



THE BIMETALLIC QUESTION

Box 883 Stock Exchange Tower
Montreal, Canada H4Z 1K2

MINUTES
of the meeting
of the
BIMETALLIC QUESTION
April 6, 2006

Date of next meeting

The next meeting will take place on:
Thursday, June 8, at 6:30 p.m. at:

The Westmount Public Library
(Westmount Room)
4574 Sherbrooke Street West
Montreal, Quebec

The Quiz at the next meeting

"The Adventure of Wisteria Lodge"
prepared by David Kellett

Minutes of the MEETING of the BIMETALLIC QUESTION held on Thursday, April 6th, 2006 at the Westmount Library (Westmount Room), 4574 Sherbrooke Street West, Westmount, Quebec.

We regret to inform you that the Minutes have **d i s a p p e a r e d**.
The management regrets any inconvenience.

We do recall that regrets were sent by Rachel Alkallay, David Dowse, and Wilfrid deFreitas who were unable to attend the meeting.

All that remain is a list of winners of the quiz.

"The Adventure of the Yellow Face"
Prepared by: Rachel Alkallay
Winners were:

Rank	Name	Score
1.	Carol Abrams	44½
2.	David Kellett	42¼
3.	Patrick Campbell	37½

Since Carol Abrams had won a quiz recently and mentioned that she didn't have the time to prepare another quiz, David Kellett offered to prepare one for her.

We humbly offer the following short story written by the scribe who lost the notes for the meeting, but conveniently, did not lose the short story. Enjoy.

A Long Way Down

by
Elliott Newman

i.

I made it painfully clear to 1704 there would be risks involved. Not the usual obvious kind, but subtle, horrible risks with indescribable consequences which I took great pains to articulate for her own good. It was evident that she was continuing to resist my warnings with what she intended the world and I should take for strength of character and firm resolve. She squared her shoulders, looked me straight in the face. Set her lips in a fixed line. But I know: where there is wavering now, there will be trembling soon and dissolution later. I've seen it before and I shall see it again. It is a hallmark of my utter devotion to duty that I spent this time with 1704 to point out the risks. Certainly, I did it much less for her sake than for that of the others. 1704 was going to be a problem; that was clear. Her present resistance and denial were pointless. This was not the place for her. Perhaps a split-level loft downtown in some renovated warehouse, a brick wall on one side, ultra-high ceilings with massive exposed oaken beams, and a cat that disappears behind its litter box when there's a knock on the door. Let her go live somewhere else. Somewhere safer. Establishing and maintaining quality of life at Granite Towers are my sacred trust. I must protect the others in whom I have invested so much and who mean so much to me. They are, after all, more of a family than I have ever known. Providence has accorded me the luxury and blessing of choosing them. I firmly repeated my patient enumeration of the risks:

(a) The proximity of the elevator. This would certainly inveigh itself on her privacy with its ascending and descending at all hours. I described how a slipping clutch would wreak havoc on a good night's rest. Not to mention the opening and closing of the doors. These make noise even at the best of times. However new the technology, I pointed out, all elevators make a certain amount of noise. As do the non-technological people exiting and entering the box, with the rustling of their packages and the polite and not-so-polite conversation, all of which would infiltrate her walls and loom especially amplified under the thin crack between her door and the striated marble ledge at its base.

The proximity of the elevator, she assured me, would not be a problem. 1704 was a socialized being, used to noise and *brouhaha*. In fact, she thrived on pressure of all kinds, she told me proudly. She touted her job as an ad exec as if that would provide all the armor and explanation necessary as a bulwark against extraneous noises that might infringe on her enjoyment of life and surroundings at Granite Towers.

(b) The construction noises. Since this was a bold and innovative project of six very tall buildings scheduled to alter the eastern landscape of West Mountain, she could expect at least a year-and-a-half of pile-driving, jack-hammering, sawing, banging, paint-slopping, glass-smashing, debris-crashing, and dust-enveloping as she entered and exited the building, not to mention the general clomping of smelly, sweaty tradesmen in and around the building with occasional intrusions into her suite as they rectified the epidemic of deficiencies that new buildings are heir to. Said dust, I informed her in painfully friendly fashion, would require her car to be washed daily. Just consider the cleaning bills to restore her clothing daily. Pernicious, pervasive dust is no laughing matter.

Again, she said: no problem. The last time she checked, she didn't have asthma, And she could afford the dry cleaning bills.

