

**UNEXPECTED GUESTS AT THE
SUNSHINE STATE SHERLOCKIAN SCION SYMPOSIUM I
OR GUESS WHO'S COMING TO DINNER**



HOLMES BEACH

“Men at his time of life do not change all their habits, and exchange willingly the charming climate of Florida for the lonely life of an English provincial town”

Sherlock Holmes in The Five Orange Pips

by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, M.D.

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by ©Carl L. Heifetz 1996 Private Consulting Microbiologist

1220 Winding Willowc Drive

Trinity, FL 34655

Phone 727-375-9383

E-Mail: microdoc@verizon.net

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The day was progressing as usual. My postprandial pipe was drawing freely, having been properly filled with Ships tobacco and well tamped. My customary overstuffed chair in the British veterans' home was soft and cosy. Facing the western picture window with its beautiful view of the surrounding park, I was whiling away my much too free time by reminiscing about past adventures, reviewing yet again the contents of the tin dispatch case sitting open upon my lap. The late April day was warm and bright. My eyes had grown tired. I had just completed my perusal of the latest issues of *Lancet*, the *British Medical Journal*, and other medical journals, as attested to by the jumble of soft-cover publications laying in a pile at my feet. Bleary eyed from my reading and feeling the drowsiness that follows a large mid-day meal, I drifted off into the afternoon slumber that has been my habit for many years.

I was awakened several hours later by the faint perception of aged feet shuffling slowly towards my station. Who the devil could it be bothering me during my nap time? I was about to express my outraged indignation for this egregious assault upon my routine when I realized that I had heard that familiar sound many times before. As I slowly and painfully opened my eyes towards the now bright sun streaming in through the window, I barely saw framed in the haze what appeared to be the figure of a Nonconformist clergyman.

He finally spoke: "Watson, old friend, aren't you even going to offer me some wine or a cigar?"

"Holmes! Is it you?" I queried, with great surprise, since it was not his normal day to visit. "What brings you here all the way from Surrey on a day on which you normally stay at home?"

"Get packed," he replied. "The game's afoot. We are going to visit the Pleasant Places of Florida."

"Holmes, now I know that it really is you." I countered. "You know that my allergies prevent me from leaving the confines of my air-conditioned domicile, and my chronic arthritis keeps me bound to this chair."

"My dear Watson," said Holmes, seating himself in the adjoining chair and lighting his ever present briar, "Do not worry. In Florida, the flora that exacerbate your chronic respiratory difficulties will be absent from the air and the nice, warm climate of a beautiful day in May in the Sunshine State will do wonders for your rheumatic condition. Besides, I would not think of returning to the location of one of my very early cases, one which has never been documented by your pen, without my good friend and companion at my side."

"But Holmes, why now? You have not been to Florida in many years. What is the special occasion?"

"Watson, as you know, I have a secretary who works at the bank located at 221 Baker Street, in London. He receives and forwards many letters to me every day. Many weeks ago he sent me a very intriguing communication from a group calling itself the "Pleasant Places of Florida." They are inviting both of us to a very special event. I hesitated a long time, but I could not resist the urge to attend."

"But Holmes, it must be an extremely important occasion that strikes your fancy so. In your later years, you have become as set in your ways as your elder brother Mycroft."

"Watson, this event is the Sunshine State Sherlockian Symposium I. It is in the Florida Suncoast, not far from the location of the adventure to which I alluded earlier. Whilst enjoying the company of our admirers, we can also journey to the beach community that now bears my surname."

"That sounds very interesting. However, why are you dressed as a Nonconformist clergyman?"

“I am traveling incognito, Watson. I do not want to get tired out by reciting the events of past cases, and be forced to fend off demands for narratives regarding unpublished adventures for which the world is still not ready.”

“But Holmes, I have read in the *Communication* that they already have a Nonconformist clergyman. If you go in that guise, everyone will mistake you for Ben Wood.”

“What is wrong with that? It might be fun to play that role until he arrives. Let them try to figure out who the real Ben Wood is.”

“No, Holmes, that will not be appropriate. I know Ben Wood. Ben Wood is a friend of mine. And Holmes, you are no Ben Wood. You will need another disguise.”

“All right Watson, how about this: I will go as Bob Burr.”

“But Holmes, won’t everyone recognize that you are not Bob Burr? He is a very famous follower of yours. He publishes one of the best known periodicals that extols your name: *Plugs and Dottles*.”

“That is not possible, friend Watson. No one outside of Peoria, Illinois has ever seen him. He never goes anywhere. That will be the perfect disguise.”

“What should I go as, Holmes?”

“Go as Nigel Bruce. No one seeing you looking like that would ever think that you are the real Dr. Watson. Now let us review again the details that I see in the communique before me.”

Sherlock Holmes withdrew a small note written in a neat, even hand, on very expensive lime green paper, bearing the watermark “PP of F” in the upper left hand corner. He unfolded it lovingly with great care and spread it out on his lap for us both to read the contents, which are duplicated below:

*25 September 1996
Palm Harbor, Florida*

Dear Mr. Holmes,

The Pleasant Places of Florida wishes to invite you and Dr. Watson to join us for a fun filled weekend in which we will honor your name and that of our esteemed leader Dr. Benton Wood, BSI. This weekend event, Sunshine State Sherlockian Symposium I, will take place in the elegant Dolphin Resort in St. Pete Beach, Florida, 2-4 May, 1997. Further information will be forthcoming. For further details, please apply to:

*Carl L. Heifetz
“Representative both with the Servants and with the tradespeople”*

*Pleasant Places of Florida Scion of the Baker Street Irregulars
3693 Siena Lane
Palm Harbor, FL 34685
United States of America*

*Telephone enquiries will be accepted at: (813) 945-9054 or (813) 945-0061
E-mail: 72642.3220@compuserve.com*

“Watson,” Holmes concluded as he rose to leave, “I will notify you further of the plans that I have made for this journey. I will send you a telegram or an E-mail message when all arrangements have been made. This sounds like it will be a splendid weekend.”

“Yes, Holmes, I am very much looking forward to it. I think that Sherlockians all over the world should experience both this event and, as you would put it, the charming climate of Florida.”