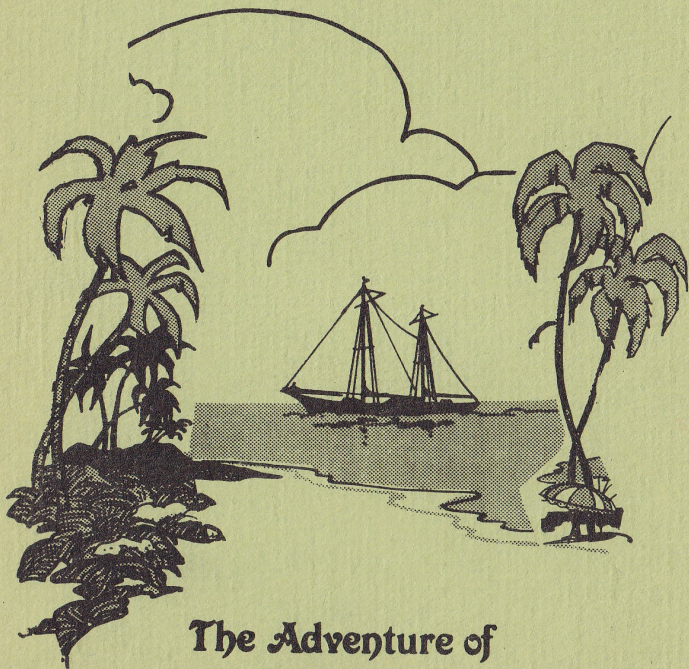




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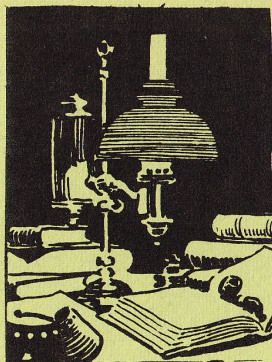
The Pleasant Places
of Florida



The Adventure of

“FLORIDIANS”

FEBRUARY - 1979



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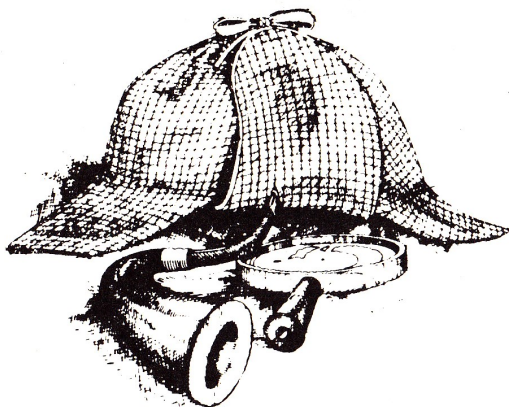
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the Sherlockian brain.)



The Adventure of the Florid Ians

Introduction

by Charles "Mike" Carroll

It was February 6, 1888, when it all began. I remember the date distinctly, for I had been burdened with a full day's round of calls, the typical doctor's Monday, catching up with the pains and discomforts accumulated over the Sunday. London had experienced a bitter January. The cold and wet had penetrated everywhere; driven by a cruel wind, it left the bones chilled within a few minutes. Holmes had spent nearly every day indoors, huddled by the blazing fire, torn between the Scylla of enforced idleness and the Charybdis of inhospitable elements outdoors.

In early January, Holmes had been involved in that remarkable adventure of murder and intrigue which I have chronicled under the title of The Valley of Fear. But that had been a month ago, and the boredom of inactivity together with the inclement weather were beginning to tell on his disposition. As I left 221B Baker Street that morning, I had jokingly remarked to Holmes

that I would willingly have traded places with him for just one day. His laconic reply made no impression on my mind until I returned to Baker Street late in the afternoon to discover that not only had he left shortly after I had that morning, but that he had not yet returned.

Mrs. Hudson served one of her tasty meat pies, but Holmes was not present to eat it. Darkness had come early; the bitter cold and whistling wind made the evening seem particularly lonely. The strong winds had made it difficult to keep the gas lamps alight in the streets, and as I looked out of our window onto dimly-lit Baker Street I became increasingly concerned about Holmes' welfare.

It was with a feeling of some relief, therefore, when at about 8:00 o'clock I heard the jangling of the bell and a footstep on the stair which announced someone's presence at our door. It was not Holmes, however, but another person, and a most remarkable one at that.

He stood well over six feet tall, and his well-built frame was wrapped in a gentleman's surtout of material once fine but now somewhat at the end of its days. A workman's cap was almost suspended above his head by a mat of straw-colored hair. But what caught my eye was his florid complexion, a color deeply beet-red and yet so bright it seemed to glow in the light from the hearth.

