing with the words.....

### Continuation III

by Caroline Everett  
of St. Pete, Fla.



..... **W**e have proof that the mysterious deaths of Lady Pembroke and her niece, the Hon. Dolly Dimick are but the tip of the iceberg -

it is a radical plot aimed against the aristocracy of England. The climax is to be played out in the House of Lords this very week when its members convene to consider the Workmen's Pension Bill, which though it has passed the Commons, faces a hostile reception in the Lords."

"I have just come from Downing Street," continued Davies, "and I need not tell you the consternation this intelligence has produced at the highest level of government."

"Nonsense!" cried Holmes, leaping from the couch where he had spent so many hours wrapped in lethargy. "Poor Lestrade has misinterpreted the facts as usual! The Lords are quite safe, although the Bill is in peril. These crimes, while equally sinister, are on a smaller scale indeed!"

"Ah," he added, "unless I am very much mistaken, I am about to receive a communication that may shed some light on our problem."

As he spoke, a ragged messenger boy clattered up the stairs and into the room. Holmes tipped the lad, tore open the envelope, gave a quick glance at the enclosure, and exclaimed in a satisfied tone, "Just as I suspected! The lovely Dolly is confirmed by Somerset House to be the natural daughter of Lady Pembroke, conceived the same year as the Dimick twins, and adopted by their parents to avoid scandal. Indeed the relationship was so close that they were easily looked upon as triplets. But now our concern is the motive behind the sad demise of mother and daughter. Her son, the current Lord Pembroke, has the most to lose by the scandal, but as he is the heir, money could hardly have influenced him to have turned upon his relatives in this unnatural manner. Nevertheless . . ."

As he spoke, footsteps were again heard

on the stairs, and a dishevelled, but elegantly tailored youth appeared.

"Aha, Lord Pembroke!" said Holmes, "We were just discussing your sad loss."

"How did you know me?" asked the astonished peer.

"Since you had engaged to see me at this hour," replied Holmes deprecatingly, "I was on the lookout for a nobly-bred young man with a mourning band and a distinct resemblance to the Dimick sisters. But come, m' Lord, pray unburden yourself. These gentlemen are my colleagues."

"Briefly, Mr. Holmes, I fear for my life. Your are naturally unaware that Dolly Dimick was my illegitimate half-sister . . ."

"Excuse me," interrupted Holmes, "but we have already discovered that fact."

"Then you know that it is my side of the family alone that is the target of this madman," continued the young man. "Even if my mother's shame should be revealed, it is vital that the murderer be apprehended! I am to be married next summer, and aside from my own safety, I would not wish to endanger my wife-to-be or my heirs. What can be the motive behind these horrible crimes?"

"That we shall find out," promised Holmes. "But first, tell me of any persons, however unlikely, that could have held anything against your family or stood to gain by their deaths."

"I am the only heir, and as Lord Dimick is not unwealthy, his daughters are well provided for. For a while Dolly was squired about by a Cyril Poindexter, a supercilious young man in my opinion, and is said to be the son of a West Country bishop, but recently their relationship seems to have been strained. All her other

friends are known to me. My mother, on the other hand, frequently held soirees for some low-class but fashionable members of the artist set. Perhaps among them you may find a suspect - - I had no use for any of them myself."

"Thank you," said Holmes, as he escorted his visitor out. "I believe you have given us several possible leads." Soon after, Holmes and I were in a cab bowling East towards Bloomsbury.



### The Conclusion

By Wanda Butts  
of Largo, Fla.

**H**olmes had insisted that Inspector Davies return to the Yard to set Lestrade aright on the matter of the threatening message, and we agreed to meet with him in 30 minutes time.

As we exited from the cab, Holmes hurried towards a side street, urgently calling, "Quick, Watson! There's not a moment to lose!"

"But where are we going?", I questioned, noticing that we were entering a section of slums.

"To prevent a wedding, Watson!" he replied, "And I pray that we are not too late."

Soon we were outside a small church, its doors closed against the dirt and grime of

outside. With no inhibitions, Holmes rushed forward and pushed against the doors. They were locked! As I added my shoulder to his, we could hear shouting from inside and we crashed into a most puzzling scene. At the altar, red-faced and angry, was the young Lord Pembroke, and at his side a tall, thin, rather attractive young woman.

