

## **Ralf Wunderlich "Larf Holtin and the Mystery of the Chinese Liddre"**

### **Introduction**

The following text evolved out of an English class lesson at school. We were supposed to write a detective story which should value the 10 rules for a good detective story by Ronald Knox (1929):

1. The criminal must be someone mentioned in the early part of the story, but must not be anyone whose thoughts the reader has been allowed to follow.
2. All supernatural or preternatural agencies are ruled out as a matter of course.
3. Not more than one secret room or passage is allowable.
4. No hitherto undiscovered poisons may be used, nor any appliance which will need a long scientific explanation at the end.
5. No Chinaman must figure in the story.
6. No accident must ever help the detective, nor must he ever have an unaccountable intuition which proves to be right.
7. The detective must not himself commit the crime.
8. The detective must not light on any clues which are not instantly produced for the inspection of the reader.
9. The stupid friend of the detective, the Watson, must not conceal any thoughts which pass through his mind; his intelligence must be slightly, but very slightly, below that of the average reader.
10. Twin brothers, any doubles, generally, must not appear unless we have been duly prepared for them.

As a bonus rule, we were supposed to feature the names of all our course-mates in the story. The following text either proves that I got it all wrong. Or was I stupid? Rebellious? Ingenious?

*P. S. I changed the title retrospectively and made minor adjustments to the story in 2012. The only remaining version of this text was the one featured in our school graduation book, but it had a couple of errors in it and to make the story fit into the new "Larf Holtin"-continuum, I had to adjust some bits. 16 years later. In case you happen to know the version 1.0, do not worry if you see some slight, but very slight, changes (for the better).*

---

### **Larf Holtin and the Mystery of the Chinese Liddre**

Although he saved mankind from destruction, Larf Holtin never earned glory or appreciation.

Yesterday he celebrated his 29th birthday. Well, he went to At Janko's and got drunk. The next morning he went into his bureau, sat down in his armchair and waited for something to happen. It was the 12th of July and it was so hot outside that nearly nobody left his or her house. He stood up, looked out of the window and sipped at his Whisky. He did not really know what to do, therefore he fetched his photo album out of the shelves, laid his legs on the table and grinned. There was his old English-class. They were all there: Ms. Dittmann,

Roman, Kilian, Anja, both Sebastians, Kai, Janko, Daniel, Thorsten, Ralf, Britta, Maike, Tanja and Anke. "Yep, that sure was a nice time..." he thought with a brought Southern State-accent. Larf often thought with this accent for some variety.

What was not a nice time was this darn hot summer day in July. Plus he had not had a case for many weeks, was short of money and what he really needed was an extraordinary something which, let's face it, is not likely to appear for an ordinary hero like Larf was. This ordinary person whom you picture right now was in fact so ordinary, it could already be called extraordinary ordinary. For example, he was 6 feet 3 inches tall, no idea what this means, maybe it is better to say he was an ordinary sized man. His eyes were brown with a little green sparkle in his left eye (which from his point of view was his right eye though) and short brown hair with first shades of grey. His wife died in an assassination some years ago and Larf did not get over it, especially since he was unsure if it really happened or if he confused himself with a movie he recently saw. Same with his daughter Maureen Annie Claudine. She did not appear in any of the previous episodes of his life, but now he thought she lives in Oklahoma on the farm of his parents-in-law. This also could make sense or not. It might explain why he thought in Southern State-accent once in a while at least.

His thoughts were confusing, but on this hot day he had nothing better to do than thinking confusing thoughts and sitting on his fake leather chair, yelling: "Damn, why is it, that every time I need money, no one calls me?!"

The sun shone through the blinds and touched his eyes. He closed them and the room immediately got dark. Suddenly there was a knock on the door. He opened his eyes and it was bright again. Fingering his gun, he said "come in".

A little man entered the room. He looked suspicious. "Do you want to donate some money for charity?" - "No, sorry, Mister, I do not!" - "Oh? Goodbye then." - "Why not."

