



A New Sherlockian

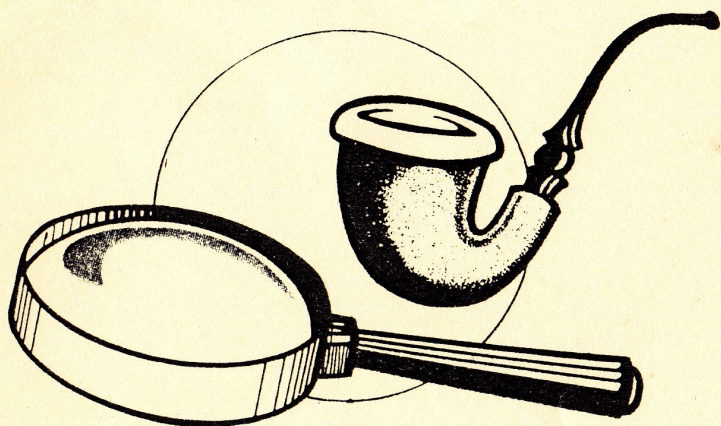
"Round-Robin" Pastiche

by Members of

The Pleasant Places of Florida

"A Case of  
Hide 'n' Tea"

or "There's Trouble Brewing Here, Watson!"



# "A Case of Hide 'n' Tea"

## Introduction

by Jeffrey Dow

With the morning Times in hand, I said, "I confess, Holmes, that sometimes I fail to understand the thinking of the general public."

Hearing no reply, I glanced over at Holmes and observed a cloud of smoke emanating from his pipe, behind a section of his paper. I thought of iterating my comment, but decided to the contrary. If Holmes was preoccupied, far be it from me to interrupt his thoughts. I resumed my reading.

After several minutes, Holmes spoke out in a far-off and somewhat languorous fashion, "I know exactly what you mean, Watson." I awaited for further comment, but none was forthcoming. Suddenly, Holmes crumpled up the paper, tossed it aside, jumped up from his seat, and started to pace back and forth in front of the fireplace.

"This Peter Polovson case has gone on far too long," he exclaimed.

"If you feel that way, then perhaps you should ...."

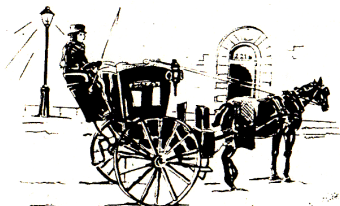
"No, no, Watson, my hands are tied. Lestrade has already warned me to stay out of the case."

With a smile, I quickly rejoined, "Since when have you started to listen to Lestrade?"

Again, Holmes proffered no reply. After a moment's silence, he cocked his head to the side, cupped his hand to his ear, and listened intently. I also heard the grind of a hansom's wheels against the kerb outside our door.

"Aha, Watson, we are about to receive a visitor, or, rather, I preciently sense that **you** are to receive one."

We could hear Mrs. Hudson answer the door bell, and then usher our visitor up the seventeen steps. Our landlady quietly tapped on our door, opened it slowly, and then spoke gently, "Gentlemen - a Madame Polovson to see Mr. Holmes." The lady took a step or two into our sitting room, uttered a small sigh, then crumpled to the floor.



### Continuation I

by Carl Heifetz

Both Holmes & I quickly gathered up the lady in our arms and assisted her to the settee, whereupon I quickly began to apply my medical skills to our inert visitor.

"Quick, Holmes," I said, "be so good as to fetch me an emetic from the kitchen downstairs!" Holmes obediently departed.

Her steady breathing was a hopeful sign and there was no trace of cyanide poison on her breath, although I did detect a faint vinegar odor. Fearing acid poisoning, I aroused the lady with a brief exposure to Spirits of Ammonia, and assisted her in the ingestion of water laced with a tot of brandy. Having regained her consciousness and poise, she smiled, dimpling her pleasingly rounded cheeks reddened by her exertions, and a fashionable touch of rouge that matched the rosy colour of her lips. This alluring picture was completed by a pair of limpid green eyes, a beautiful coiffure of flaming red hair, and simple white bonnet.

"Thank you for your assistance, Mr. Holmes," she gasped. "I now feel safe, although I was rather apprehensive when I approached your door."

"I am sorry, Madame Polovson, but I am Dr. Watson," I corrected her. "Mr. Holmes is my friend and colleague, and he has left you in my medical care."



With panic in her eyes, she screamed, "That will not do! I must see Mr. Holmes this instant. Please bring him back immediately! I need protection!"