"Mister Holmes?" he said with a trace of Welsh accent, touching his cap in a way which I immediately recognized as that of a former military man.

"No, I am his friend and associate. I expect Mr. Holmes very shortly. Please come in and sit down, if you desire."

"Thank you, sir. I will. Mr. Holmes is

expecting me this evening." That statement surprised me somewhat, but not nearly as much as the one which followed.

"Ian Watson at your service, sir."

"You don't say? As it happens, that is very nearly my own name. I was christened John Watson, but I used to have a Scottish aunt who called me Ian at times. What might your business be with Mr. Holmes, may I ask?"

"Indeed, I don't know, sir. I'm a tinker by trade, and just received a notice this afternoon to call on Mr. Holmes this evening at his digs about eight, that he had a job for me. There was no indication what . . . "

He was interrupted by a loud jangling of the bell and a heavy step on the stair, and in a moment there burst into the room a second stranger who might almost have been a brother to the first, except for a shock of red hair which stood out on all sides of his cap. He exhibited the same stocky build and the same ruddy, almost luminescent complexion.

"Which one of you be Mister 'Olmes," he said in the accent of east London.

"Neither, my good man; but we expect him momentarily," I said. "May I know your name?"

"Ian," he replied.

"By Jove, that is surprising," said I. Almost with a sense of foreboding, I continued. "And your last name?"



ee
"Why it's Watson, Sir!" replied the red-haired man. "My mates down at the docks told me of Mr. 'Olmes notice and I came 'round at once."

While I was recovering from this shock which appeared to have affected the first Ian Watson also, a third ring, followed by the inevitable hasty footfalls, left me with a feeling of inevitability which was confirmed when a third man, obviously a gentleman, but inflicted with the same sanguine countenance as the others, flung himself into the room.

"You are, no doubt, also Ian Watson?" I inquired.

"Of course, I came as soon as possible. Are you Mr. Holmes?"

As I started to explain Holmes' absence, the detective himself entered.

"Ah, Watson, I see you have been entertaining your namesakes. Make yourselves at home, gentlemen, while my colleague and I bring ourselves up to date." He motioned me into his bedroom.

"Holmes, who are these people?" I demanded. "Why do they all bear my name?"

"They came in answer to my notice in the Times," replied Holmes. "I advertised for Ian Watson, who is to make a great deal of money by performing a special service for one Mr. S. Holmes. As you see the name is not uncommon!"

"But how is it they are all inflicted with such terrible sunburns? We have not seen the sun these three weeks in London!"

"Bravo, Watson," said Holmes. "You will

make a detective yet! But I cannot now answer you beyond pointing out that they have all three been in a warmer clime in the recent past - not long enough to acquire the tan of Englishmen in the tropics, but only the painful burn of unaccustomed exposure to a hotter sun."

"Holmes, you are more mysterious than ever! How could three persons with the same name all have acquired sunburns abroad in the same week? Why have you advertised for them?"

"In seeking one, I seem to have drawn them all," replied Holmes, cryptically. "The question is, are they all Ian Watsons, or just imposters seeking the promised reward? But let me explain further . . ."

At that moment a crash, a cry, and the sound of a slammed door, brought us back to discover the sitting room empty except for the third visitor who was lying on the floor insensible. I hastened to his side and under my ministrations he soon recovered from what appeared to be a savage blow to the jaw. We helped him to a chair and assured him his assailants had departed.

"I had not realized that physical danger was involved when I answered your advertisement," he told Holmes wryly.

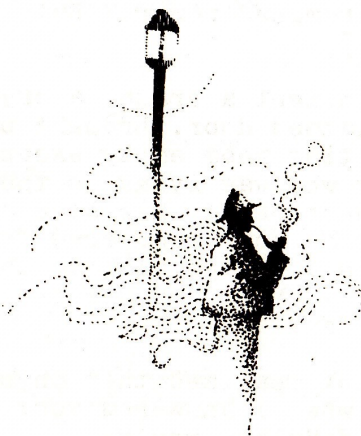
"Surely you are not unfamiliar with the unexpected from your experiences in the tropics?" suggested Holmes.

"You are right. I have just arrived from the West Coast of Florida, in the States, where I have taken over a cattle ranch in the wild, but beautiful, area called Manatee. The powerful families controlling these vast spaces are trying to acquire my few acres, and I have returned to England to raise funds with which to combat them. The record-breaking Cunarder Umbria

brought me from New York in less than a week. Your advertisement seemed to be the answer to my prayers. I am still young and hardened by my labors on the frontier and should be able to undertake almost any task."