Why was I so insistent on pointing out these potential areas of future concern? Call me dedicated to a fault. I believe in the exemplary exercise of caution, anticipation, attention to detail, and rigorous vigilance of avoidable error. I have turned the melding of these elements into an art form which I practice daily in all aspects of my job as assistant property manager of Granite Towers. I anticipated a certain weakness – call it falseness, if you will – in her demeanor. Her veneer of composure and confidence were transparency itself. She didn't know what I know. My employers rely on me to make the right choices. I needed to be selective. Highly selective. The last thing we needed was a tenant whose pretence at competence and control would yield fissures and problems later. 1704 was such a one. I knew it.

The proverbial buck would stop with me if so much as a hair fell out of place in this most prestigious and pulsating of dwelling places. With just under 1000 apartment units and a potential human population of 3,000 or more souls, I undertook the responsibility to create a perfect environment for all concerned. I never realized the enormity of the task. I learned to employ a myriad of skills to avoid problems. Any errors in this department were mine alone, and as such, were mine alone to rectify.

Under other circumstances, 1704 would have interested me. About medium-height, butternut blonde, green-eyed, with unblemished skin that might have been peeled off an alabaster statue, and as trim and curvaceous a torso as a fashion model, she tried to come across as a model of self-confidence. Under that façade there agitated an insecurity that with time and proper guidance would present a problem.

I went on.

(c) The height above street level. It's a long way down from the seventeenth floor to the street. Not a good thing if you are the least bit acrophobic or when the elevators break down. Or when you are despondent and perspiration moistens the adhesive tape that is sticking your fragmenting psyche together in the middle of the night.

She disputed that all elevators would go on the frits at the same time, and she was not afraid of heights. She belonged to a sky diving club. Of course. I played my last card.

(d) The huge cemetery across the street. Clearly visible from her living room, it began immediately behind the steel fence beside the sidewalk, and did a reverse cascade up the western slope of East Mountain with its thousands of grave stones, dozens of bungalow-sized family crypts with ante-bellum, Greek revival *accoutrements* and stone angels that were never intended to fly, and foliage of oak, maple, hemlock, chestnut, sycamore, weeping willows, and other well-tended and strategically-placed trees.

She responded somewhat glibly that the silence of the cemetery would balance off the noise of the elevators across the hall from her door. Also, she would easily see the verdant lushness of the mountainside, and none of the death folded within its breast, she said. An interesting image, I thought. I also thought she swiveled somewhat in her seat to reveal a bit more of her cleavage than had previously been evident, since her artistically designed blouse was opened down to the fourth button.

She need not have bothered. I was on duty. I had vowed noever to mess with the residents. I take my job very seriously.

ii.

It began as predicted. No sooner had 1704 ensconced herself in the apartment with her odd assortment of *bric-à-brac retrouvé* that defied even the most indulgent definition of good taste than the requests – then demands – poured in. First, a leaky faucet. In her absence, I let myself into the apartment and remedied the problem by turning the offending hardware on and off a few times to dislodge a speck of solder in the housing. Then, more complaints: the lovebirds (of the genuine feathered variety) belonging to 1702. Screeching, she said, at various times each and every night, sometimes all night. I replied on our letterhead that I would investigate the situation and respond to her at six p.m. the following evening. This required my getting up at 4:00 a.m., making it over in darkness to my parking space, walking up all seventeen floors in order not to alert anyone of my presence in the building yet, and planting myself in the hallway at 4:45 between 1704 and the alleged ornithological miscreants next door in 1702. I adopted a military “at ease” position, not allowing my back to touch the wall, since I was now on duty, and as such did not allow myself any leaning whatsoever. As expected, the usual dead silence from 1702. 1710 nodded good morning to me as they waited for the elevator at 7:00, both giving me a final curious glance as they slid in. I heard stirrings in 1702 following the rise-’n-shine melody on the alarm clock at 7:29, my time. After the distant flushing of his toilet, there followed the calm chirping and cooing of his caged birds at 7:32. I noted slow movement on the part of the mistake in 1704 around 7:45 after the alarm clock melody of “California Dreamin’” seeped out to me. From the time 1702 left until I vacated my post, several other tenants and overnight guests used the elevator. All but one couple seemed curious about my presence in the hall, but none asked me about it. That one couple seemed exhaustedly engrossed in each other and walked more like a three-legged beast than two distinct entities. I left and was at the Bauhaus-inspired desk in my office off the lobby by 8:00.

That night I presented myself at 1704 at 6:00 p.m. sharp. I rang and knocked several times without response. I consider myself a reasonable person and I believe it not unreasonable to expect that my efforts to serve others to the betterment of their comfort and quality of life be valued. I stood in a muddle of some agitation when I realized that 1704 was not going to answer because she was in all probability not at home. I returned to the office and decided to await her return. There was always paperwork to do. More fittings of square pegs into square holes, so to speak. I had been up since 4:00 a.m. and now I made a fresh pot of tea. Dinner could wait. I dialed her number at 7:00 and she answered after the fourth ring. I asked if I might come up. She said alright, but with none of the enthusiasm she had tried to crank up at the beginning of this unfortunate and completely avoidable business.

