

The Sherlock Holmes Caper
Peter Sharp Legal Mystery #15
By Gene Grossman

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(A brief summary of each is set forth at the end of this book)

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Introduction

If this is the first Peter Sharp Legal Mystery you're reading, it might help you to know a little background information about the characters.

Peter Sharp's wife asked him to leave their home when she decided to downsize the household she owned, due to a conflict of their respective philosophies concerning legal representation: Peter is a private attorney specializing in defending the poor, unfortunate people 'wrongfully' accused of crimes. On the other hand, his ex-wife Myra, is now the elected District Attorney of Los Angeles County... the people who Peter contends operate the only successful 'railroad' in the country.

Peter ultimately wound up living on a dilapidated old boat in their back yard, until moving it to a slip in Marina del Rey, where he discovered his former law school

classmate Melvin Braunstein was a boat neighbor who soon became his employer, using Peter to do certain legal chores for his small law firm.

Unfortunately, Melvin died in a plane crash, leaving Peter to inherit the small, failing law practice, an office manager (Melvin's twelve-year old Chinese step-daughter Suzi, a computer genius) and Bernie, her huge St. Bernard.

In accordance with Melvin's Will, the court appointed Peter as Suzi's legal guardian, and through a series of misfortunes that miraculously worked out, they wound up living aboard a beautiful 50-foot Grand Banks trawler-yacht, from which they operate their small law firm.

When Peter isn't swilling Patrón Margaritas at one of the marina's local watering holes, he's usually involved in some losing legal case that little Suzi will inevitably solve, leaving Peter with the impression that he's actually as good as he thinks he is

When Suzi isn't busy scheming up some plan to get Peter and Myra back together again, she's using her amazing computer skills (and several valuable law enforcement programs she 'appropriated' from Myra's home computer) to aid local police agencies with their computer and crime-detection problems.

All the local cops eat lunch at a Szechwan restaurant around the corner from the marina, where Suzi's uncle is the owner, and where she occasionally sits on a high stool and acts as cashier.

Your mission – if you decide to accept it – is to match wits with this 12-year-old girl and see if you can figure out a solution to each case before she does... while not being misled by theories and arguments proposed by all of the adults surrounding her (police, investigators, attorneys, prosecutors, etc.).

Chapter 1

I've finally found the only sure-fire way to stay happily single that works for me and that I can get away with on this boat – and I've already placed my order for it.

There isn't a normal female in the world (or at least one that I could settle down with) who would allow me to put what I've just ordered in any prominent place in our residence, so making it a deal-breaking item, I hope to remain safe.

What is this magical item? Simple: it's a large framed painting (or a cheap repro-duction thereof) of Dogs Playing Poker.



And how, you might ask will I be getting away with hanging this picture here in our Grand Banks 50 Trawler Yacht? Simple. The only female I have to contend with here is a 12-year-old brat who owns a dog very similar to one of the card-

players featured in the painting... and there's no way she can protest my hanging a picture of her favorite breed – the Saint Bernard.

Other men have used similar 'must-keep' devices to discourage all but the most desperate of the female predators – a mounted animal's head, a Marilyn Monroe lamp, a huge stuffed marlin, a large bowl of collected restaurant matchbooks, a book-case containing some valuable comic-book collection, and the list goes on.

As has been documented in the Single Guys' Bible, ***What Women Really Mean: the Female-to-English Dictionary*** by Dr. Nick Shoveen that I recently ordered from Amazon, males and females look at prospective spouses from different viewpoints. When a guy looks at a girl he wants to marry, he hopes she'll stay exactly the way she is now, forever.

On the other hand, when a girl looks at a guy she might settle for, she sees a work in progress – something she plans on molding into what can be a presentable end-product that she won't be disappointed to be associated with in public.

Unfortunately, things never seem to work out as planned: the girl is the one that changes over time, and the guy's obnoxious traits that drive his wife crazy stay around forever, like they're etched in stone.