"But first, we must find out why the other Ian Watsons attacked you!" I exclaimed.

"The facts are in our hands," said Holmes "We have only to interpret them," and he drew from his pocket a tattered envelope.



Continuation I

by Helen P. Swift

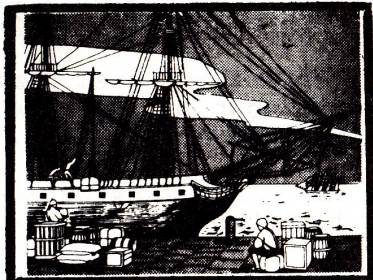
^{pp} **N**ote the postmark, Watson - Palmetto, Florida, U.S.A." as he took out a folded sheet and handed the envelope to me.

"My services have been sought by a Mr. William J. Cobb," Holmes continued. "He is endeavouring to locate a man thought recently returned to England from Florida, and who had, when he left, a most unusual, almost phosphorescent, ruddy complexion. If this person were

to be found, he was to be given the sum of £500 if he would inform me of the whereabouts of the spring from which he drew his drinking water whilst in Florida. His name is presumably Ian Watson."

"Is your name in truth Ian Watson?" I asked the assaulted victim who was gingerly moving his right arm.

Before he could answer, Holmes interrupted. "I'm not finished, my dear Watson. I sought out the chief stewards of two ships recently arrived from the U.S., and I discovered that there was on board the Umbria a man who claimed to have been on the west coast of Florida - but no information was available as to his whereabouts in London, or elsewhere in England."



"What was the physical description given of this man?" I asked, with a direct glance at the "Ian Watson" in our sitting room.

"It so happens, Watson," Holmes replied, "that I was in a small pub down by the docks when talking with the Umbria's steward. Two men lounging nearby seemed inordinately interested in our conversation and I implored the steward to speak softly. The two men began to speak rather excitedly and then to quarrel. Shortly thereafter they left the pub. But they had heard the steward say the name 'Ian Watson' and then describe this Watson with particular attention to a 'strange sort of complexion - florid with a luminescent quality'."

Holmes stepped over to the mantle, filled his pipe from the supply in the slipper, and turned to his visitor whose appearance was that

of a man not so much frightened as puzzled by the recent attack upon him.

"Were your interests in Florida limited to cattle ranching?" Holmes queried. "What was the source of water on what I assume would be called a plantation?"

'Ian Watson', not sure of the direction of Holmes' questions, thought for a few moments.

"I had just started with a small herd shipped down by boat from just north of Tampa," our visitor said slowly.

"How many persons did you have working on this ranch?" asked Holmes.

"I had three blacks, or negroes as they are called there, together with the wife of one of them."

Before he could continue, Holmes asked, "When were you approached with offers or 'threats' to acquire your property?"

"I had attended a cattle sale in nearby Terra Ceia. A Mr. William Cobb came to me and said he had heard I wanted to develop further my interests. He also commented on the fact that I had what must have been a somewhat painful sunburn. At that point a man walked over and was introduced to me as a Dr. Ruskin, a physician with a special interest in chemistry. After a desultory conversation I moved on toward a nearby barn. Since this was a very casual conversation, I was somewhat surprised when, two days later, both Mr. Cobb and Dr. Ruskin came to my rather makeshift house, situated on the eastern boundary of my land. They were, of course, on horseback and reined in as I walked toward them. Dr. Ruskin commented that my sunburn appeared to be still quite severe. I asked them their business with me . . . "



Continuation III

by Bill Ward

At that moment, the jangling of the bell rang out below stairs interrupting our remaining 'Ian Watson.' This was followed shortly by the sound of footsteps rushing up the stairs two at a time. The door burst open to reveal yet a fourth figure, not nearly so robust as the previous three.

This new arrival immediately singled out our story teller, and, uttering a shrill cry, attacked him with the abandon of a dervish. Having the advantage of surprise, the smaller man caught our remaining 'Ian' off-balance and knocked him reeling. Pressing his advantage, he continued attacking furiously as the melee careened wildly about the room.

Holmes advanced in an attempt to restrain the attacker. The larger man struck out blindly with his fists, knocking his smaller adversary into Holmes. The two went down hard in a jumble of arms and legs. As Holmes struggled to free

himself, the beleaguered 'Ian' bolted from the room and down the stairs. I rushed to assist Holmes from the confused mass, when his voice sounded a note of urgency.

"Quick, Watson! The window!"

