

Watson's Quick Mysteries

A Clear Case of Self Defense

The outer door to Mrs. Fabersham's apartment house gave no clue to the chaos which lay beyond.

Inspector Lestrade ushered Sherlock Holmes and me through the vestibule, where we viewed what remained of the house's inner door.

It had been smashed to bits, and shards of what had been an elegant leaded glass panel lay all about and crunched under our feet.

The late Mr. Fabersham lay on his back just inside this inner doorway.

His rumpled shirt front and waistcoat were soaked with blood, and three red-rimmed, jagged black holes — no two of which were more than an inch-and-a-half from any other — gave evidence of the entry points of the bullets which had taken his life.

Sherlock Holmes took his glass from his pocket and knelt beside the body.

He brushed several shards of glass aside so as to get a better look at those fatal punctures.

"What do you think, Watson?" Sherlock Holmes asked me.

"The deceased appears to have been a man in his early forties, considerably overweight.

"Judging from the condition of the facial tissue and lack of developed musculature, I would say that he

had not led an exemplary life. Dissipation, I'd say, likely drink.

"Death was apparently caused by at least one of the three bullets — 38 or somewhat larger caliber I'd say.

"I'd be surprised if a postmortem examination would reveal anything else."

"Has anyone moved the body?" Holmes asked Lestrade.

"No, Mr. Holmes.

"He lies just where he was found when the local constable was called," Lestrade explained.

"Mrs. Fabersham admits to having shot her husband?" Holmes asked.

"Yes, she said that she shot him in self-defense."

"May I speak to her?" Holmes asked.

"I'll get her," Lestrade replied.

Mrs. Fabersham, a slight young woman with long, flowing brunette hair — who would have been very attractive had it not been for her puffy eyes and tear-stained face — entered the room leaning heavily on Inspector Lestrade's arm.

"I've told the police here everything," Mrs. Fabersham sobbed.

"I am very sorry, madam.

"If you could endure the pain just one more time, I need to hear the details from you personally," Holmes asked quietly and respectfully.

"Well, as I told the constable and the Inspector here, my husband and I have been having domestic difficulties for some time.

"No, it was more than difficulties; he was a brute.

"He abused me.

"He even beat me when he was in one of his drunken states!

"Tonight when he went to his usual drinking bout at his club, I told him that he was not to return at all, never to set foot in this house again.

"He said that that was quite all right with him and he stormed out.

"Around midnight, though, I heard a terrible noise in the front of the house.

"The servants had all gone to bed, so I came to see what the trouble might be.

"I could see that there was someone outside of the leaded glass door banging and beating upon it.

"At the time I had no idea who it was.

"I went and retrieved my husband's revolver — wretched thing.

"It was Henry!

"He smashed right through the glass door, shattering it as you can see, and charged at me screaming obscenities and announcing that he was going to kill me!

"Mr. Holmes, I had every reason to believe that he would do just as he threatened.

"In a moment of panic — and self-preservation — I shot him!"

Sobs wracked Mrs. Fabersham's slender body.

"Did you, or anyone, move Mr. Fabersham's body before the constable arrived?" Holmes inquired.

"No, he lay just as he fell.

"The force of the bullets knocked him over backwards and he never moved.

"He died instantly, I believe," Mrs. Fabersham explained.

"Very well, madam.

"You have my thanks and my deepest condolences," said Holmes.

"Well, that explains everything, Mr. Holmes.

"A clear case of self defense," Lestrade summarized.

"I think now, Inspector, if I were you I'd question Mrs. Fabersham more closely.

"All is not as it appears here, Lestrade," Holmes cautioned.

What was the circumstance that made Sherlock Holmes suspicious?

The Answer to the Mystery is on the next page.

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Answer to the Quiz

"Do you suspect that lovely Mrs. Fabersham of cold-blooded murder, Holmes?" I asked.

"I don't know, Watson.

"Perhaps; perhaps not.

"But all is not as we have been told in the death of Mr. Fabersham," Holmes replied.

"What makes you think that, Holmes?"

"Two things, Watson.

"I was first suspicious when I saw the remarkably confined arrangement of the bullet entry wounds.

"The clustering would have been the envy of even an accomplished marksman; scarcely the pattern one would expect from a frightened woman firing wildly as she fled for her life, do you think, Watson?"

"Hmmm," I nodded.

"But the most telling evidence lay in the glass fragments," Holmes continued.

"There were fragments everywhere — from the shattered door panel."

"Yes, Watson, everywhere.

"Even where there should have been none.

"Do you recall that everyone I asked insisted that Mr. Fabersham's corpse had not been moved and lay just as it had fallen?"

"Well, there were shards of glass lying on top of the body, even directly over the bullet wounds.

"Even if some fragments had clung to Fabersham's clothing when he charged through the door panel, those fragments would have either been dislodged by the force of the bullet impact, or at least driven into the wound by the bullets themselves.

"No, Watson, I fear that the door was smashed *after* Mr. Fabersham's body lay dead upon the floor.

"This was done in an attempt to set a scene of violence and impending threat to Mrs. Fabersham, which might justify Fabersham's sudden and violent liquidation.

"I do not know if Mrs. Fabersham is the sole perpetrator of a premeditated murder.

"I rather suspect a male accomplice — perhaps a lover — who is a marksman in his own right.

"If Lestrade will follow my advice and question Mrs. Fabersham further, I feel sure that the truth will emerge in the end.

"I fear that one of my character weaknesses emerges, Watson.

"I would tend to add this case to those already in our chronicles in which my sympathies lay more with the perpetrator than with the victim."

(For bragging rights, can you name some Canonical cases in which Mr. Holmes' sympathies lay with the perpetrator?)