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MYSTERY PUZZLE

by Parker Brothers



Framed For Murder[™]

A JIGSAW PUZZLE MYSTERY

DR. BLACK ACQUIRES MISSING PAINTING

DARBYSHIRE — Dr. David Black, international financier and art collector, announced today the acquisition of the long-lost self-portrait of the brilliant but tortured nineteenth-century artist Henri LeBlanc.

The painting, which has been missing for almost 100 years, was completed just hours before LeBlanc shot himself to death with a pearl-handled revolver.

LeBlanc had used the gun unsuccessfully a few days earlier in a duel with Pierre Rouge, his arch rival for the romantic affections of his model Lillie Von Ochre. Rouge, the most renowned painter of his generation, won the duel by drawing first blood, but refused to kill his opponent.

In a scandal that rocked the art world, LeBlanc left a note blaming his suicide on his all-consuming envy of Rouge's artistic talents and romantic conquests. LeBlanc wrote that his only regret was not having killed Rouge before killing himself.

LeBlanc's last painting disappeared from his atelier on the day of his death. Despite years of searching by the international art community and LeBlanc's family, the painting went undiscovered until Dr. Black's announcement today. Dr. Black declined to discuss his plans for the painting, or whether he would make it available for public viewing.

Framed for Murder™

From the great hall of his Tudor Close estate, Dr. Black watched nervously as his devoted butler Hogarth struggled into the room with a huge cloth-covered painting in tow.

"Careful, careful. It's priceless," Black cautioned the teetering butler, who lifted the painting into position on an antique display easel. The artwork's protective cloth fell loose and trickled down to the floor. At last, the latest addition to Black's world-famous art collection was dramatically exposed — the long-lost self-portrait of the artist Henri LeBlanc.

Black was overwhelmed. He choked: "It's magnificent. Poor, poor LeBlanc. If only he hadn't let his hatred for Rouge destroy his life. The emotion. It's all right there. Right on the canvas."

Peering intently, Black instructed the butler to move the painting a little to the left. Hogarth unconsciously inched the painting to the right and stepped back slightly to take a better look.

The butler shuddered. Ever since Black had brought it home shrouded up like a corpse, he'd felt something dark and cold...like a sinister shadow.

Moving away from the easel, Hogarth joined Black who was still transfixed by the power of the painting. Without removing his eyes from the canvas, Black spoke with the confidence that only a man of his ego could muster: "Perfect. That's perfect. That picture looks like it was painted precisely for this spot. I was born to own this LeBlanc. It has been coveted by others, but now it's mine, all mine."

Hogarth wiped the sweat of exertion and nervousness off his brow and forced himself to take another look at the portrait. Regardless of his own feelings, he had to agree that it did appear to belong in the impressive great hall with its elegant tapestries, old masters, and suits of armor.

But whether Black was "born to own" this particular painting — a painting enveloped in mystery, sought after and fought over for almost

100 years — well, that was an entirely different story. Especially for a certain set of six people, well-known to Black and deeply mistrusted by Hogarth.

Black cleared his throat, took a deep breath, and continued: "I now have what those six wretched fools want. Let's invite them here to Tudor Close to see what they're missing. Let's introduce them to Monsieur LeBlanc at a special unveiling."

Hogarth hesitated. He wanted to tell Black he thought he was making a grievous mistake. But he hadn't remained Black's butler for twenty years by telling him the truth, so his fear was left unspoken. "Straightaway, sir," the butler said.

Dr. Black started out of the room. He'd walked only a few feet when suddenly he stopped...as if struck with...no, it couldn't be, Black thought...but yes...he felt something...he felt LeBlanc's cold eyes...boring into his back, perhaps into his very soul. He turned to face the portrait and locked eyes with the countenance of the anguished LeBlanc, a man so consumed by envy that it led to death.

"Those eyes, those haunted eyes. What do they see?" Black blurted out passionately.

Thankfully Hogarth knew that his master did not expect an answer from him. Instead the butler picked up the blood-red shroud-like cloth that lay in a heap on the floor and began to cover the portrait.

"Yes, yes. Bloody good idea, Hogarth. Let's keep the painting covered until we unveil it in front of those six poor fools."

"Very good, sir," the butler responded gently. Yet again Hogarth's words belied his thoughts. For deep inside he knew that things were far from very good. Very far indeed.



The shades were drawn tightly at the Belgravia townhouse of Mrs. **Elizabeth Peacock**. Mrs. Peacock wanted to be left alone. She'd given her cook Mrs. White the day off.