I turned quickly and suddenly found myself staring up at the ceiling. In my haste, I had fallen headlong over a chair which had upturned during the struggle. As I scrambled to right myself, I heard Holmes' voice from the direction of the window.

"Too late!" he cried. "Watson, tend our guest."

As I shook my head to clear my senses, my eyes fell upon the motionless form of our Don Quixote. I made my way to his side ruminating upon the unaccustomed violence visited upon our usually calm digs and all curious aspects connected with this puzzling collection of my namesakes. I could see that the young man (in his repose, I could now tell that he was a young, wiry specimen) was only stunned. He was stirring, and I knew that I should very shortly have to contend with his renewed wrath unless I could find some way to distract him. I determined to disarm him with my initial words, "Ian Watson, I presume."

"Wha'!?! How d'ye know?"

I had guessed correctly, and my tactic had had the desired effect. As I had now captured his attention, I followed up at once, "Well, young fellow-me-lad, you are the fourth this evening."

At that point I became aware of a fact which I felt would make Holmes proud. "There is one notable difference between you and our three earlier callers," I continued. "Their

complexions were extremely florid. Yours, however, while not that pallid hue of the native Londoner, is decidedly less colorful. You have, I perceive, spent some time of late in either a tropical, or sub-tropical clime, though not as recently as our first visitors."

"Ye do amaze me wi' your ken!" he said.

"Ratiocination," I calmly replied.

At that moment, Holmes reappeared at the doorway. "Ah, Mr. Watson! A little the worse for wear, I see. I take it you have made the acquaintance of my colleague, Dr. John Hamish Watson."

"Ye are truly amazing wi' your knowledge o' me!" our fourth visitor exclaimed.

"Elementary. I see you have not the rosy hue of our previous guests. What's this? Your cuffs and shirt front seem to have acquired some of our late departed 'Watson's' complexion! It is much as I suspected!"



Conclusion

by Wanda Butts

At this point our florid friend suddenly remembered his earlier wrath and jumped up, in-

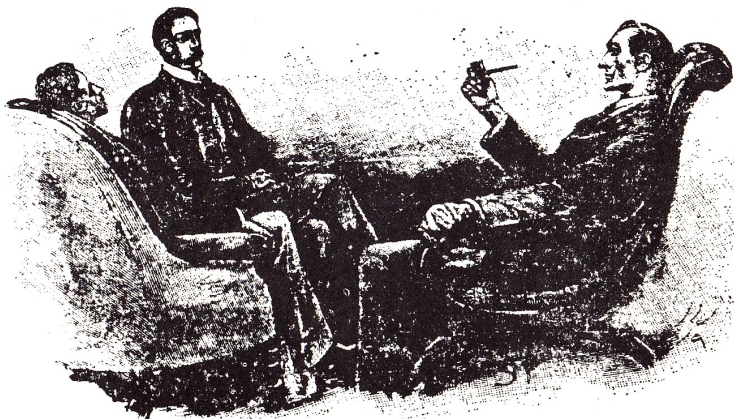
tending to leave us. Holmes' voice, however, halted him at the door.

"You will find your friend half-way back to America by now."

Our young Ian turned slowly to watch Holmes as he re-filled his pipe and proceeded to light it.

"And 'ow kin ye know tha' unless you're in on 'is conivin' schemes?" he asked, eyeing my companion with suspicion.

"Do come and sit down, Mr. Watson." Holmes calmly motioned towards a chair as he took the opposite seat. He glanced in my direction, "And you, too, of course, Watson. It is time this mystery was cleared up."



"IS THERE ANY OTHER POINT WHICH I CAN MAKE CLEAR?"

"I should say so!" I interjected, keeping my eye on our angry guest as I righted the overturned chair by my side.

"I assure you that I have nothing whatsoever to do with the man who just left here so abruptly, other than his apprehension," Holmes stated

to the man still standing at our door, "In fact, we had only just met before your arrival, however false that introduction might have been."

"Ye say you're involved wi' 'is apprehension?" He came slowly toward us, taking the seat opposite Holmes. "Then why did ye not follow tha' man?"

"My dear sir," my companion explained patiently, "You are in London. The authorities here can do nothing. I have made arrangements by wire with the proper people for his capture as soon as he sets foot in the colonies."

"But I 'ave proof of nothin'," anger drained from the young man's face into a look of utter hopelessness, "The authorities canna do a thin' wi' 'im back 'ome either!"

Holmes leaned forward to tap on his knee, "I said 'proper persons,' young man, not authorities."

His eyes finally met the detective's with a new respect, "But wha..."

