

# The Curious Incident of the Wayward Purse

By **Landon Y. Jones** - March 9, 2016

On the last night of my honeymoon to Europe in 1970, I was stabbed. Happily, I was not stabbed by my wife. Less happily, I was stabbed by someone intending to inflict great bodily harm upon me. At the time I dismissed it as an unfortunate but freakish incident. Only now has it become more clear what it really was: an ominous foreboding of the specter of international terrorism.

It was in London, of all places. To celebrate the finale of our six-week honeymoon, Sarah and I had dinner with friends at a fancy restaurant in London's Soho district. I know it must have been fancy because I recognized the rosy-cheeked actor Sir John Gielgud sitting at an adjacent table.

After dinner, we were strolling back to our bed & breakfast when, suddenly, there was crack of a huge explosion, sending reverberations roiling through the streets. Down the block we could see flames and smoke erupting from a car. As I later learned, it was one of many IRA bombs exploded in London during "the Troubles" in the 1970s.

"Let's get out of here," I said. But my friends were curious. What's going on? Perhaps we could help someone. So we joined a melee of people rushing down the street toward the accident.

We got closer, then suddenly, pandemonium. A group of men leaped from a car and attacked a man who had been attempting to direct traffic away from the scene of the explosion. They knocked him down on the street and then circled around him, kicking him.

I was astonished. I knew I had to do something . . . but what? As it happened, I was carrying my wife's purse under my arm, as I often do for safety in the middle of crowds. So, bizarrely, I grabbed the only weapon I had: a purse. Holding its handle, I

swung it at the attackers, hitting at least one of them.

The force of the blow broke the handle of the purse, which flew down the street with all of our valuables, traveler's checks, and passports. Sarah assessed the situation correctly and abandoned me in order to retrieve her purse, which she quickly did.

But, meanwhile, the attackers were so outraged at being attacked by an American wielding a purse that they stopped pummeling the man on the street and turned on me, fists swinging. I backed quickly into the crowd, which seemed to discourage them, so they retreated.

As I stood gasping, a woman approached me and said in a distinct Cockney accent, "Hey, mate, I saw 'em stick ya." She pointed at my side.

I pulled up my sweater and, sure enough, there was a puncture wound on my right waist in the area generally called "lover's handles." Fortunately, my lover's handles were ample enough to offer some protection. The wound was not bleeding badly, so I dismissed it for the time being.

It was not until we got back to our room that we looked more closely and decided to go to an emergency room. Soon I found myself on a gurney in the legendary Charing Cross Hospital, beloved by Sherlock Holmes fans like me.

"What happened?" the doctor asked me. I was not about to get caught in some police investigation of the bombing so I took the easy way out. "Oh, just an accident with a knife while cooking dinner," I claimed. He nodded. After probing and cleaning the wound, he stitched it up with what I later learned was cat-gut.

As I lay on the gurney, staring at the ceiling, I felt relieved. It looked as if we would be able to make our flight, after all.

Then a badge flashed in front of my eyes.

“O’Shaunessy, Scotland Yard.”

Scotland Yard??!!

I was being interviewed as part of the investigation. I decided to come clean. So I admitted to trying to use a purse to defend the man being beaten on the street. The detective from Scotland Yard smiled and told me the victim of the beating was an off-duty policeman. I had helped him by distracting the thugs. He said I had done a good turn.

He then suggested that I come to the police station and make a statement. Which I did cheerfully.

The next morning we were on the way home.

The ripple effects of terrorism are very strong, though. I still think about this incident here in New Jersey many years later. I was at Newark Airport the other day and found myself profiling the other passengers at the gate. Almost subconsciously, I found myself reaching for my purse.

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