THE CASE OF THE EMPTY TOMB

by Kent Syverson
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THE CASE OF THE EMPTY TOMB

By Kent Syverson
CAST OF CHARACTERS

MASON PERRY
B.J. FETCH HER
SAM SHOVEL
NANCY DREARY
SHERKEY HOMELY
DR. WHAT'S WRONG
PRODUCTION NOTES

SYNOPSIS: The Case of the Empty Tomb opens the day after the Resurrection. The Sadducees, who say there is no Resurrection (see Matthew 22:23), have hired attorney Mason Perry to prove that Jesus did not rise from the dead. He hires four other detectives to help him with the case: B.J. Fetch Her, Sam Shovel, Nancy Dreary, and Sherkey Homely along with sidekick Dr What’s Wrong. They meet again thirty-nine days later to compare notes. Each detective solves the case by using one of the four theories people use to try to disprove the Resurrection:

- The women went to the wrong tomb.
- It was Judas Iscariot who was crucified, not Jesus.
- Jesus didn’t really die, he only passed out.
- The disciples stole the body of Jesus.

(These are the same theories our pastor discusses every Easter, to remind us how ridiculous they are.) Each theory is destroyed as the detectives prove them wrong. Finally, they huddle together and come up with one ridiculous theory — until Dr. What’s Wrong makes a startling discovery that changes everything.

COSTUMES: Mason Perry wears a business suit.
B.J. Fetch Her wears a windbreaker and carries a fishing pole.
Sam Shovel wears a raincoat and a plaid hat.
Nancy Dreary wears 1950s clothing.
Sherkey Homely wears a plaid poncho and a detective’s cap.
Dr. What’s Wrong wears a suit.

PROPS: A briefcase, legal pad and pen for Mason Perry. The other characters may hold clipboards or notebooks to hide their scripts as they read their reports, if desired.

SET: None needed.
(MASON PERRY enters, carrying a briefcase.)

PERRY: My name is Mason Perry. I'm an attorney. Four days ago a man named Jesus, formerly of Nazareth, was crucified for blasphemy. Early yesterday morning, a series of strange events occurred, and a rumor spread that he had risen from the dead! The Sadducees have hired me to disprove that theory. However, the rumor is spreading at an alarming rate, and I cannot do this job alone. I have hired four detectives to help me.

First, there's the star of the hit series, Stealing, She Wrote, B.J. Fetch Her! (B.J. FETCH HER enters.) Next, there's that gumshoe from the hit movie The Maltese Turkey, Sam Shovel! (SAM SHOVEL enters.) Then there's the teenage detective who sometimes works with The Hardly Sons, Nancy Dreary! (NANCY DREARY enters.) Finally, there's that super sleuth from overseas, the resident of 122 Butcher Street, Sherkey Homely! (SHERKEY HOMELY and DR. WHAT'S WRONG enter.) Wait a minute. There are two of you?

WHAT'S WRONG: I work with Mr. Homely.

HOMELY: This is my assistant, Dr. What's Wrong. He helps me on all of my cases.

WHAT'S WRONG: (Very proper) Quite right.

PERRY: Very well. Now, it's time to get down to the business — FETCH HER: The business of disproving the theory that Jesus of Nazareth has risen from the dead.

SHOVEL: The Sadducees, who say there is no Resurrection, have hired you to help them disprove that theory.

NANCY: The rumor is spreading so fast, this job can't be handled by only one person, so you hired us to help you.

HOMELY: Elementary.

PERRY: (A beat) How do you know that already?

HOMELY: We're detectives. It's our job to figure things out.

PERRY: Of course! I do that myself, except I'm usually in the courtroom. (A beat) We'll have to split up. Everybody
take a different area. Find out all you can about this so-called “Resurrection,” then report back to me and we’ll all compare notes. Together we should be able to come up with a report that will satisfy the Sadducees.