"I suggest you inform us of the facts of your case first, for the benefit of my friend's curiosity as well as mine." Holmes leaned back to puff on his pipe. "While I believe I now know your full story, a verification from you would be most appreciated."

"I own a cattle ranch in Manatee, Florida. At an auction near Tampa, two men approached me, a Mr. William J. Cobb and a Dr. Ruskin. Cobb seemed very interested in my water supply although for the life of me I cannot determine why. At any rate, they came out to my ranch two days later on the guise of a casual visit. Dr. Ruskin asked too many questions about my water supply to seem less than suspicious, and at one point I noticed tha' Cobb gave 'im a warnin'

look. Their interest made me all the more secretive. It is just a small spring on me land. Nothin' spectacular tha' I know of. Enough water for my cattle and me. From the way Cobb guided tha conversation, I took it tha' Ruskin was afraid of the man. I found out why too soon. When it was clear tha' I wasn't abou' to cooperate, there were assaults on my stock. My prize bull was slaughtered. A barn set on fire. Other incidents. One o' me 'ands almost lost 'is wife in a fire. In between these assaults, Cobb visited occasionally, hintin' tha' 'e 'ad the power for protection against such attacks if only I would sell him the land from which my water came. 'E insisted tha' I could draw enough from a well. Tha' may 'ave been true, Mr.'Olmes, but I was not about to be threatened into selling what little land I 'ad!

"Then one day, Dr. Ruskin came to visit me, requesting a sample of my water. As a chemist, 'e said, 'e was interested in testin' the various properties of the water in the area. 'E seemed a likeable man and I 'ad almost conceded when Cobb appeared. "E 'ad evidently been keepin' watch over Ruskin. Whatever the doctor's interests were in my water, Cobb was afraid of bein' left out should some discovery be made. I soon found myself unable to cope wi' my losses. Luckily, I still owned some business interests here, and so returned to sell out.

"Cobb followed me, and attempted to murder me several times. The Captain of the Umbria thought me mad to keep insisting that Cobb was on board. 'E was not registered and no one on board answered to 'is description. Since my arrival, I 'ave enlisted the aid of two friends, actors in a theatre I once owned. It was they who appeared 'ere first. By obtaining your aid, I knew Cobb would sooner or later show up, 'opin' to find me. 'E knew I was returnin' 'ere to raise money, but 'e 'ad no way of knowin' of my investments."

"But the postmark was Florida," I interrupted, "It couldn't have been sent by you!"

"I wired one o' ma 'ands that Cobb was on board the Umbria and to send Mr. 'Olmes the letter under Cobb's name."

"But killing you wouldn't have solved his problem," I objected. "Your land would have gone to your heirs."

"'E knows I 'ave none," Ian smiled sadly, "What 'e doesn't know is that I am leavin' the land divided equally among my 'ands. They would never sell to 'im, or be threatened." His expression changed to one of puzzlement, "But 'ow did you know to send word back to America for 'is capture?"

"The ship's steward." It was Holmes' turn to smile. "He mentioned your constant accusations of attempted murder by a man named Cobb and provided me with enough information. I also suspected my advertisement would bring out Cobb, and your two friends. Oh yes, I know a bit about thespian disguises myself and I recognized them in the pub where I met the steward. They were quite excellent in a small production of King Lear late last year."

"And do ye also know why they were so keen on my water?", Ian asked.

Holmes shrugged, "Searching for the legendary 'Fountain of Youth', my good man."

"Pooh!" he frowned, "And that's all it is too - a legend!"

Ian stood, now calmed, and offered his hand, "Well, Mr. 'Olmes, it would seem you 'ad all my problems solved before I ever met you! I don't know 'ow to thank you."

"My regular fee would suffice," Holmes replied drolly.

"Of course," he agreed, "It was I, after all, who did 'ire you." He stopped at the door, a question on his face. "Before I leave, might I ask who the 'proper people' were that you informed in America?"

"Merely your hired hands," Holmes said.

"Well!" he broke into a broad grin, "Good day to you, sir! And to you, Dr. Watson! A good day it is, too!"

Holmes shut the door after our guest left and returned to his chair, contemplating his pipe. After a few silent moments had passed, he turned to me, a twinkle in his grey eyes. "Here is another fact which might amuse you, Watson. To complete your records of my cases, the name of the servant I sent a message to was A.Doyle."

THE



END

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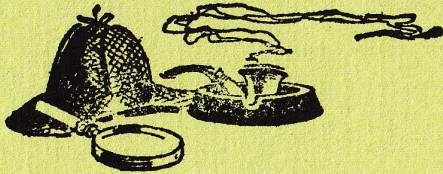
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