I departed quickly, running down the stairs and into the kitchen. "Holmes! The lady demands your immediate presence," I cried. "She is frightened out of her wits, and claims to be in grave danger!" We quickly returned to our rooms - and observed they were empty!

Sherlock Holmes dryly responded, "That temptress is the only one that we need fear, Watson. As I suspected, the bird has flown the coop."

Indeed, the room was uninhabited. She was gone. But Holmes spotted a rawhide purse, which was left behind under a pillow on the settee. He carefully began to examine it. "Is that a tobacco pouch?" I inquired.

"No," replied my friend, "it contains a very rare and expensive tea. A type grown only in the States - Florida, if I'm not mistaken. Some time ago, I wrote a short monograph upon the source & properties of some 575 different blends of tea. Have you read it, Watson?"

Upon further examination of the pouch, he extracted a note, which he carefully unfolded. It was written on very expensive bond paper, by a female hand using a fine platinum-tipped pen with the finest India ink. The note revealed a cryptic message:

**"IAWHRA PLASHINT PLHDAS ON NLOREEH RADOEAR"**

"This may well be a three-pipe problem, Watson," said my companion as he proceeded to stoke up his pipe. "Would you be so kind as to locate the driver of the hansom cab that was parked two houses away when we received our lady visitor?"

"Hansom? What hansom?" I asked, "I saw no hansom."

"Ah yes, my friend, you saw it but did not observe it. That is the cab that took our vanishing visitor away. Its number is 45."



When I returned, I noted my colleague in a less solemn mood. From the sideboard he dispensed for each of us a generous dram o' barley bree with a wee splash from the gasogene, then launched into a scholarly discourse on the subject of crypto-analysis.

"At first, I experienced some difficulty in decoding the message. It appeared to be a simple letter substitution, but with some peculiarities. Obviously the container must bear the clue to the solution. Then I realized it was the solution. I substituted rawhide, then tea, then combinations of the two without success. A more simplified form, "hide and tea" worked perfectly as substitutes for the first ten letters of the alphabet. The inclusion of two letters standing for "E" makes it more baffling without the code."

"Thank you for the lecture," I stated, with some exasperation, "but what in blue blazes does it say?"

"I'm afraid that our cryptogram has only led us into deeper waters, Watson. Note the solution, keeping in mind the alternating substitution for "E".

**"IAWHRA PLAHSHNT PLHDAS ON NLOREEH - RADOREAR"** reads:

**"BEWARE PLEASANT PLACES OF FLORIDA - RECORDER"**

"By the by," Holmes added, "where did the lady emerge from her hansom cab?"

"According to the driver, she was left at the American Embassy," I answered.

"There remain many unanswered questions, my friend," mused Holmes. "What has this cryptic message to do with the the Polovson case? Why did she go to so much trouble to 'leave behind' this message for our eyes? Why did Madame Polovson travel to the American Embassy? Was that her true destination, or merely a ploy to deceive us? What is the meaning of 'Pleasant Places of Florida', and finally, who or what is this mysterious Recorder? All of these questions, Watson, needs be answered."



The next morning I awoke to the acrid smell of one of Holmes's chemical experiments. As I stepped from my room, I was assaulted by a haze which filled our sitting room and stung my eyes causing me to reach for my handkerchief to use as an air filter.

"Good heavens, Holmes!" I choked out. "What the devil are you up to? Are you trying to asphyxiate us both?"

"Oh, Watson! Be so kind as to sample this," he said, offering me a cuppa. I pushed it aside and headed toward the window.

"'Tis not a spot of tea that I need," I growled, "but some fresh air! Are you try to poison us both?"

"No, no, my friend," his steely grip ushered me to a chair, "you really must have some tea - some of **this** tea."

I gave him a look of remonstrance, but he put the cup to my lips. Instantly the steam from the brew eased the burning in my eyes. I took the tea hesitantly and sniffed. The aroma was not unpleasant, but vaguely tar-like. The result of a small sip was remarkable. I could breathe more easily. My expression revealed my obvious surprise. "It's the tea from the pouch," Holmes stated.

"But with what noxious fumes are you flooding our rooms?" I asked. "And how did you know the tea was an antidote?"

Before he answered, he strode to the window and opened it, thus clearing the air of the fumes. He turned, dramatically, and produced what was left in the pouch. "The container itself, when properly treated, creates the poison you have just experienced. Frightening, isn't it? An innocent-looking leather pouch, yet with the potential of death. You have just witnessed the ultimate weapon, Watson. It is easily concealed, and can render its victim incapable of fighting back and, without the antidote, unconscious."

