

Plays for Young Audiences

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Sherlock Holmes and the Baker Street Irregulars

Story by
Sir Arthur Conan Doyle

Adaptation by
Thomas Olson

Sherlock Holmes and the Baker Street Irregulars was first presented by the Children's Theatre Company for the 1988-89 season.

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Cast of Characters:

- Sherlock Holmes
- Wiggins
- Cartwright
- Simpson
- Beggar
- Constable
- Lestrade
- Woman 1
- Woman 2
- Mrs. Hudson
- Doctor Watson
- Blind Peddler
- Captain Jergens
- Mrs. Langtry
- Prince Edward
- Butler (Jasper)
- Medium (Madame Kalianda)/Gentleman
- Little Bill
- Henry
- Princess Victoria
- Flower vendor
- Queen

Ensemble includes: crowd, dockworkers, and pygmies

Act I. Scene i.

Preshow: Baker Street; before sunset. Various Street People going about their everyday business. Music underscore. Crowd assembles, muttering sotto voce with increasing agitation, news about an incident at the river docks. Bleed-through of scrim reveals the berth of the ship "Matilda Briggs." Holmes and three streetboys: Wiggins, Wright and Simpson are present. Holmes hides as Simpson dives into the river beside the ship with a battered carpetbag. A "blind Beggar/peddler appears with two small Urchins. Crowd gathers with a Constable rushing up the gangplank and urgently rushing back. Simpson delivers wet carpetbag to Holmes, who hides again as Le-e and Constable return and ascend gangplank to ship. Constable notices Holmes, Wiggins, Cartright and Simpson leaving with carpetbag, blows his whistle and rings bell in alarm. Lestrade appears at top of gangplank with Captain of ship, whose legs buckle. He collapses in arms of Dockworkers as lights crossfade back to Baker Street exterior.

Act I. Scene ii.

Baker Street. Corner, near Holmes' apartment. Deep burgundy sky and a green sun, setting.

Lamplighter lights a streetlamp. Watson appears impatiently looking up and down the street. He is dressed in a tuxedo and a napkin is tucked in his collar. Two Women are walking.

WOMAN 1: Oh, Daisy -- would you just look at the sunset?!

WOMAN 2: Red and green! Well now, ain't that appropriate!

WOMAN 1: How do you mean?

WOMAN 2: Well, Cecily, I mean Christmas is only two weeks away.

(They giggle; then notice WATSON.) Evening, Doctor Watson.

WATSON: *(A nod,)* Ladies.

WOMAN 2: Waitin' on Mr. Holmes again, are you? *(WATSON realizes he's wearing his napkin and removes it.)* Did you notice the sunset?

WATSON: *(Noticing.)* Oh, well -- that is something, isn't it?

WOMAN 1: And what does Mr. Sherlock Holmes think of it?

WATSON: I really couldn't say. We've never discussed it.

WOMAN 2: Well, I'll wager he knows all about it -- every little reason why. Him and all his science know-how.

WATSON: Yes, I expect you're right.

WOMAN 2: I wouldn't like that, would you, Daisy? I wouldn't want to know everything.

WOMAN 2: Oh, no, Cecily. T'would spoil all the fun in life, I think.

WOMAN 1: Doctor Watson?

WATSON: Yes, Madam?

WOMAN 1: Go an' get yourself a coat to put on?

WATSON: Madam?

WOMAN 1: I have such trouble getting my boys to wear proper clothes in the cold weather.

WOMAN 2: You wouldn't want to set a poor example for the little ones now, would you?

WATSON: No, Madam.

WOMAN 1: Thank you kindly, Doctor Watson.

WATSON: Don't mention it. *(He exits.)*

WOMAN 2: What a nice young man, don't you think, Cecily?

WOMAN 1: Yes. Daisy -- terribly obliging. Can't say as much for his friend Sherlock Hokes, though.

WOMAN 2: Oh, no. Never as much as a "how do you do?"

WOMAN 1: Too much on his mind, I suppose.

WOMAN 2: *(As they exit.)* Oh, I wouldn't like that, would you, Cecily?

