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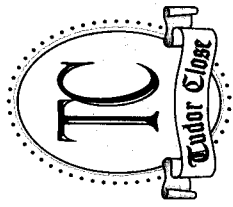
MYSTERY PUZZLE

by Parker Brothers



Death Foretold

A JIGSAW PUZZLE MYSTERY



Dr. David Black

requests the pleasure of your company

at a weekend house party

on the occasion of his fiftieth birthday

Saturday, the fifteenth of March,

at Tudor Close, Darbyshire



Birthday dinner at eight o'clock in the evening



*After-dinner entertainment by
Madame Chartreuse, Fortune-teller*

RSD

No Gifts, Please

Death Foretold™

Soothsayer: Beware the ides of March.

— William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*

Dr. David Black was not a superstitious man. Rich and greedy, yes. Cunning and calculating, definitely. A little mean, certainly. But superstitious, no.

Black cheerfully walked under ladders, faced Friday the 13th without a tremor, and unlike many men throughout the ages, he approached the ides of March with relish (or should we say English chutney?).

You see, the ides of March, or March 15th as it is more commonly known, was Black's birthday. At least in his estimation, it was a monumental occasion meant to be celebrated, especially this year since Black was turning 50.

To mark a half century of profitable living, Black's thoughts turned to the plans he'd made for his upcoming birthday celebration. He was throwing himself a small elegant weekend house party, a party with a very selective guest list. He had invited just six close friends. Well, perhaps "close friends" was a bit of an exaggeration on his part, since during the past year each one of the six had found reason to be angry with him.

Yet, Black chose to overlook the depth of negative passion towards him.

"A spot of bother, but all forgotten now, I'm sure," Black had said to his trusted butler Hogarth a few weeks earlier as he addressed the six invitations. "I'm sure they'll all want to come to Tudor Close to celebrate my birthday with me. Don't you agree, Hogarth?"

Hogarth had responded with a small suggestion — to add the words "no gifts, please" to the invitations before he put them in the post. Hogarth had felt sure that a full weekend of plentiful food, lavish accommodations and free entertainment would be irresistible to the six greedy guests.

Black had to admit that the butler had been right. All six invitations had been accepted, and preparations had steamed ahead for what he knew would be a truly memorable weekend.

The highlight of the celebration was to be a seven-course birthday dinner followed by an evening of fortune-telling starring the dazzling Madame Chartreuse. She was an extraordinary seer known throughout England and the continent for her powers of prediction. Just the thought of Madame Chartreuse

made Black smile. Although he didn't believe in fortune-telling, he believed in Madame Chartreuse's power to entertain — and in her ability to make money. In that, she was truly amazing.

Black had known her when she was still little Charlene the char girl, back when they were both a lot younger and a lot poorer; before Charlene had realized her special powers inherited from daffy Aunt Tillie; before she had disguised her humble cockney beginnings under a faux gypsy accent and exotic turbans; and before she had captured the attention and the checkbooks of international café society by her dramatic and surprisingly accurate readings of tarot cards, tea leaves and palms — and by gazing into crystal balls.

Before Madame Chartreuse would agree to come to Black's party, Black had found it necessary to cross her palm with an exorbitant amount of silver, and to promise to buy her a new crystal ball. Only then, when her successful negotiations with Black were complete, did she promptly abandon her gypsy facade and say to Black with a knowing grin, "Blimey, Blackie, I 'ope you understand a gal's got to make a living."

Dr. Black had been amused at the time, but today he remembered something else Madame Chartreuse had said to him:

"Blackie, old bloke, now tell me about the six guests? ...Are you sure they're close mates of yours? ...I've got an uneasy feeling about them."



Retired military man **Colonel Mike Mustard** should have been happy. Just a few days ago, the Royal Dragoons Club had voted him "King of the Club" for his patronage and loyalty. In his honor, the club had bestowed upon him a battalion of privileges, including a commissioned portrait of himself for the club's Waterloo room, a spacious two-bedroom suite on the club's top floor, and free Old Fashioneds for life.

Since living on a small military pension took as much effort as a careful military maneuver, Mustard should have been delighted with the thoughts of free drinks — and of moving out of his tiny, dark, cluttered bedsitter in the West End.

But today instead of celebrating, he was frowning over a devastating rumor he'd just heard at the club during his daily card game of War. The club's landlord, Dr. David Black, was planning to raze the Dragoons Club for a car park!