"Thank God that there's no war going on at present," I gasped, horrified at the implications.

"Thank God, indeed," agreed the great detective.

I finally grasped the connection of his experiment with the occurrences of the day before. "Holmes!" I cried, "then this is the proof needed in the Povlovson case! If Madame Povlovson came here yesterday, and had the antidote in her possession, then she must be working for another government as an undercover weapons ... chemist ... of some sort." I stumbled over my words, not knowing the proper nomenclature for such a new and deadly career.

"Ah, but you have missed the obvious question, Watson. Why did she come here at all?"

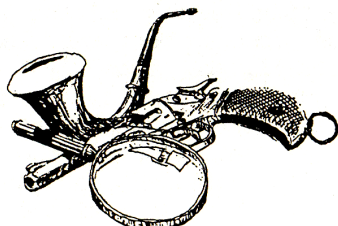
"You said that she was a temptress," I replied.

"This is a tangled web indeed, Watson," he said. "I do not think I misjudged the woman, and yet ... I wonder. Crossing over to the fireplace, and picking up his violin and bow, he opined, "There are so many roads that people can take." He raised the Amati to his chin and plucked at the strings with his left hand.

"But have you found out who or what is this Recorder? And where are the Pleasant Places of Florida?" I asked, astonished to note that he was fading into that dream-like, euphoric state as he is wont to do on occasion.

A knock at the door startled only me.

Holmes pointed toward the door with his bow. "Aha!, Wiggins is here. I trust he will provide an answer to at least one of your quires, Watson. Be a good chap and let him in."







Continuation III

by Bob Ennis

As Holmes spoke, we heard the familiar patter of naked feet upon the stairway and the chatter of young voices at our door. Wiggins, taller and older than the other irregulars, stood at hand in the van of the band.

"Gotcher message, sir," he reported, "and we tailed the young lady, as you asked. But 'ow did yer know she'd duck out of the back door of the Embassy?"

"I have powers beyond your ken, lad," Holmes replied, "but tell me where she went from there."

"The bird went straight on to a medical office on Harley Street, Guv'nor, and then went in through a side door," Wiggins explained. After a pause for effect, he continued, "The name on the doorplate read: 'Dr. Leon Sterndale'."

"Great Scott!, Watson," Holmes fairly shouted, "the plot thickens. You recall Sterndale and our unfortunate experience with that poisonous devil-foot root he brought from Africa. If he is involved in this affair, we shall put him away for good."

Holmes then dismissed his dutiful irregulars, recompensing each with the usual Queen's shilling.

I walked over to the table where Holmes had left the hide pouch of tea. Lifting it, I carefully poured out the remaining contents on to a plate, and gently turned the pouch inside-out. There was an inner lining to the pouch which was made of some fiber I could not indentify.

"Be careful, Watson," warned Holmes, "the hide is poisonous!" With my pocket knife, I took a small snippet from the lining and placed it under the lens of my medical microscope.

"I say, Holmes, have a look at this!" I exclaimed. "There are small, reddish single-celled plants scattered among those cellulose fibers. I have encountered these before in my studies. They are called dinoflagellates, and are single-celled organisms which grow in the ocean in warm tropical waters. When the conditions are right, they form what is called the 'Red Tide'." I noted a puzzled expression on his face.

"The organisms of the Geneva Gonyaulax and Gymnoidium produce a potent nerve toxin," I further explained.

"I do believe you are on to something, Watson," said Holmes. "Let us consult the commonplace book." After several minutes of feverish searching, Holmes burst out, "You've done it, Watson! You've done it!"

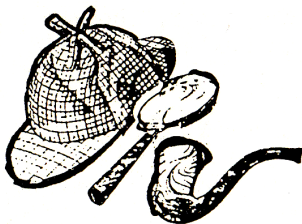
"This pulls it all together. The cipher read 'Beware the Pleasant Places of Florida'. One of the most pleasant of those places is Anna Maria Island, on the Gulf of Mexico, where Red Tides occur frequently. The cellulose in the pouch lining is pounded mangrove root, which is known to concentrate the neurotoxin. Fiendishly clever! The hand of Sterndale is in this for sure. With his supply of devil-root exhausted, he has found an even more deadly substitute.