WOMAN 1: Oh, no indeed! I've got enough to worry about as it is
(Lights fade to Blackout)

Act I. Scene iii

Lights rise on Baker Street apartment shared by consulting detective SHERLOCK HOLMES and WATSON, who enters angrily. and paces. A clock on the fireplace mantel tolls seven; WATSON consults his pocketwatch, comparing it to the clock, then goes back to the table, lifts the lid on HOLMES' plate and prepares to spar some of the food as MRS. HUDSON enters.

MRS. HUDSON: Drop it, Doctor!

WATSON: *(Dropping fork and lid with a clatter.)* Dash it!

MRS. HUDSON: For shame! You know that's for Mr. Holmes!

WATSON: Yes, and I say double-dash to that!

MRS. HUDSON: Yes, Mr. Holmes is s bit tardy, isn't he.

WATSON: "A bit?!" Rather! Over an hour, Mrs. Hudson -- well over!

MRS. HUDSON: *(Lifting the lid on second plate.)* I expect his supper's stone cold.

WATSON: As it should be!

MRS. HUDSON: I'll take it down to the kitchen and warm it up.

WATSON: Don't bother.

Mrs. Hudson: *(Starting off with plate.)* No bother at all.

WATSON: *(Grabbing the plate and setting it down.)* Yes, Mrs. Hudson; I tell you it is a very great bother indeed! *(WATSON notices her amazement and attempts a recovery.)* Ahem.. .as you well know, Mrs. Hudson, Holmes and I have tickets to the theatre this evening; therefore, if, indeed, Holmes returns within the next, let us say, five minutes, he'd have precious little time to change into suitable attire, let alone eat his supper. You see?

MRS. HUDSON: *(A knowing look.)* Yes. Doctor Watson. I see. And if he should not return in time?

WATSON: Mrs. Hudson?

MRS. HUDSON: As my esteemed lodgers, the both of you are entitled to one breakfast meal in the morning and one suitable supper at night. Such are the terms of our agreement, Doctor. As to the terms of your agreement with Mr. Holmes, well that is none of my concern.

WATSON: But, dash it, Mrs. Hudson, I spent half the afternoon waiting in line for these blasted theatre tickets! It's opening night – the Imperial -- Lilly Langtry, Mrs. Hudson! The Prince himself will most certainly be there!

MRS. HUDSON: Well, good for you -- and Lilly Langtry and His Royal Highness and all the other London society figures who will applaud the momentous rising of tonight's curtain. But I ask you. Doctor, am I to punish Mr. Holmes' with a cold supper on account of some silly play? No, sir -- I'm afraid whatever ill will you may now feel toward Mr. Holmes has nothing to do with me.

HOLMES: On the contrary, Mrs. Hudson -- it may have much to do with you.

WATSON: HOLMES!! (*Entering; carrying carpetbag.*)

HOLMES: (*Removing his cloak.*) I presume by your formal attire that you are indeed successful in securing tickets to tonight's gala performance. Congratulations. I sincerely hope you won't be disappointed. As for you, Mrs. Hudson, I'd suggest you get dressed.

MRS. HUDSON: Pardon?

HOLMES: The Doctor is in need of an escort.

MRS. HUDSON: Me?

WATSON: Her?! Holmes!

HOLMES: Quickly, Mrs. Hudson -- I've kept my cab waiting outside.

WATSON: But ...

MRS. HUDSON: But I don't know if I can. Opening night at the Imperial -- Lilly Laagtry and all...why, I haven't been to the theatre in ages ... I'll look a fright. My gown is so out-of-fashion ...

HOLMES: Nonsense, dear lady! You'll look charming as ever. Come, come, Mrs. Hudson -- one of the virtues in attending the theatre is that the audience sits in the dark. I shouldn't think anyone will notice.

MRS. HUDSON: True, but ...

HOLMES: Please do accompany the good Doctor, Mrs. Hudson? As a personal favor to me?

MRS. HUDSON: Well, if you put it like that... Oh, may I ask the nature of this entertainment?

HOLMES: It is a Christmas panto. "The Sleeping Beauty."

MRS. HUDSON: A panto?! Well why didn't you say SO in the first place? *(She exits.)*

HOLMES: *(A call after her.)* You have only ten minutes. Mrs. Hudson! *(He goes to window, looks for a moment, signals, then goes to table. WATSON steps forward to admonish him.)*

WATSON: Mister Sherlock Holmes. . . !