Larf was bored. His life was a mess. He quit school at the age of 17, stayed jobless until he got to know Marie, his wife (R.I.P.). She made him feel comfortable in society and one day, he became a detective. But now she was dead. Or did he see this story in a TV series? Time to go to At Britta's and have some drinks to wash away the sadness. He took his jacket and left the room.

"Mr. Holtin, Mr. Holtin, please wait!" It was Stewart, the son of the caretaker. "What's hangin', Stewie?" Larf responded in a cool fashion that only suicidal private detectives can show. "Didn't you read the newspaper, Mister?" - "Of course I did, how dare you..." - "Well, I don't think so."

Stewart was very smart for his age. He was 8 and often came to visit Larf in his office. Life larked, no, come again, Larf liked those moments. It gave him the feeling of being needed, being a father. For a child he never had. The caretaker was a damn fucking Scottish bastard from Wales. Stewart needed a role model. Maybe Larf could find one for him.

"Mister Holtin?" - "What, yes, no. I was absentminded." - "I noticed, Sir. Here, I brought you the article." Larf read the big black letters on grey paper: NO CHINAMAN INVOLVED IN SHOOTING AT AT DANIEL'S BAR IN CHINATOWN

"Well, Stewart, two things: First, please call me dad. I mean, Larf! OK? Second, I cannot help here, Stewie, because a good detective does not deal with Chinamen. And I guess Chinatown is full of Chinese people, isn't it?" - "But the headline states that... ah, never mind, Mr. Larf."

They walked downstairs when Larf heard his phone ringing. He rushed back into his office. "Holtin, private investigations, crimes of any origin, taxi service..." - "Da da. Dis is Mr. Proesocheck frrom Rrussah. I need help. Please come quickly. Goodbye." - "Sure. What is your addre... hello?" - The Russian caller had hung up. "Well, what a pity. Sounded pretty promising. No Chinamen involved as far as I could tell." Noticing he was talking to himself, he went downstairs again.

"Hello Mr. Holtin." - "Hello Mikey." Mikey was Stewart's six years younger twin brother and was not quite as intelligent as the elder one. But more funny. Mikey pooped and Larf started to laugh. Larf loved to laugh. And it was an honest laugh. A laugh that told everyone that it was a Larf. Larf laughed because he now knew that it was 10 sharp. Mikey pooped everyday at the same time. Like a machine. It must be some sort of inner clock, Larf thought while leaving the house and entering the desertlike street. It was obscenely hot and he quickly rushed towards the nearest underground station. It is not possible to say the name of the station due to privacy concerns of Mr. Holtin. 15 minutes later he arrived at the Central Station of the city he lived in and walked straight towards At Tanja's Inn. It was closed. "What the..."

He kicked a small red ball out of his way. The ball flew on the street. Brakes squealed, people screamed. It was coincidental though, therefore Larf did not notice the chaos which evolved around him. He walked forward and forward, away and away. The sun stood above the Western horizon when Larf became conscious again. Where was he? Oh no! It looked like Chinatown in the evening. "Of course. The one thing I was not supposed to do, happened. Well, now that I am here, I might as well solve the case which Stewart told me about."

A little Chinese boy appeared out of nowhere and offered Larf a glass with a blue liquid in it. "Is this an hitherto undiscovered poison? If yes, do not even try to offer it to me, chap!" - "Sir, what does that even mean? It is just a little drink for a friend who comes to this place called At Maike's Tavern." - "Nice try, but do you think I'm a fool? You don't have a Chinese accent. Liar!" - "Excuse me, Sil. I have the feering that it was the authol's faurt." - "Well, I won't drink your hit... your hither... your blue liquid anyway." [Little Chinese boy leaves the stage.]