"I fear, Watson," Holmes continued, "that Sterndale and Madame Polovson intend to sell the secret of this poison to Von Bork, an agent of the Kaiser, and escape to the continent and leave poor Peter Polovson to pay the supreme penalty, while the rest of Europe will be at their mercy. He managed to secrete the message into the pouch while his wife was distracted."

"I say, Holmes, but what of the recorder?" I asked. "How does a wind instrument play a role in all of this?"

"Not an instrument, Watson," Holmes gently chided. "A 'Recorder' is the title of the Chief Judicial Magistrate of cities and boroughs in England. And, in this instance, a Magistrate, Bentwood, by name, of the Southwark Borough, London, where Polovson is incarcerated. He must have abetted him in sending the message."

Holmes was already pulling on his Inverness cape and adjusting his deerstalker. "Come, Watson, the game is a-foot!," he cried. "Best you bring along your revolver and dark lantern. Pray we shall be successful - for the fate of Europe may well be in our hands!"



## Conclusion

by Peter Calamai

At dusk we passed down Baker Street to Marylebone Road, then on to High Street, and down Beaumont to Devonshire. A few paces west brought us to a mews behind the houses on the east side of Harley Street.

"Here we wait until dark, Watson," explained Holmes, indicating a recess in a garden wall. "And there, above, is the lair of our prey - the great lion-hunter himself."

"But what can we possibly hope to accomplish here, Holmes?" I queried.

"To put aright two injustices - one recent, and the other decades old," he responded.

As darkness absorbed us, Holmes spoke softly, "Now, Watson, quickly! Boost me up over the garden wall, then grab my hand to follow." Within moments we had the wall at our backs. We approached the house, guided by the dark lantern. We drew close to a sliver of light, which shone through the drapes of the ground-floor window.

Carefully peering in, we spied Madame Polovson cowering in an armchair, hands clasped to her ears as Stern-dale paced the floor, stopping every few strides to level an accusing finger in her direction. We couldn't hear their conversation, but it appeared that the lady was in mortal fear.



"It seems that Madame Polovson is not in league with Sterndale after all," I whispered to Holmes, "but has been acting under duress, and that he alone intends to peddle the deadly poison to Von Bork."

"That much is clear, Watson. Not so obvious, however, is the significance of that object which is on the tilt-top table beside the chair," Holmes noted. I gasped. On the table was a brass box with its lid ajar, and upon it were emblazoned the letters, "K.K.K.!"

"Great Scott, Holmes!" I cried, "John Openshaw!"

"The Openshaw family, more accurately," Holmes went on to explain. "Madame Polovson was, indeed, trying to tempt us, as I noted at the time, but not into danger, but rather to seek our protection. I failed her cousin years ago - I cannot fail her now."

"I am all at sea. What about the Pleasant Places of Florida, and the Recorder of Southwark?" I enquired.

"No doubt Madame Polovson will enlighten us, once we have extricated her from the lion-hunter's lair."

At that moment, Madame Polovson caught a glimpse of us through the opening in the drape, and immediately she ceased to cringe in the chair, and began answering Sterndale, barb for barb. Apparently stung by her remarks, he rushed from the room. In a trice she was at the window, released the lock, and opened it to allow our entrance.

"Quickly, Watson," hissed Holmes, "I hear Sterndale's returning footsteps!" His craggy face appeared at the doorway. His first glance, with fierce eyes, was directed toward Holmes. His eyes then turned slowly toward me and the service revolver I held, which was pointed at him.

"So, gentlemen - we meet again," Sterndale said, as he lit up a cigar, "and my compliments to you, madame - a pretty piece of work. I trust you have reasoned this all out, Mr. Holmes."

"Elementary, my dear Sterndale, elementary. You have joined forces with the infamous Klu Klux Klan, murderers of Mme. Polovson's father, uncle and cousin. Your objective was to gain possession of the incriminating lists that Elias Openshaw brought from Florida. But I am still puzzled as to your motive."

"I can shed some light on the matter, Mr. Holmes," interjected Madame Polovson, whose dimpled cheeks now had no need for rouge. "As you have correctly ascertained, I am the daughter of Elias Openshaw. I was but a motherless child when he decided to flee the charming climate of Florida. Realizing all his family stood in peril from the KKK, he arranged my adoption by a wealthy, but childless, couple from whom I eventually inherited a group of the best hostleries in the state. They are named after our family name - Pleasant."

"Aha - The Pleasant Places of Florida," I exclaimed. "But what about the Recorder?"