Upstairs in her boudoir, where her unopened mail and unanswered phone messages piled up beside her, Mrs. Peacock buried herself under her satin sheets, surrounded by silver-framed photographs of her beloved late husband Harry.

"I'll never leave this room again," Mrs. Peacock had told Mrs. White minutes before packing her off. "I'm going to cancel the phone, the mail, and my subscription to that dreadful *Darbyshire Chronicle*." For it was the newspaper that had brought Mrs. Peacock the news that had driven her to her bed — that of Dr. Black's acquisition of LeBlanc's self-portrait.

"That Black, he's so vulgar. He doesn't deserve it," Mrs. Peacock had cried when Black had refused to sell her the painting. "It should be ours. Harry's and mine. We've been searching for it for years. Oh, Harry will be so upset."

The fact that Harry Peacock had been dead for over a decade was of little consolation to his widow. To her, Harry would always be alive, despite his fatal accident. He was crushed under the wheels of a fishmonger's lorry while following up a lead to the missing LeBlanc. Truly, the only thing that Harry Peacock loved as much as his wife was the work of Henri LeBlanc.

"Oh, poor, poor Harry," she whispered into the pillow. "If I could lay my hands on that evil Black, I'd kill him."

Reaching up to pull her goose feather comforter over her head, Mrs. Peacock inadvertently knocked her stack of unopened mail to the floor. As she bent to retrieve the scattered letters, a small white envelope with the Tudor Close crest caught her eye. "My, my, what do we have here?" she asked in surprise, tearing open Dr. Black's invitation.

A strange look passed over Mrs. Peacock's face as she read. First, she glanced over at the bottle of sleeping pills she always kept at her nightstand, then she cast her eyes skyward and said in an emotion-laden voice: "Harry, my dear, now I have a reason to get up. I'll take care of that Black. Just leave it to me."

Mrs. Peacock grabbed the pills, jumped out of bed, and began dressing.

Mrs. Blanche White stepped off the crowded bus with her hand in her pocket and a scowl on her face, and headed for Hyde Park to feed the pigeons. Having an unexpected day off away from a hot stove and a whiny Mrs. Peacock should have been a treat, but it wasn't. Mrs. White was too upset.

She muttered angrily to herself as she sat down on a park bench. She withdrew her hand from her pocket, along with the invitation from Dr. Black that she'd been holding onto since she'd received it a few days ago. Mrs. White looked down at the engraved words for about the hundredth time, and shook her head. "Blimey, that Black. 'Ow I 'ate that man. 'E's a scoundrel, 'e is!"

In moments of stress, Mrs. White's cockney accent kicked in stronger than ever. Even in her more relaxed moments it was hard to believe she was of French ancestry. Her decent coq au vin, her first name, and an occasional "Sacre Bleu" were the only real clues.

Yes, very few people (not even Mrs. Peacock) knew of Mrs. White's most important French connection — that she was the last living relative of the famous artist Henri LeBlanc. But Dr. Black knew it all right. And according to Mrs. White, he also knew that the LeBlanc self-portrait belonged to her, not him — it was her birthright!

In anger and frustration Mrs. White kicked at the few pigeons that dared to approach her and rose slowly from the bench. Walking might clear her head, she thought. She'd been beside herself for days, ever since she'd seen that article in the newspaper. And now — this invitation.

" 'Orrid man, that Black," she fumed as she walked round and round the park's duck pond. " 'E just wants to rub my face in it. I could kill 'im."

Mrs. White quickened her pace. It had started to drizzle, but the rain began to have an odd calming effect on her. She looked down at the now damp invitation still in her hand and was struck with inspiration.

"Sacre Bleu! I know just what to do," she said with a gleam in her eye. "I'll go to Black's unveiling, and I'll..."

Visions of her gleaming new carving knife raced into her head. Chuckling to herself, she walked out of the park and headed for home and her kitchen.

"The bloody cheek of that man!" growled an enraged red-faced Colonel Mike Mustard, as he crumbled Dr. Black's invitation into a ball. Cursing, he kicked it with a spit-polished boot into the fireplace in the Duke of Wellington room at the Royal Dragoons Club.

"Imagine, inviting me to see 'his' LeBlanc after we've fought tooth and nail over it for years!" the retired colonel boomed in a voice that could have stopped the charge of the Light Brigade. "It's preposterous!"

To keep his explosive temper in check, Mustard began pacing the room in parade style. Instead, with each step he became angrier.

"That LeBlanc belongs right here in this room," he shouted, "where all Dragoons can enjoy it. Right over there." Mustard gestured up to a spot over the fireplace next to a portrait of Wellington, while down below in the fire Black's invitation burned to a crisp. "Yes, it belongs right here, don't you think?" Mustard scanned the room for agreement, but was met with disappointment. The only two Dragoons in view were a snoring Crimean veteran and a deaf Falklands cavalryman.