"What? No! Preposterous!" Mustard had blustered to his gossiping fellow card players, upon grasping the shocking news. "It can't be true! Black would never have the nerve to tear down a building as historic and beloved as the Royal Dragoons, now would he?"

Mustard knew it was a rhetorical question, for what Black would do was anybody's guess. Just a few months earlier Black had raised the club's rent so unexpectedly that the colonel had had to take out a loan to pay his membership dues. But this was different. Much more was at stake — not only that spacious two-bedroom suite, but also the very honor of the Dragoons themselves!

He had to take action! He had to plan his attack! Throwing his cards on the table, Mustard stood up in ramrod military fashion and headed for the bar and a stiff free drink.

"Blast! Why did I ever accept that scoundrel Black's invitation for this weekend?" he muttered angrily to himself as he waited for his drink to appear. Mustard knew in his heart that the luxurious lure of Tudor Close was too much for an impecunious old soldier like himself to pass up. Besides, the party would give him a chance to find out if the rumors were true... and if they were... well, he didn't even want to think of what he might do...

With a slight frown, the beautiful and vain **Miss Vivienne Scarlett** studied her tanned glowing face in her boudoir mirror. Yes, she thought, she probably had gotten too much sun on her trip to St. Croix. Oh, the sun could be so aging! She'd just have to be more careful the next time.

And there definitely would be a next time, for St. Croix was the home of her wealthy fiancé Count Emile D'Emile, a strikingly handsome and vain young oceanographer with a strong romantic streak.

Trading her frown for a wistful smile, Scarlett thought back to that starlit tropical night when Emile had proposed. "Darling," he had told her, "you're young and beautiful just like me. We belong together for eternity."

Scarlett remembered she had been thrilled and then frightened by Emile's words — for young she wasn't. Scarlett was at least ten years older than Emile, and if he ever discovered the whole truth... well, who knew what might happen...

With a shudder, Scarlett peered closer into the mirror. While it confirmed her youthful beauty, Scarlett knew the truth was that her plastic surgeon's handiwork, not Mother Nature's, was responsible for her breathtaking

appearance! The only person who knew besides Scarlett herself was Dr. David Black. He was Scarlett's former lover and the proud possessor of Scarlett's "before and after" surgery photos — photos he'd repeatedly refused to give up, to Scarlett's ever-increasing anger and frustration.

Turning away from the mirror, Scarlett faced harsh reality. She just had to get those photographs back from Black and she had to do it soon. Now that Count D'Emile was in the picture, those pictures were crucial to her future happiness.

Scarlett bent down and picked up the invitation lying on her boudoir table — the invitation to Black's birthday celebration this weekend. Why did the party have to be on the unlucky ides of March, she moaned to herself. Well, her love for Emile was stronger than any superstition. The party would be the perfect time to get the pictures back! And if it wasn't... well, Scarlett didn't even want to think of what she might do...

Frequently married and recently svelte society matron **Mrs. Elizabeth Peacock** had been basking in the sunshine of literary attention — and enjoying every minute of it, until today.

Today Mrs. Peacock's feathers were ruffled, very ruffled indeed. A letter was the cause of her dishevelment. A letter from a solicitor requesting verification of the source material she'd used in her recently published autobiography *Proud as a Peacock*. The book chronicled her many loves, memories, shopping sprees and social successes.

While the letter didn't say who wanted the information or why, Mrs. Peacock was quick to read between the lines. "It's that diabolical creature Dr. Black! He's going to sue me!" she cried to her cook Mrs. White, who was attempting to serve the distraught woman a no-fat, no-cholesterol, no-calorie lunch. Pushing her plate and poor Mrs. White aside, Mrs. Peacock jumped up and shrieked, "Every word in my book is true... or close to it. He can't do this to me!"

"I had just about forgiven him that nasty review of my book in *The Darbyshire Chronicle*," sputtered Peacock. "Imagine calling me a peacock today, a feather duster tomorrow!"

Mrs. Peacock knew she had a lot to protect — the whirl of book signings, literary lunches ("just a salad for me, please") and chat show appearances. She

was successful! She was thin! She was getting rich and she could shop to her heart's content. No way was Black going to jeopardize all that. She'd have to convince him to drop the lawsuit this weekend... and if she couldn't... well, she didn't even want to think about what she might do...

Back in Mrs. Peacock's kitchen, **Mrs. Blanche White** coddled — not an egg — but a sore tooth, as she waited for the latest batch of her new low-calorie crumpets to brown. "Mrs. W's White Chocolate Chippets," she said, smacking her lips. "That has a nice sound to it."