Did you hear the noises again this morning, I asked.

Yes, she responded, obviously agitated. What are you going to do about it?

You heard the lovebirds in the apartment next to you at six in the morning?

Yes, she said, and at 1:00, and at 3:17, and again at 4:48. I can't go on like this much longer. I need my sleep. It's affecting my work. My boss is making noises that I don't seem to be handling my clients as well as I used to. And speaking of noises, my neighbors in 1706 were up talking and arguing all night, right up until after 6:00 this morning.

I offered her as much consolation and reassurance as I could, left the building for the evening, and dined at a fairly exclusive restaurant. I ordered an expensive *demi-bouteille* of Bordeaux wine. 1704 was trouble, as I had suspected she would be. I held the globular wineglass up to the light and gazed at a most agreeable view of an elliptical world through its burgundy filter. 1706 was unoccupied and 1702's lovebirds had been obediently quiet throughout the night, at least when I'd been there. There had been no detectable noises from those apartments. My instincts, as usual, had been correct. What had been avoidable was now inevitable.

iii.

The police cars and ambulance were there with their lights flashing, winking, and revolving when I backed up meticulously and accurately into my parking space at my usual time of 7:15. Someone had taped the outline of a sprawled body on the asphalt about 15 spaces over from me in line with the 04 apartments. Substantial amounts of blood were congealing to a dark purple color all over the area and a few shocked residents milled around silently. 1206 came up to me in his bathrobe, his ashen face all the more lost and sad under his completely bald dome.

It ... it's that lady from 1704, the beautiful blonde lady, he said, as if his world had collapsed. She was so nice. She often spoke to me in the elevator. Once she even had my wife and me up to her apartment for a drink. She was so elegant, she had such refined taste. She ...

I patted his shoulder and said something, I don't know what.

He looked up at me and said, Thank you.

Another tenant pointed me out to what looked like a policeman in a civilian suit. He walked over and asked, Who are you?

I gave him my name and told him I was the property manager.

He asked me a number of questions, jotted down the answers, took my business card, and went back to his car.

Later that day, in fact at 1:47 in the afternoon two detectives entered my office and asked if I could let them into 1704. I did so, and watched their taking measurements. They said this was procedure. One of them said he had worked with 1704 at an orphanage. She was always volunteering and the kids loved her, he said. She was very imaginative, always making up stories and talking in different voices. He chuckled. He grew serious and asked me if 1704 had been depressed or despondent recently. I told him I hadn't known her long, since she'd only taken occupancy nineteen days ago. I added that she had complained shortly after moving in of the pet birds next door making a loud noise, as well as hearing voices from the other neighboring apartment that was uninhabited at that time. I added that she appeared increasingly agitated and mentioned she had told me she was having trouble at her job. He added that it was a shame, since everyone liked her, she was a real treasure to everyone who knew her, helping out with people who had problems, nowhere to go, and so on. She must have snapped, he said.

He wondered how it happened, especially to such nice, solid people, then shrugged.

It just happens, his partner said.

No, it doesn't just happen, I thought, back in my office and alone. It takes work. Planning. Meticulous planning. And devotion to duty. All in defense of my tenants' right to quality of life without problems. Square pegs in square holes. It's easy when you know how. After all, I had the passkey. There were always reasons to go in: a leaky faucet, a paint smear on the oak parquet floor, an off-track sliding cupboard door. Noise. Noise, noise, noise, giving me dozens of reasons to install even more tiny speakers in strategic locations so that those noises could follow her from room to room like flypaper on the heel of her shoe. Lovebirds with an angry edge to their maddening cooings. Indistinct snatches of husband and wife arguing incessantly, pirated from the ancient *Bickersons'* radio show. Wind wafting among the tombstones, whistling up the elevator shaft, seeping into every corner of her apartment. Dogs barking. Cats in heat vocalizing their urgency and desire impossibly in mid-air, just off her balcony. Scratchings in the closet, under the rug, behind the back panel of her bedroom night table drawer. Another inside the hinge of the refrigerator door, and in more than a dozen other locations. Noise that could be flipped off in a flash when other hidden devices warned me of visitors or when she was on the phone, or if she was using any form of audio recording device.