No matter. The action-oriented Mustard knew what had to be done. He sank down into a well-worn armchair by the fire to plan his attack. For retired though he was, Mustard could feel another battle coming on. He'd felt that way ever since reading that infuriating article in the newspaper. Oh, how he wanted to kill that Black! He'd wanted to kill him for years.

Indeed, Mustard had been engaged in personal combat with "Dr. Bloody Black" since their childhood days way back in Yorkshire. And unfortunately for the poor colonel, Black always seemed to get what Mustard wanted. Whether it was rugby or cricket. A levels or O levels. Money or possessions, or women. In particular Miss Vivienne Scarlett, Black's latest conquest and Mustard's latest

loss. Losing Scarlett to Black had been terrible...but now losing the LeBlanc as well...well, it was bloody preposterous.

Suddenly Colonel Mustard sprang out of his chair as if shot by a cannon. His battle plan had been formulated.

"Aha! I knew that small dagger I brought back from Malaysia would come in handy someday," he cried with malicious satisfaction. "I'll go to Black's unveiling after all. I know what has to be done."

With an enigmatic smile Mustard walked towards the club bar and a stiff drink.

Across town **Miss Vivienne Scarlett** was soaking in a bubble bath scented with perfume from one of her many admirers. A bath always seemed to help when she had a headache, and she'd had one since she opened that invitation from Dr. David Black days ago.

"Perhaps I'm losing my touch," she sighed as she began scrubbing her creamy pink skin. "David promised to give that painting to me, not keep it for himself. He knows how much I want it!"

For over a week now, ever since reading that article in the newspaper, Scarlett had expected a besotted Black to deliver the coveted painting to her door. Instead, only the invitation had arrived.

Worriedly, she looked herself over amidst the bubbles for some sign of a physical flaw that might have caused Black to change his mind. Fortunately, she didn't find one. Scarlett had been trading on her looks for years, and she didn't want to stop now.

"Well, I'm as lovely as ever. There's nothing wrong with me,"

Scarlett spoke in a newly-reassured voice. "There's something wrong with him, though. With Black. No man breaks a promise to me. No man...ever." She shook her damp curls in genuine disbelief. "And to think I threw Colonel Mustard over for him. I must've been crazy! Well, I'm not crazy now."

Her confidence restored and her headache much, much better, Scarlett stepped out of the tub and began drying herself off with a fluffy monogrammed towel, another gift from another admirer. She

then sat down at her flatteringly-lit vanity table. Beneath the mirror she noticed Black's invitation lying just where she left it in a fit of pique a few days before.

Scarlett picked up the invitation and came to a decision. Yes, she'd go to Black's unveiling of the LeBlanc self-portrait. Yes, she'd even bring a little something for her host. From the bottom drawer of her vanity table she pulled out a gift from Colonel Mustard — a pearl-handled revolver that he had wanted her to always carry.

"Yes, this should do very nicely," she smiled to herself, as she held the gun tightly in her dainty hand. "Very nicely."

"That Black, it's all that sidewinder's fault!" snarled **Professor Peter Plum**, art history scholar. He hurriedly picked up his books and sprinted from the lecture hall to escape the humiliating glares of his students. "If Black were here right now, I'd...I'd...I'd..."

The exercise fanatic and transplanted Texan took a deep breath to regain his composure, but was unsuccessful. "...I'd kill that varmint," he burst out in a loud Amarillo twang, running up the stairs to his office two at a time.

Still fuming, he unlocked his office door, threw his books on the desk, and began doing push-ups to relieve his aggression. In between gasps he tried to think positively, a rather annoying American trait.

Maybe his hastily put-together lecture on "Soup Cans in American Art" hadn't gone as badly as he thought. But then, how to explain that onslaught of spitballs and paper airplanes? For a minute there he felt he'd been caught up in a panhandle dust storm.

"Ouch," cried Plum. The push-ups, and the truth, began to hurt.

The professor switched to knee bends, and faced facts. His lecture had been as well-received as a cactus in a balloon factory. Why? His audience had expected a monumental event in art history — the first public viewing of LeBlanc's long-missing self-portrait. Instead, they'd been served tinned soup!

For Plum it was to have been a tenure-ensuring moment. But it was not to be. And all because of that blasted Black.

"That thieving no-account broke his promise to me," ranted a perspiring Plum, now flexing his arms with a pair of heavy metal hand weights. "He's been telling me I could have the LeBlanc ever since that article in the newspaper came out. I should have known better. I should have canceled the lecture. He's ruined my career!"