"Lord Pembroke!" shouted Holmes, "As you value your life leave this place at once! Go, now, with Watson."

It was then I saw a movement out of the corner of my eye and was quick enough to catch a small figure trying to slip out the door in the confusion. As it struggled, the cloak it was wearing fell back to reveal a familiar face.

"Miss Dimick!" I said, startled. "Polly, is it not?"

"Hurry, Gregory," she turned to yell at her cousin. "Flee with Marie! Father must have sent them!"

But Holmes was already striding up the aisle and had reached the couple before they had a chance to make their move. "Well, well, Lord Pembroke, since you refuse to take my advice," a smiling Holmes spoke, as I wondered at my friend's sanity, "suppose you tell me why your wedding has been so updated. I had thought you mentioned a date set for next summer."

"It is . . ." replied the young Lord as he drew himself up to Holmes, ". . . a matter of my own delicacy, Mr. Holmes. Surely if you have been sent here to collect me, you can let my wife go."

"Your wife?" Holmes' voice was incredulous. "Can you be legally married, my Lord?"

"Of course we are!" he insisted, reaching for the woman's hand.

"Can you be?" Holmes repeated, then suddenly reached forward with a swiftness of movement and yanked on the bride's hair. It came off in his hand. "Legally married to a man!"

The "bride" then jumped at Holmes as Lord Pembroke staggered back from the shocking news, almost fainting. I stepped forward to aid him, forgetting that I already had Polly Dimick on my hands. She soon reminded me as she pushed against me, struggling to get away. At this point, the priest rushed out a side door, and I turned to see that Holmes had finally subdued his "lady" as I had mine.

"Lord Pembroke," Holmes turned to the shaken man, "do you think you are able to come with us to the Yard? I should prefer not to leave you in this neighborhood."

I glanced at my watch as we rode in a cab to Scotland Yard, and found only slight amusement that we were on time as Holmes had predicted. We were greeted at the gate by Inspector Davies, whose expression of puzzlement was matched only by my own.

To my surprise, when moments later the two we had brought in were given the choice of a lighter sentence if they cooperated, it was the "bride" who spoke up, and not Polly Dimick.

"My Lord," said Holmes, as he turned to the still pale Gregory Pembroke, "do not pass any guilt on yourself, I beg you. Cyril, here, is an excellent impersonator and has fooled many an unwary person."

"Cyril?" I muttered to myself softly. "Is this Cyril Poindexter, who was squiring Miss Molly Dimick?"

"The same," Poindexter spoke up. He grimaced at my companion as he used a handkerchief to remove his makeup. "And so, Mr. Holmes, we meet again!"

"And you are not as fast as the last time," Holmes pointed out, "but tell me, Cyril, why did you bother to become involved in this affair?"

He shook his head and replied, "A dire mistake - a dire mistake, indeed, Mr. Holmes. The girl talked me into it, of course."

"Polly?" I interjected.

"No," he replied, smiling, "Dolly!"

I glanced at Holmes, thoroughly perplexed.

"Out with it, man!" Davies demanded. "The whole story from the beginning!"

"I was squiring Dolly Dimick," he began his confession. "I met her through her mother - the real one, Lady Pembroke. As she was adopted, and it was approved by her true mother, the Dimicks allowed a fellow of my rather questionable background the honour."

"Mr. Poindexter has some rather interesting family lines, Watson," Holmes mused. "His grandmother was raised in South America near the Amazon River."

"The poisons..." muttered Davies.

"Quite right," Poindexter nodded, seemingly happy with his present state. "The plan was simple at first. She explained to me who she was, and that she intended to obtain her proper fortune from the Pembroke family."

"But she was adopted by my aunt & uncle,"

Lord Pembroke spoke up, his voice barely a whisper. "They treated her as their own daughter. She was to be well-kept should anything happen . . . "

"She did not wish to be well-kept, my Lord," Poindexter said, as he gave an icy stare toward the young man, "and she was treated, I might add, as their very own adopted daughter. They would not have allowed one of their own to be squired by me."

"Are you saying that Dolly murdered her own mother?" Davies queried.

"I am saying that she obtained various poisons from me," he replied. "I was to meet her at the funeral for an exchange of funds."

"But that was a closed affair," Davies interrupted.

"He went . . ." Pembroke whispered, wiping his brow, "as my fiancée."