The previous batch had been, in Mrs. W's words, "a wee bit hard" and her poor tooth had chipped during a sample tasting. But now, after a major batter overhaul, Mrs. White felt she'd finally gotten the recipe right. She peeked at the browning objects and said to herself with a satisfied smile, "They look duckie, just duckie. These crumpets are going to make my fortune, if I could only get a backer!"

Well, rich Dr. Black was still a possibility, Mrs. White thought, though he had previously rejected her culinary overtures and considered her a little "half-baked." Holding an ice pack to her swollen cheek, Mrs. White pushed aside memories of those rejections. There'd been "Mrs. W's Scrumptious Scones" ("no taste" Black had said), "Mrs. W's Tangy Biscuits" ("no tang" Black had said), and "Mrs. W's Tantalizing Trifle" ("no tantal" Black had said).

Well, this time he'd better like my chippets, mused Mrs. White, as she exchanged her ice pack for a pot holder and began to remove the chippets from the stovetop. He just had to! She was getting older... and more and more tired... and she was running out of recipe ideas... besides, she was going to have a major dental bill to pay.

Well, she'd just have to arrange a chippet-tasting for Black this weekend during his birthday celebration. She was sure she could convince Black to say "yes" this time. And if she couldn't... well, she didn't even want to think what she might do...

Physical fitness fanatic and sports enthusiast **Professor Peter Plum** pulled himself out of the Olympic-size gymnasium pool where he'd been swimming laps for the past five hours. Training to swim the English Channel

was tedious work, and Plum was still trying to perfect his American crawl, a stroke he'd learned back home in Indiana, USA.

As Plum picked up a towel and began to dry himself off, he considered his precarious business situation. Just like the waters of the English Channel, his prospective partner Dr. David Black was deep, dark and unpredictable.

Plum thought back to his off-again on-again negotiations with Black for the joint purchase of the Darbyshire Sheep, a league-winning local rugby team. While Black's commitment to the Sheep had ebbed and flowed like the Channel tide, Plum had already sunk his life's savings into landing the franchise. So each time Black appeared to back out of the deal, Plum's spirits took a nose-dive and his anger rose to the surface.

But for the last month or so, the good doctor had seemed more solidly behind the idea than ever, and he had asked for final papers to be drawn up. Plum had even decided to miss a few swimming practices to attend Black's birthday splash.

But now Plum wasn't so sure. Rumor had it that Black was set to buy the Warkhamshire Ponies, a water polo team. In fact, Black had just purchased season tickets to all the matches.

Was Black going to abandon the Sheep for the Ponies? Plum agonized as he headed for the locker room. He'd test the waters this weekend. But if Black backed out of their deal now... well, he didn't even want to think what he might do...

Deep in the Darbyshire woods, the timid and nearsighted Reverend Jonathan Green hammered a "NO HUNTING" sign into a tree with such force that he startled himself. After a quick prayer of thanksgiving for hitting the nail instead of his thumb, Green kept his eyes heavenward and said in a low, but strong angry voice: "Please let these signs work, and if they don't..."

Green decided to leave his prayer unfinished. The usually mild-mannered reverend was overcome with passion for the propagation of the Darbyshire Anti-hunting League. The league, known locally as SHOT (Stop Hunting in Our Township), had become a second religion to him. So much so that once from the pulpit Green had preached to his astonished parishioners: "Those harmless, innocent little animals don't deserve to die, but maybe those evil hunting people do!"

Green knew he was more concerned with the conversion of hunters than with souls. With the commandment "Thou shalt not hunt" uppermost in his mind, Green had selected the wealthy country squire and enthusiastic hunter, Dr. David Black, as the main target of his conversion efforts. And after months of sometimes angry one-to-one sermonizing, Green had thought he was meeting with some success, until today.

Today, Reverend Green had expected to receive a donation of hunting trophies and artwork from Black for the church fête on Sunday. The donation was to symbolize Black's agreement to a hunting moratorium, but to Green's rising anger no such donation had appeared.

Green began walking through the woods towards the vicarage, where the church fête committee was waiting to meet with him about some last-minute arrangements. Preoccupied, he narrowly avoided a large oak, but tripped over an adjacent stump. Picking himself up, he had a flash of optimism... maybe Black would give him the donation after the birthday party on Saturday night! Green said a silent prayer it was so... because if Black was going to resume hunting, he didn't even want to think what he might do...



Caesar: The ides of March are come.