HOLMES: *(At the table.)* Watson, you scoundrel!

WATSON: Me?! What have I done?

HOLMES: For shame! You intended to eat my meal, hadn't you?

WATSON: Well ... I... But

HOLMES: Don't try to deny it -- the evidence is plain.

WATSON: What evidence?

HOLMES: The sauce, Watson! The sauce I dived over this ... (*Waving his hand over the plate and sniffing.*) ... chilly chop has been poked by the tines of a fork. And here, your fork, retired from duty, still boasts some droplets of the incriminating gravy -- strange, that: you always clean your plate and utensils utterly, Watson. Furthermore, from the position of the fork, it has obviously been dropped. So, our dear Mrs. Hudson caught you in the act, did she? Come, Doctor -- confess. As you see, the evidence is blatantly apparent.

WATSON: Alright, I'm sorry, aren't I? You were lab, Holmes. I was upset, and... (*He stops himself, noticing HOLMES smile.*) Hold on! Why on earth am I apologizing to you? Dash it, Holmes -- it's you who owe the apologies! You disappear this afternoon without SO much as a note or award to Mrs. Hudson as to your whereabouts after I spend considerable the and expense securing tickets to a play you, yourself, said you were eager to see, only to be told (not consulted, mind you) -- told that I'm escorting our own landlady to one of the premier social events of the London season!

HOLMES: You are displeased.

WATSON: My, you are a keen detective.

HOLMES: But that's just it. Watson. I cannot now or any other time apologize for my profession.

WATSON: It isn't your profession that prompts me to protest -- it's your blasted behaviour!

HOLMES: Ah! I stand corrected. I apologize.

WATSON: Good. That's all I wanted to hear.

HOLMES: No more?

WATSON: No more.

HOLMES: Watson, you disappoint me!

WATSON: What have I done now?

HOLMES: You haven't asked me where I've been!

WATSON: Oh, no. Sherlock Holmes, don't you dare tell me ...

HOLMES: Afraid so, old chap. I've happened upon an adventure.

WATSON: Without me?!

HOLMES: It couldn't wait.

WATSON: Where?

HOLMES: Matilda Briggs.

WATSON: A lady without me?!

HOLMES: No, Watson -- not a lady.

WATSON: Who, then?

HOLMES: *(Nodding toward the carpetbag.)* Why don't you tell me?

WATSON: Oh -- you've brought home some evidence! *(He goes to open it.)*

HOLMES: *(Freezing WATSON in his tracks.)* Ah-ah: Look. Smell. Listen. Only then -- perhaps -- if you're deserving -- may you touch.

WATSON: *(A grumble, to himself.)* As though I were a schoolboy.

HOLMES: But Watson, that's just it! Be a boy! Regard that carpetbag with all its innate novelty and mystery, using the wide, open eyes and keen imagination of a child. Only then will you see without prejudice and discover the tale it has to tell. Come Watson, what do you see?

WATSON: Oh, Holmes, please -- I'm hardly in the mood just now for parlour games.

HOLMES: "Parlour games," sir?! After nearly three years as my colleague and bosom companion, am I now to understand that you, Doctor John Watson, qualify the very foundation -- nay, the soul! -- of my art, my science, as possessing no greater import than an evening at charades?

WATSON: No, Holmes -- of course not. Forgive me. What I meant was, there really isn't time --...the play ...

HOLMES: You have five minutes: more than enough time.

WATSON: Very well ... (*WATSON steps toward the carpetbag as HOLMES sits down to dine. He recites the method.*) Look. Smell. Listen.

HOLMES: That's right.

WATSON: (*After a moment.*) Dash it, Holmes; my mind's a muddle.

HOLMES: Shall I give you a clue -- to get you going?

WATSON: I'd be much obliged.

HOLMES: That carpetbag ...

WATSON: Yes?

HOLMES: ... isn't mine.

WATSON: Well, I could have told you as much! I never thought it was yours.

HOLMES: Oh? Why not?

WATSON: Because I've never seen it before.

HOLMES: What does it matter what you've seen before? You'd best prepare to see many a new thing -- and many a thing anew, old chap -- that is, assuming you'll accompany me on this adventure.

WATSON: Of course I'll accompany you -- if you'll have me. But, why should you want to, I wonder. Heaven knows, I haven't the least fraction of your skill at deduction.