What's the solution? If they are to remain together, as early in the relationship as possible she must get together of all his 'single guy' crap and replace it with distinguished, adult stuff, that's all of *her* choosing.

Anyone who knows me is aware of the fact that I'm a big fan of Sherlock Holmes – and yes, I do realize he's a fictional character, but I also know that so is Santa Claus, but we still have a Christmas tree on the boat each year, with presents neatly stacked beneath it.

Sherlockians all know that Iggy – that's the nickname I use for Arthur Conan Doyle, because his real name includes *Ignatius* between the 'Arthur' and the 'Conan' – was an ophthalmologist, and one of his professors at medical school was Doctor Joseph Bell, who had a favorite teaching routine he would use in class periodically: a student would be asked to go outside and fetch a random passerby.

Once in the classroom, Bell would take a good look at the visitor and then proceed to tell the class things about him like “this man has just returned from Rangoon, where he served in the Royal Fusiliers and was wounded twice. Now back in civilian life, he is employed as an etcher of glass...”

The visitor would be as amazed as the students at Bell’s accuracy. Once the observational rant was over, Bell would explain to the students what items he noticed that gave him the information to make all of those correct conclusions.

Of course when it was over, it was like a magic trick exposed... so simple that everyone watching felt silly for not being able to do the exact same thing.

The moral of Bell’s magical exhibitionism was simple: you may be able to repair a patient’s vision, but you still can’t teach him to see... and when it came to seeing, nobody did a better job of noticing little things than the professor.

Bell was a strong influence on Iggy, and when he discovered that being an eye doctor wasn’t a quick trip to financial success, he created a fictional detective named Sherlock Holmes, modeled after Doctor Bell, who would solve crimes, quite often by observing things that others either didn’t see or didn’t think important.

This particular observational/conclusional talent has been repeated over and over again in literature and entertainment. Author Rex Stout created a series of 72 books featuring the original ‘armchair’ detective Nero Wolfe, who would send his secretary/legman Archie Goodwin out to gather information that Wolfe would then use to logically conclude who the guilty person was.

Television detectives on shows like ***Law & Order Criminal Intent***, ***The Mentalist***, ***Monk***, ***Psych*** and countless others have also tried to emulate Holmes’ methods, and like them, I am also happily single... but maybe I can observe and deduct a little on my own.

Someone is walking down the dock towards our boat. Let’s see if I can tell something about this person, just by ‘observing’ his appearance. Ah, he’s coming up our boarding ladder... the game’s afoot.

He steps onto our deck and knocks on the door.

“Yes sir, can I help you?”

“Yes, is Miss Suzi Braunstein here?”

Okay, here goes. He's about my height, a little over six feet – and looks like he's in good shape... and he's asking for Suzi, so I think I've got it figured out.

No sense in spoiling the fun by telling this guy about himself; I wouldn't want to start some gossip going around the marina about my amazing talent. I'll just keep my mouth shut for a while and then show off by telling Suzi how much I know about her visitor.

I'm sure that the dog has alerted her to the fact that someone has boarded the boat, so the mere fact that she hasn't opened up her stateroom door must mean she's temporarily not available, so I might as well chat with her visitor. He comments on the titles he sees on the top shelf of my bookshelf – Edgar Allan Poe, Arthur Conan Doyle, Ellery Queen, Rex Stout and classic crime movies. "Ah, I see you're a mystery buff, huh?"

"You got it pal, and it takes one to know one, because you obviously recognize the names." He smiles.

I direct him to her stateroom door, and after a polite knock, the door opens and he disappears inside. A few minutes later he walks out with a small wrapped package. He thanks me as he leaves the boat.

This is going to be fun. I pick up my legal pad and start to make some notes:

The left side of his face is more tanned than the right side;

He looks to be in good physical condition;

He has a moustache;

He's wearing a short-sleeved shirt that's not tucked into his trousers;

He asks for Suzi by using her full name

He's wearing a pair of dark aviator sunglasses

He's wearing a baseball cap

Let's see now, what can all these things mean?