I had warned her there would be sounds. Sounds. Sounds that when they appear without explanation prey on the mind over time and take over with their cacophonous welter, growing too big for the mind to contain them. And then they explode as noise, leaving the fallout of madness that itself grows and amplifies and echoes and reverberates at first in one room, then another until it takes over inside your head and wrests the air from your soul forever.

It is such a long way down. I thought she would stop being a problem once she stopped being. That is the usual way. She was too self-confident, too together to be real. And I proved it because she broke into little pieces so easily. What did they mean, those detectives, when they said she volunteered with kids? This was 1704 they were talking about: a smudge on the asphalt, nothing more. And the grief and loss in the eyes of bald little 1206 that morning and when he came back from the funeral and presented me with a lily – a lily of alabaster hue, almost as though it had been peeled from her face. No. No! That was 1704, just an idea, a square peg that wouldn't fit. What did the detective mean when he asked me to come around to the station tomorrow, first thing, nineteen days after her leap? Why was he was hoping I would clear up a few questions? Wasn't this open and shut? This breeze on her balcony is amazing, it's so brisk. The lights are twinkling invitingly off to the north where the street meanders into the club district, where people meet and make various noises at each other that for the most part don't set them off. Across the street the gravestones are tiny, blurred, shaped against each other and against the rising slope of East Mountain. It's hard to see her grave from here. But it's there. They told me. She told me. She's been telling me every night, all night long, the flawed alabaster lady of 1704. Telling me every day and night in a torrent of words that my inner strength and devotion to duty – thank goodness – can keep in a semblance of order against the barrage of exploding noise. And yes, she agreed, because I heard her clearly, it is a long way down, but only at the beginning before you step off the edge to deal with those noises. It's time.

A Walk through Time

Five million years from now, provided there are still a planet and reasonably intelligent life forms on it that care about such things, we might be considered the newer fossils. A lot of things need to happen for this to come about, and all of them are beyond our control. However, if we manage to become pressurized, fossilized, and not necessarily sanitized, sentient and intelligent beings of the future might find pretty geometric fragments of our mortal remains embedded in the stonework of buildings, monuments, and stone fences.

On Sunday May 7, beginning at 11:00 a.m., an intrepid group of Sherlockians dutifully trailed after Ingrid Birker, a specialist in reptiles with the Redpath Museum, on what burgeoned into a gleeful voyage of discovery of fossils, lesser relatives, and kitten prints in brick. We started at the Redpath, where Ingrid pointed out assorted shells in the limestone rock that comprises most of the façade and foundation of the building, and indeed many of the older buildings in Montreal. Ingrid's geological explanations were informed, authoritative, and fascinating. Through her tutelage, we began to see tiny parts of our environment in a new light. Stepping back, the perspective morphed into a broader and more awesome sweep of history, paleontology, anthropology, architecture, and to some degree the divine as we walked west along Sherbrooke Street as far as the Sulpician property just east of Atwater Avenue, with its reflecting pool, well hidden from the street. Had we not known better we might have been witnesses of one of the great gardens and ponds of magisterial Europe of two centuries ago! Yes, we were a sight, especially those of us who sported one deerstalker and a couple of Victorian capes that flapped in the occasional breeze.

Our thanks to Joan O'Malley who set up the tour with Ingrid, and to the nineteen or so intrepid Montreal Sherlockians who as always brought their individual perceptions and generous comments into the mix.

A Recipe NOT from Mrs. Hudson's

For our Bimetallic members who enjoy the hands-on approach of archeology, try making a few not-so-tasty treats such as Sherlockian fossils for our next meeting. This recipe, I am sure, did not past muster in Mrs. Hudson's kitchen.

Things members will need:

- soil
- water
- wax paper
- cookie sheet
- containers (to mix soil and water)
- spoon (for stirring)
- objects to stir into soil (small sea shells, leaves, rocks, nuts in shells, murder weapons, etc.)

What to do:

1. Fill a container half full of soil. Mix water with soil, stirring until you have a thick consistency – mud that can be molded or shaped by hand. Stir the object or objects into the mixture.

NOTE: This activity works best with soil that has a high clay content. Very rich soil, like potting soil, will crumble too easily.
2. Pour out onto wax paper placed on a cookie sheet. Now form a mud pie, making sure that the stirred-in objects are totally concealed in the mud.
3. Place the mud pies on a windowsill or outside so the sun can aid in the drying process. Let sit for a full day and overnight. Check after 24 hours to see if it is dried throughout. If the weather is very humid, your wait will be longer.
4. When thoroughly dry, take a mud pie and carefully break it open with your hands.
5. Although real fossils took millions of years to form, for those of us who are limited in time, we can make ours in a day or two.