The lady smiled and answered, "Mr. Holmes explained his theory, but, really, it's nothing quite so complicated. The Recorder is a major newspaper in Florida, and under the control of the KKK."

Holmes now interjected, "Perhaps I should relate the rest of the circumstances briefly, Watson, or we shall be here all night. After the barque "Lone Star" disappeared at sea, the remaining members of the K.K.K. in Florida had thought themselves safe. They were prominent in commerce, as you know, and it was not long before they found their attempts to dominate the hotel industry thwarted by the success of the Pleasant Places of Florida."

"By then, Madame Polovson was living here in London," Holmes continued. "She was married to a Civil Service man she met while on the Grand Tour. At first, the KKK tried to force her to sell by contaminating the shorelines near the Inns with the Red Tide, then publicizing its dangers through the Recorder. When that stratagem failed, the nefarious KKK enlisted the aid of Sterndale."

"Very impressive, Mr. Holmes, but there is one point you have overlooked," noted Dr. Sterndale. "While you all have been talking, I have managed to introduce a lethal dose of the neurotoxin into the end of my cigar. You may rest assured that Leon Sterndale will **never** be placed in the hands of the police."

He proved to be correct. Despite my best medical efforts, he expired within the half-hour, but not before he revealed where his hired confederates were holding Peter Polovson. And so it was that the couple were happily reunited, and were able to call upon us at Baker Street the following day.

"Peter and I cannot thank you both enough ...." Mrs. Polovson began, but was interrupted by Holmes.

"There is one detail upon which you could enlighten me," said Holmes. "What role does the non-existent Recorder of Southwark play?"

"I might be of help, sir," interjected Mr. Polovson. "Your expertise lies with those who break the law, while mine is in the other direction -- drafting statutes for the Home Secretary. The Recorder of any borough presides over the Court of Quarter Session, and those courts have been expressly forbidden, since 1842, to try any serious felony, including treason, and, since 1889, to try cases under the Official Secrets Act. So had there been any plot involving poisons, or sales to the Kaiser, I would have been bound over for the Assizes, but not under the jurisdiction of a Recorder anywhere."

"There is one other matter of some confusion, Mr. Holmes," said Madame Polovson, gathering her shawl about her as she rose, nodding in Watson's direction, "when the good Doctor deals with the deciphering of the message, in his narrative, he might wish to note my first name."

"And what might that be, madame?" Holmes asked.

"Florida," she jauntily replied, and with a flourish, swept out through the door.

**The End**



**PREVIOUS 'Round-Robin' PASTICHES by the PPoff**

1. **The Case of the Foreign Cabman** (1975)  
[Leslie Marshall, Joy Mitchell, Tom Mitchell,  
Tom Reesor, Wanda Butts & Paul Gunning.]
2. **The Case of the Lost £'s** (1976)  
[Leslie Marshall, Mike Carroll, Marvin Norton,  
Charles Saunders & Harry Seigrist.]
3. **The Adventure of the Second Stein** (1977)  
[John Fought, Ben Wood, Mike Carroll, Ed Morgan,  
Joy Mitchell & Tom Mitchell.]
4. **The Singular Adv. of the Solitary Balloonist** (1977)  
[Tom Reesor, Herman Herst, Ben Wood, Caroline  
Everett, Mike Carroll & Tom Mitchell.]
5. **The Curious Affair of the Witch's Brougham** (1978)  
[Herman Herst, Svend Petersen, Paul Gunning,  
Wanda Butts & Mike Carroll.]
6. **The Adventure of the Florid Ians** (1979)  
[Mike Carroll, Caroline Everett, Helen Swift,  
Bill Ward & Wanda Butts.]
7. **The Case of the Three Merry Debs** (1980)  
[George Tullis, Helen Swift, Bill Ward,  
Caroline Everett & Wanda Butts.]
8. **The Adventure of the Bar's Clue Bungle** (1982)  
[Ben Wood, Mike Bryan, Helen Swift, John Kalajian,  
Wanda Butts, Caroline Everett, Marsha Pollak  
& Mike Carroll.]
9. **The Adventure of the Pale Ontologist** (1987)  
[No record of participants on file.]
10. **The Adventure of the Doc-Croaker's Dirk** (1991)  
[Ben Wood, David McCallister, John Kalajian,  
Duane Damon, Judy Buddle & Jeff Dow.]
11. **The Sound of the Basket Hills** (1994)  
[Ben Wood, Tom Takach, Caroline Everett,  
Mike Carroll & Wanda (nee Butts) Dow.]