The fact that his face is tanned more on one side than the other leads me to

believe that he drives a car with the driver's window open, thereby tanning the left side of his face more than the right side.

He's wearing a pair of dark, oversized *Ray-Ban* sunglasses like most cop wear.

His physical condition looks pretty good for a guy in his early 40's, so he probably works out.

He doesn't look like a fashion plate, but he wears a neatly cropped moustache and has a short haircut.

His shirt wasn't tucked in, which means that either he's a slob, a high school student, or for some other reason.

He asked for Suzi and used her last name.

Now for the fun part: I conclude that this guy is an off-duty California Highway Patrol officer.

The unbalanced sun tan is because he patrols the San Diego Freeway, which goes north and south. He is also obviously based in a northern station so that he drives south in the morning and north in the afternoon, with the setting sun on his left side. He must ride in patrol car and not a motorcycle, exposing only one side of his face more to the sun

Further evidence supporting my conclusion is because he's got one of those law-enforcement standard moustaches, and the fact that his shirt was not tucked in. This is the way that off-duty peace officers dress when going to or from work in civilian clothes, with the un-tucked shirt hiding their holster.

He also must have been referred to Suzi by another peace officer and hasn't met her yet due to the fact that their communications have been by email up to now. If he had met her before, he would have simply asked for her using only her first name instead of the full one.

The package he walked out of here with was no doubt some report she must have prepared for him that has something to do with a case he's working on for the CHP. This is a lot easier than I thought it might be. Maybe my superior abilities of observation and detection will keep women from wanting to marry me, just like they did for Sherlock. Maybe I should cancel that order for the dogs print.

It's now eleven thirty and Suzi will probably be leaving in a few minutes for her uncle's Szechwan restaurant around the corner, where she will be seated on a high chair behind the cash register near the front door.

Ordinarily I would offer to drive her those few blocks to the restaurant, but she has her own mode of transportation, and the first time I saw it I almost crashed my car, because for an instant I thought I saw a large Saint Bernard driving a vehicle.



Suzi has a four-person electric cart with large blocks on the pedals that she drives around the marina to do local errands. The Saint Bernard sits right next to her and leans over towards her shoulder, so if you see that cart coming down the street and are looking at its passenger side, Suzi is completely hidden by the dog's large body, and it looks like the dog is driving.

This is the second Tuesday of the month, so the local law enforcement guys in this area will be having one of their monthly inter-agency lunches at the restaurant and comparing notes on the local crime statistics.

Suzi's like the restaurant's little rock star and also an adopted 'mascot' for all the local cops, so she never misses a second Tuesday working the cash register there. Ah, here she comes now. I'll just drop a little conclusion on her, and see how she reacts.

"Hey kiddo, you off to the Restaurant now?"

She doesn't answer me. She knows that I know exactly where she's going, and obviously doesn't want to dignify my stupid question with an answer. I try my 'A' material now.

"So how'd it go with that CHP officer?"

That got her attention. Both her and the dog stop in their tracks.

"My, aren't we observant today. Please, tell me what brought you to that conclusion Peter?"

She went for it. Perfect. Now I can do my Sherlockian rant.

One by one I rattle off my observations about our visitor, embellishing my conclusions and summing up with the final result.

She starts for the door and as she exits the boat, she lets me know how I've done:

"That gentleman was Otto, and he told me he works at the boatyard, where he operates the hoist they use to remove boat engines and sailboat masts, so he faces west all day, with the sun on his left side.

"You did a pretty good job with the sun-tanned face, but your main problem was with construction: the foundation was wrong – and if that's not correct, than the entire set of assumptions you build upon it will also be wrong... and so it was.

"The package he left with was a used leash that Bernie no longer likes, so I auctioned it off on eBay and being the winning bidder, he came to pick it up – he'll be using it on his Rottweiler. See you this evening... dinner's at seven."

Good thing I didn't cancel that order for the poker-playing dogs painting.