SHOVEL: Just make sure that you include us in the credits!
FETCH HER: If you don’t, I will. I’m a writer, you know.
PERRY: All right, already! Calm down! I’m an attorney; I know all about copyright laws. Now, are there any more questions?
NANCY: What’s the main reason the Sadducees want to end this rumor?
PERRY: There are several reasons. One of them is that Jesus constantly denounced them and other religious groups in public.
SHOVEL: That’s right! I have a friend who’s a Pharisee. He told me that Jesus was always on their case, and that he never lost an argument with them!
HOMELY: Elementary!
PERRY: (After a beat) Are we finished now? (Everybody else nods.) Then let’s go! (Everyone except MASON PERRY exits. MASON PERRY takes Center Stage and speaks to the audience.) Thirty-nine days have passed. The others have finished their investigations, and now we are ready to give our reports. (The DETECTIVES enter as MASON PERRY moves to Stage Left, opens his briefcase and takes out a legal pad and pen. They stand at Stage Right. DR. WHAT’S WRONG stands erect with his hands behind his back, slightly apart from the others.) Good, we’re all here. B. J. Fetch Her, you may go first. (FETCH HER goes to Center Stage. MASON PERRY takes notes as she speaks.)
FETCH HER: The key to this whole thing is timing. This year, there was only one day between Passover and the Sabbath. That meant everything had to happen in just one day — the trials, the Crucifixion, and the burial.

By the time Jesus’ body was laid in the tomb, evening
was coming, and the people had to hurry back to their homes to prepare for the Sabbath. Some women wanted to give him a proper burial, but they had to wait until after the Sabbath to do it.

They got up very early in the morning on the third day to prepare the spices for Jesus’ body. It was just getting light when they left for the tomb. Now, when you combine the darkness of the hour, their grief and their haste, the answer is obvious — they went to the wrong tomb!

When they arrived, the tomb was open. They claim they saw two angels at the tomb, and one of them said, “He is not here.” Those “angels” were really gardeners, and the early morning light gave them an angelic appearance. When the gardener said “He is not here,” he meant that Jesus was not buried in that particular tomb. (The others look at each other, considering this possibility. Then SAM SHOVEL takes Center Stage.)

SHOVEL: (To FETCH HER) Wait a minute! Those women went back and told Jesus’ disciples what they saw. Two of them went out to see for themselves. By then it was fully light, and they could easily find their way. They went to the right tomb, and that was the one they found empty! How do you explain that?

FETCH HER: (A beat) I can’t explain it. I never even thought of that! (B.J. FETCH HER rejoins the group.)

PERRY: (Tears out page of notes from his legal pad and folds it.) It’s obvious we can’t use that one. Sam, tell us your theory. (MASON PERRY takes notes as he speaks.)

SHOVEL: Until recently, there were twelve disciples. Now there are only eleven. One of them, Judas Iscariot, is reported to be dead. That can mean only one thing — it was Judas who was crucified!

Jesus had a knack for finding out things ahead of time. Judas went to the Chief Priests with a plan to
have Jesus arrested. But Jesus found out about it and
planned to have Judas arrested instead!

Two distractions took place at the arrest site —
presumably orchestrated by Jesus. First, a man
wearing only a sheet appeared on the scene. When
someone tried to grab him, he grabbed the sheet
instead, and the man escaped naked! A streaker will
grab anybody’s attention!

Second, one of the disciples tried to cut off the ear of
a servant. Then his ear was supposedly healed. While all
this was going on, Jesus took off his cloak and put it on
Judas, then escaped, and in the confusion they arrested
Judas instead. For some reason, Judas never told
anyone who he really was. (The others ponder this theory.
Then NANCY DREARY takes Center Stage.)

NANCY: (To SAM SHOVEL) Wait — I heard that Judas
hanged himself, and his body was found in a field
somewhere. Now how can anybody be alive in one place
and dead in another place at the same time?

SHOVEL: You have a point there. I forgot about that! (SAM
rejoins the group.)