The convelstion fled his mind, Larf thought with a Chinese accent for variety. "I wonder who shot first? It could be no one mentioned at the beginning of the story. Wait, what story am I referring to and to whom do I talk here? Anyway, there was no one mentioned except Stewart and Mikey, their father, oh, and my dead wife plus the daughter and the parents-in-law and then there was also this suspicious looking charity guy... so basically, there was really no one mentioned. Wait... my photo album! Could it have been one of those I looked at? Ms. Dittmann or Roman or Kilian or Anja or one of the two Sebastians or Kai or Janko or Daniel or Thorsten or Ralf or Britta or Maike or Tanja or Anke? I'd better call Persson, my stupi... thought-reducing friend from Sweden. He will surely not know what to do."

25 minutes later - Larf played Up'n'down (the old but never boring game) in the meantime - Persson arrived. He was 32 years old but looked like 47 and weight the same in pounds, in case 1 pound equals 2 kilograms which probably is not the case, but it is irrelevant to the situation anyway. Or is it? Well, let's just say Persson was neither the tallest nor the thinnest. His main interest in life were dogs. He liked them and owned five pink-coloured poodles.

"Do you know how we get to At Maike's Taveln, I mean, Tavern, Persson?" - "I sure do, Sir. There is a secret passage from the Southern Berwick Street." - "Is it only one secret passage?" - "Actually, there are two, but they cross each other." - "Hmm... that'll do. Let's call it an exception if anyone asks." They hurried down the tunnel. It is not possible to say where exactly they hurried, because it is a secret, but eventually we find the two guys standing in front of the tavern just when Persson is about to ask "Are you sure that you did not commit the crime yourself?" - "Don't be ridiculous, Persson. This would not make any sense. Then again... nothing really made sense for the whole day. And minus plus minus is plus. So maybe... nah, it wasn't me, I'm fairly sure about that." The restaurant's waiter waited in front of the entrance.

"Did you see anything?!" Persson shouted immediately after he saw the waiter waiting. Larf shook his head in a disappointed looking manner while making some sort of strange hissing sound. "Persson, Persson, you silly fool. You Watson. What shall he answer to such a hasted question? You have to calm down. Look how it is done: Come on, you bloody Chinaman! Pretend, you are the murderer. Pretend, man. Pretend!" - "Pletend? Solly, sil, I am a lear waitel, not an actol who can pletend to be someone else. Bad white actols wolk as waitels and can thelefol pletend something. I am a waitel because I was boln fol it. I rove to be waiting. Apalt from that: What exactry ale you Gland Moff Talkin about?"

"The shooting yesterday?" - "Hahaha. The shooting was onry fol plomotion. I asked two speciarists fol a nice spectacle." The names wele - ret me think a moment - ah yes, Sebastian and Sebastian." - "I know these two guys. They were in my English class." - "Yes, they reft a rettel fol you hele." - "How did they know I would come here?" - "I guess the authol tord them." - "Are you sure?" - "No." The waiter moved his right foot around the floor, indicating an awkward feeling. Larf scratched his neck while pretending to see something interesting in a very far distance. Persson... well, Persson actually did nothing but standing still, so it is not worth mentioning it. Persson stood still.

After a couple of quiet minutes, Larf finally said: "Well, in this case, I declare that the case is solved. Yep. Persson, let's go and have a drink in At Kilian's Night Club. They have delicious cocktails there." - "Alright, Sir!" Persson replied. They both - or at least one of them (and I am not even sure about that) - knew how stupid this case was. Or maybe not?

## **The End**

---

*Watch out for further episodes of the incredible tales of Larf Holtin. What did Sebastian and Sebastian wrote in their letter to Larf? What did Persson really think at the end? What role did the 2 years and 8 years old twin brothers fulfil? What was the blue liquid that the little Chinese boy offered to Larf? Are the Chinese accent bits too much for being funny? (No.) Did anyone notice that the newspaper had a wrong bar name mentioned in the headline? Questions, questions, questions... and no answers. Yet.*