Soothsayer: Ay, Caesar, but not gone.

— William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*

"Happy birthday to me, happy birthday to me!" A handsomely tuxedoed Dr. Black sang loudly but off-key, and then tried for the third time to blow out the candles on the cake Hogarth had set before him.

Black took a deep breath and blew. The candles flickered, along with the lights from the dining room chandelier, as a flash of lightning and a clap of thunder jolted Black and the elegantly dressed but somber-faced guests seated around the table. Fortunately, the candles went out and the lights stayed on. Black motioned to Hogarth, who was standing ready with a camera, to snap a photo. The flashbulb flashed and Black said good-naturedly, "Make six copies of that, please, Hogarth. I'm sure my friends would like a wallet-sized snap of me."

All of the guests exchanged dubious glances, especially Miss Scarlett, who cringed at the thought of the other photographs in Black's possession. An uncomfortable silence began to fill the room as Black looked around expectantly.

"What's he waiting for?" Professor Plum grumbled under his breath with typical American impatience. Plum was on edge with worry. He was having visions of sheep being stampeded by ponies.

After several minutes, Black finally realized that no birthday gifts would be forthcoming. "Can you believe they took that 'no gifts, please' seriously?" he groused quietly to Hogarth. Resigned and a little hurt, Black spoke to the beturbaned, berobed, and bejeweled woman seated to his right. "Char... er... Madame Chartreuse, shall we begin?"

With that, Hogarth hurriedly finished serving the birthday cake, and placed a brand new glistening crystal ball in front of the gypsy Chartreuse.

"Vat a ball!" Madame Chartreuse cried with pleasure. "I know I can see clearly the future in this. Doctor, let's start with you."

At Chartreuse's direction, Black moved closer to the ball, while the fortune-teller waved her ringed fingers over its iridescent surface and peered intently into its cloudy interior. A heavy hush enveloped the room as everyone waited for Chartreuse's prediction. Mrs. Peacock shivered and caught Mrs. White's eye. Were there lawsuits or crumpets in Black's future? Each one of the six guests had something at stake.

The gypsy began to speak to Black in a deep trance-like voice: "*I zee... I zee you going on a long, long journey to a hot, hot place. I zee...*" Madame Chartreuse stopped suddenly as a round of thunder shook the room.

Miss Scarlett gasped as the lights dimmed. Clearing his throat, Professor Plum reached over to her and gave her hand a reassuring squeeze. There was just something about Scarlett that made men want to touch her. Even Dr. Black looked at her with longing. Reluctantly, Plum transferred his eyes from Scarlett to Black and asked: "Little vacation planned, Doctor?" Black shook his head no.

Down at the other end of the table, Colonel Mustard, his military medals oddly aglow under the chandelier's eerie half-light, turned to Reverend Green and whispered knowingly. "Long journey, hot place. Come, come. We've known he was going to Hades for some time, eh? The only question is when?"

Clearly, in Mustard's eyes, eternal fire and brimstone was the only fitting punishment for anyone who'd tamper with the honor of the RoyalDragoons.

The reverend grimaced in agreement, playing nervously with the SHOT button pinned to his clerical collar. While the clergyman didn't approve of discussing Hades at dinner, there was no doubt in his mind that the devil's domicile was the proper place for evil hunters... like Black might still be.

Again, the room became still as Dr. Black and the six guests waited for Madame Chartreuse to continue. But unexpectedly, Chartreuse, with a frightened expression, changed course and said hurriedly, "That's it. That's all I zee. Who's next?"

Black looked surprised, but said nothing, for which Chartreuse was deeply grateful. She did not want to tell Black what else she had seen in the crystal ball. Chartreuse's first rule of fortune-telling at parties was: "Don't give bad news to the person who's paying you!" She did not want to tell Black that while she saw him going on a journey, she did not see him coming back! In fact, all she saw was blackness...

As if by some unspoken command, Colonel Mustard strode forward with his unmistakable military bearing and stood at attention next to the crystal ball. After scrutinizing Mustard from head to highly polished toe, Madame Chartreuse assumed her trance-like position and spoke huskily: "*I zee... I zee rubble that may cause you trouble.*"

"Rubble, what rubble?" questioned Mustard, but Chartreuse did not elaborate, and Mustard knew he was dismissed. As he marched back to his seat, he shook his head in confusion and thought: Why, rubble could mean anything! It could mean that I'm going to lose my wallet or my car keys in my messy flat... or, it could mean that Black is going to raze the RoyalDragoons Club...