PERRY: (Tearing out and folding the second sheet of notes) We
can’t use that one either! Nancy, tell us what you found.
(MASON PERRY takes notes as she speaks.)

NANCY: It really isn’t that hard to figure out. It’s so obvious
— Jesus didn’t really die!

When someone is crucified, it can take days to die!
Jesus was on the cross for only six hours! Two other
men were crucified with him that day, and their legs
had to be broken so that they would die faster. Jesus’
legs were never broken. After only six hours on the
cross, Jesus just passed out! The guards thought he was
already dead, so they took him down and allowed for
him to be buried.

The tomb where he was buried probably had some
hidden opening which allowed enough oxygen in to 
revive him. He got up and managed to get out of there on 
his own strength! (The others think this over. SHERKEY 
HOMELY goes to Center Stage. DR. WHAT’S WRONG joins him.)

HOMELY: Haven’t you overlooked something? One of the 
guards stabbed Jesus’ side with his spear! Blood and 
water came out — that only happens when a person 
dies. How could anyone survive that, especially after 
six hours on a cross?

NANCY: (A beat) Oh, no! I guess I really blew that one! (She 
rejoins the others.)

PERRY: (Tearing out and folding up the third page of notes) That 
makes three theories we can’t use! Sherkey, you’re our 
last hope. Give us your report — and make it a good one!

(MASON PERRY takes notes as he speaks.)

HOMELY: It’s really quite elementary.

PERRY: Hold it! Don’t say that! We’ve already had three 
“obvious” theories proven false. I don’t want another one!

HOMELY: But this one is based on a story that’s already in 
circulation. The disciples stole the body of Jesus while 
the guards were asleep!

PERRY: Say, that’s right! I remember hearing that story 
myself.

HOMELY: Quite right.

PERRY: But I also remember hearing reports that Jesus 
made several public appearances. How do you explain 
that?

WHAT’S WRONG: Maybe their eyes were playing tricks on 
them.

HOMELY: (To DR. WHAT’S WRONG) That would explain it if 
there were only a few people involved. But several 
hundred people claim to have seen him — many all at 
once. It’s impossible for all those people to hallucinate 
at the same time.

WHAT’S WRONG: You are quite right, as usual.
HOMELY: (To MASON PERRY) But there is another way to pull off such an illusion. Before the Crucifixion, Jesus was constantly seen with his disciples. Now, he's being seen all alone. That means that “Jesus” is really Thomas in disguise!

After the disciples stole the body of Jesus, Thomas dressed himself in Jesus’ clothes and has been making those appearances himself! He’s seldom seen with the disciples anymore, so nobody caught on to the ruse until now. (The others mull this over.)

FETCH HER: (Goes to SHERKEY HOMELY at Center Stage.) Excuse me ...

PERRY: On, no! Not again! (He tears out and folds over the fourth sheet of notes.)

FETCH HER: I’m sorry, but I see a flaw in that theory. The entrance to the tomb was well guarded. Even if all those guards had fallen asleep, they would have awakened at the sound of the stone being rolled away. The disciples would have been caught and crucified themselves!

HOMELY: (A beat) Oh, dear! I fear that you are right.

WHAT’S WRONG: Too bad, Homely. (SHERKEY HOMELY rejoins the others.)

PERRY: This is ridiculous! We had four perfectly good theories, and we’ve already proven them false! We’re right back where we started!

WHAT’S WRONG: It’s like we tricked ourselves. (MASON PERRY suddenly has an idea.)

PERRY: Tricks! That’s it! Everybody huddle! (Everybody except DR. WHAT’S WRONG gets into a huddle. DR. WHAT’S WRONG stands with his hands behind his back, looking away from the group. The group breaks huddle.) Then it’s agreed!

Jesus of Nazareth was really a master magician!

(MASON PERRY begins to write.)

FETCH HER: All those so-called “miracles” he performed were really cleverly staged illusions!

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