"Yes, you see, that's another line of my work," Poindexter gave a sharp laugh. "I pick up men in the evenings, get them drunk at the local Pub, and disappear. A few months later, I appear with the announcement that I'm pregnant. It usually pays well. They are so drunk that they do not remember a thing that happened. Pembroke here, though, had to do the non-orable thing and offer to marry me!" He laughed again, "I say - I was shocked at that!"

"We were to be married," he continued. "Now and then he would send me away to Kent, all very hush-hush. Next summer there would be an official announcement, and we would renew our vows, having secretly wed earlier. Romantic, no?"

"You're getting away from the case at hand, Poindexter," Davies warned.

"Not really," he smiled, then sighed, leaning back against the chair he was in. "Well, ahead of the story, I admit. You see, Dolly's sister, Polly, discovered what was going on and had told her mother, Lady Dimick. Now here's where the plan became complicated. Dolly knew that Polly knew, and she poisoned her not realizing that she had already confessed to her mother. When she discovered this, Dolly confessed everything selling the old woman on the idea that it was all my doing and that I tried to kill her, but that she had offered Polly her handkerchief just before the funeral and it was she, instead, who died."

"But it was Dolly Dimick who died!" Davies insisted.

"Was it, Lord Pembroke?" asked Holmes as he turned to the young man for confirmation. "Think back on the scene in the church, if you can, when your cousin called out to you."

"Good Lord!" cried a paled Pembroke. "She is Dolly!"

"Holmes, I don't under . . ." I started to say.

"The Dimick twins had a slight speech impediment, Watson," Holmes explained. "I noticed it when I spoke with them before. That was the reason for the startling enunciation of their musical number the other evening. With the proper concentration, they learned to overcome the infirmity. Dolly, however, had no such handicap."

"When she called out to me," Pembroke said, "on the spur of the moment . . . ."

"Quite correct," Holmes nodded. "So Dolly poisoned her mother and her sister. Where does that leave you, Cyril?"

"She talked the Pembrokes into releasing the news that it was she who had been the latest victim in order to throw me off the trail," Poindexter explained. "As I had been at the funeral, however, I knew better. When we next met at our usual rendezvous, she convinced me to accept the good Lord's proposal, arrange a wedding day, and leave the rest up to her. Her plan was to lure him to the church to do away with him, and then come forward as the sole surviving heir of the Pembroke estate. I am unsure of the exact plan. I did not want to know. I was being paid for my acting services, you see."

"Then the Father who ran away was a fake," I concluded. "We should find him! He must have been in on the plot to murder Lord Pembroke!"

"Dear Dolly performed adequately before," Poindexter stated, sighing. "No, the priest was another actor friend of mine. Thank goodness he got away!"

"But what about the note?" Davies asked. "Who sent that?"

"We shall never know," Holmes shrugged. "While convenient to Miss Dimick in further frightening Lord Pembroke in an early, secret marriage, it was merely a coincidence. Some radical backers of the Workmen's Pension Bill threatening the House, should they not pass it, I surmise."

Poindexter sighed again, forcing a weary smile, "Well - it was an exciting debut, at least." He stood, ready to be escorted back to his cell.

"Debut?" Davies grimaced at him, "How do you mean that?"

"Why into society," Cyril curtsied at the Inspector, his voice falling into a soft,

low tone. "The only men who had been interested in me before were just middleclass. Gregory, here, was my first real gentleman."

"Get him out of here!" Davies snapped at two of his lieutenants.

Holmes turned to the irate Inspector. "Mr. Davies, might I suggest an escort for Mr. Pembroke? I fear he shall need air in returning home."

As we exited the Yard, I was shaking my head in wonder. "Had I not been here, Holmes," I said, "I would never have believed such a story! Poor Poindexter. He was obviously talented. What could have possessed him to sink so low?"

"Low in your eyes, perhaps, Watson," Holmes replied, "but it was, after all, just another acting job to him."

"But impersonating a female, and picking up men!"

"You shall never understand an actor's heart, my friend," Holmes replied as he shook his head, chuckling. "You seem far more upset over his usual line of work than the fact that he supplied poisons for what he knew to be murderous acts."

His step quickened, and he gave me no chance to reply. "Quick, Watson! We've just time to encounter my brother as he returns from the Diogenes Club to his rooms, if we hurry! I should like to hear of his conclusion to this case from his armchair deductions!"



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