Mustard glanced over at Black, but couldn't read his faraway expression.

At that moment, Miss Scarlett, a study in red silk and diamonds, rose from her seat and began walking gracefully towards Madame Chartreuse.

Then another crack of thunder shook the dining room. Scarlett reached out to steady herself and saw that her hand was trembling. She'd been nervous ever since she'd unpacked her suitcase and discovered that broken mirror. Maybe it wasn't a good time to have her fortune read, she thought. But curiosity propelled her forward.

As she moved closer, Scarlett's beauty momentarily distracted even Madame Chartreuse. "What a beautiful tan you have," the gypsy said to her with a tinge of envy.

"Thank you," replied Scarlett in a voice experienced in accepting compliments. "I got it in St. Croix while I was visiting my fiancé."

With a nod, Madame Chartreuse began her crystal ball meditation and spoke to Scarlett in a trance-like voice: "*I zee risk... risk of exposure.*"

Startled, Scarlett repeated the word "exposure" to herself, while trying to interpret its meaning. Why, it could be a warning to stay out of the sun or it could be something much more sinister... it could mean Black was going to expose her photographs...

Regaining her seat, Scarlett looked over at Black in puzzlement, but Black's face was turned away towards Mrs. Peacock who was now taking her turn at the crystal ball and listening to the gypsy's words with a nervous expression.

"*I zee... a lot of money coming and I zee... a lot of money going.*"

Madame Chartreuse pronounced to Mrs. Peacock, as she lifted her eyes from the milky ball. Trying to see what Madame Chartreuse saw, Peacock stared unsuccessfully at what looked to her like a giant paperweight.

Exasperated, Peacock headed back to her place at the table, and worriedly wondered just what the gypsy's words meant. While money coming and money going could refer to her well-known spendthrift ways, it could also mean something much, much worse... that Black was going to sue her after all...

Hoping Black would be easier to read than Chartreuse's crystal ball, Peacock glanced in his direction for enlightenment. But at that moment thunder roared again and the lights flickered, and the moment was lost.

As Mrs. Peacock sat down, Mrs. White stood up and approached Chartreuse and the ball.

"I hope you see some baked goods in my future," Mrs. White said to the gypsy with a wink. "And I'm not talking about fortune cookies! Hah!" Mrs. White always appreciated a good joke, especially when she made it.

Chartreuse answered with an enigmatic smile.

Waving her rings over the ball, the gypsy resumed her trance-like state and spoke: "*I zee something... I zee something chipping or crumbling...*"

"Chipping or crumbling, now what does that mean?" demanded White. With another hand motion, Chartreuse waved a bewildered Mrs. White away.

Mrs. White sat down with a heavy thud and a heavy heart. What did Madame Chartreuse's words mean? Was she going to chip another tooth... or were her chippet dreams about to crumble, for Black had agreed to sample her crumpets later tonight...

It was now Professor Plum's turn and he moved forward with the vigor of a well-trained athlete, his nervousness hidden by his all-American smile. He hadn't seen a fortune-teller since the Indiana State Fair years ago, and he didn't know what to expect. Plum looked down at the ball as Chartreuse looked up at Plum's well-muscled body.

The gypsy smiled to herself and then spoke in her odd accent: "*I zee vater... vater... turbulent vater.*"

Chartreuse's words took Plum by surprise. Could they mean he was in for a rough channel crossing... or worse yet, could they mean Black had decided in favor of the water polo Ponies...

Plum stared across the room at Black for some indication, but Black's dark eyes and half smile were unrevealing. As if to punctuate Plum's uncertainty, the thunder and lightning returned. Reverend Green waited for it to stop before stumbling slowly towards Madame Chartreuse to take his turn at the crystal ball.

Green's nearsighted eyes followed the flash of Chartreuse's rings as she waved them over the ball.

Slowly Chartreuse began to speak: "*I zee... I zee a change of plan ahead.*"

"What? What did you say?" asked Green as he cupped his ear in the gypsy's direction. He couldn't hear her words over the pounding of the now torrential rain against the dining room windows.

Chartreuse repeated her prediction in a louder voice. Although the reverend heard the words this time, he still didn't understand their meaning. Hmmmm... a change of plan, he thought as he blindly tried to find his way back to his chair. That could mean tomorrow's church fête was going to be canceled by rain, or it could mean that Black was going to start hunting again...

Reverend Green's thoughts were interrupted by Dr. Black, who stood up and said to the guests in a gracious voice, "Thank you all for sharing my