Purple with exertion and anger, Plum put the weights down and began to fish Dr. Black's invitation out of the dustbin where he'd thrown it just before the lecture.

"Well, I've changed my little ol' mind," the professor spoke in a voice dripping with hate. "I'm gonna go to Dr. Black's unveiling after all. And I'm gonna bring these little ol' friends with me."

He looked down at the heavy metal weights he'd just put down, and smiled for the first time all day.

Thankfully for Reverend Jonathan Green, choir practice was finally over. The clergyman always found it difficult to harmonize when his mind was on something else. And right now he was less interested in hitting the right notes, than in hitting Dr. Black right in the nose.

"That man is the devil himself. The idea of sending me an invitation! I'd like to kill him with my bare hands," angrily murmured the usually timid reverend. Holding his cassock hem in one hand, he carefully descended the steep stairs of the choir loft. In the other hand, he was surprised to find he was clutching the choir soloist's faux alligator pocketbook.

"Oh, no!" cried Green as he arrived safe but not especially sound, at the bottom of the steps. "Not my kleptomania again!"

Nervously Green ran his fingers through his brown hair. The reverend knew his larcenous habits would be the death of him one day if he didn't do something soon.

Black! Black! Black! That's all he could think about. If only Black had given him the LeBlanc painting when he had promised! If only he

could have sold it in time to replace everything he'd stolen from the church! If only...but now it was too late. He was going to be discovered.

"Oh, how I hate that man." Green spoke in a voice he never used for Sunday sermons. "I want revenge!"

With a furious push, Green banged the chapel door shut. Heading through the woods toward the vicarage, he prayed for an answer, a sign. Suddenly the reverend looked down and saw he was still carrying the faux alligator bag in his hand. Maybe this was the answer he was looking for! He tore open the pocketbook. No, there was less than a pound in change. But wait...what was this?

Startled, Green pulled out a thin sharp object from the bottom of the purse. It was an ice pick!

"Now why would our mousy little choir soloist be carrying an ice pick in her purse?" wondered a shocked Green. "Well, she is a little odd..."

Reverend Green stopped abruptly and began to laugh a loud

unearthly laugh. He'd received his sign after all. "Ha! Ha! Ha! Now I'd be happy to accept Black's invitation," Green said gleefully, putting the ice pick in his cassock pocket.

Tossing the pocketbook into the nearest bush, the reverend laughed all the way to the vicarage.



Hogarth wheeled the drinks trolley into the library and took a quick inventory.

Yes, all six guests had arrived right on schedule, at six o'clock. They were now gracing the room with a mixture of hatred and curiosity. The magnetic pull of the LeBlanc was too great to keep them away.

The butler knew Black's arrogant behavior would get him into trouble one day. He just hoped it wasn't today. With the unveiling set for midnight, there was a lot of time to, well...to kill. "Aah, an unfortunate choice of words," Hogarth mumbled to himself as he began pouring drinks. The guests mingled uncomfortably about the room, awaiting Black's arrival with nervous anticipation.

THE SOLUTION

It was eleven-thirty, according to the kitchen clock. Just a half hour to go, thought Hogarth nervously, as he stacked the dinner plates and began carrying them to the butler's pantry. Without warning, an unmistakable sound ricocheted through Tudor Close, piercing the heavy night air. It was the sound of a gunshot.

Startled, Hogarth did his best to keep the plates from falling out of his hands, but they crashed in a thousand pieces on the floor. For once the butler neglected tidying up and raced out in the direction of the shot.

Within seconds he arrived in the great hall to find Dr. Black lying in a pool of blood beneath the still-shrouded portrait of Henri LeBlanc. A pearl-handled revolver was nearby.

"Sir, can you hear me?" A devastated Hogarth gently lifted Black's head. Behind him the butler could hear the six guests rush into the room and gasp at what they saw. Black opened his eyes slightly, but his breath was too labored for speech. Hogarth persisted, "Sir, who did this to you and why?"

This time, Black rose feebly up on one elbow and pulled the cloth off the painting in answer. Then he breathed his last breath.

The six guests issued another collective gasp as they viewed the LeBlanc self-portrait for the first time.

"Why he looks just like..." Mrs. White began. Hogarth raised his hand to stop her.

"I know which one of you killed Dr. Black," Hogarth said calmly, as he turned his back to the painting and faced the six guests. "And you're not going to get away with it."

To find out what Hogarth knows, just solve the jigsaw puzzle. You'll be ready to point your finger at Black's murderer, too.