HOLMES: No. Few do.

WATSON: And never will.

HOLMES: That remains to be seen. Continue.

WATSON: It's rather the worse for wear, just now. Strange -- reminds me a bit of my army days in Afghanistan. Because of the fabric. The dyes.

HOLMES: Good.

WATSON: Though just a bit. I'd venture to say it's of r more d h a t origin. See the leaf pattern? Definitely Asian -- tropical. That's about all -- aside from the fact it appears to be quite soggy.

HOLMES: And how soggy?

WATSON: Neither rain nor snow today. The river? Matilda Briggs is a ship, isn't she?

HOLMES: Excellent.

WATSON: From the Asian Pacific.

HOLMES: The island of Sumatra, to be precise.

WATSON: You deduced that from the carpetbag?

HOLMES: I might have, but no, my dew fellow, I gained that information from other sources.

WATSON: Then I am at a woeful disadvantage.

HOLMES: I never said you weren't. Now smell.

WATSON: (*A grumble; a sniff.*) Oh, my word! Most unpleasant.

HOLMES: Like what?

WATSON: I'd rather not say.

HOLMES: Shall I say it for you? Sewage, perhaps?

WATSON: Precisely.

HOLMES: Take the two and make them add up to one.

WATSON: The odour comes from within! You've got a living creature in there!

HOLMES: I have.

WATSON: Well, good heavens, man -- release it.! It will surely suffocate, if it hasn't already.

HOLMES: I rather doubt it. (*A squeak.*) Aha! Proof positive! It's quite dive. (*Another squeak.*)

WATSON: A rodent. Unmistakably.

HOLMES: Quite right.

WATSON: An aquatic species.

HOLMES: Bravo. Brilliant exercise, Watson.

WATSON: May I take a look now, Professor?

HOLMES: You may... (*MRS. HUDSON appears in the doorway.*) . . . not ! Watson! (*Guiding WATSON away from carpetbag toward MRS. HUDSON.*) Not a woman in all of London more lovely than our Mrs. Hudson; wouldn't you agree, Watson?

MRS. HUDSON: Oh, Mr. Holmes!

HOLMES: (*Thrusting cloak and hat on WATSON.*) And not a moment too soon. Your cab awaits -- curtain in ten minutes -- have a splendid time -- my regards to society -- I'll keep a lamp burning ... (*WATSON and MRS. HUDSON are out; HOLMES closes the door, goes to the window, waves to WATSON and MRS. HUDSON.*) Goodbye! (*He turns in the opposite direction and*

signals, then goes to the carpetbag, opens it slightly, then looks about for gloves.) Gloves ... canvas gloves ... *(HOLMES steps into his bedroom and returns, putting on heavy gloves, heading toward the carpetbag. A knock at the door.)* Come in, Wiggins. *(Door opens.)* You brought the coffee?

LESTRADE: *(Entering.)* Coffee, Mr. Sherlock Holmes? Thank you; I'd be delighted.

HOLMES: *(Turning; quickly removing the gloves.)* Inspector Lestrade of Scotland Yard! What a surprise! And what brings you to Baker Street on this fine December evening?

LESTRADE: The fact that you, Mr. Holmes, were sighted at Victoria Docks this foul December afternoon.

HOLMES: *(Walking toward the window.)* "Foul," you say? *(Again, a signal.)*

LESTRADE: I do. Foul play.

HOLMES: Really?

LESTRADE: Don't play dumb with me, Sherlock Holmes; you how as well as I that the cargo ship Matilda Briggs is the scene of some horrendous criminal action.

HOLMES: I make it a practice not to jump to conclusions, Inspector. Crimes generally require evidence. I how next-to-nothing about that ship of which you speak.

LESTRADE: Very well; let's speak of something you do know. Theft is a crime, is it not?

HOLMES: Of course.

LESTRADE: Refusal to cooperate with the police is an offence as well, is it not?

HOLMES: In some cases.

LESTRADE: Well?

HOLMES: Sir?

LESTRADE: Are you going to talk or not?

HOLMES: What would you have me say?

LESTRADE: Fine. You're under arrest, Sherlock Holmes.

HOLMES: Under what charge?

LESTRADE: Theft.

HOLMES: Of what?

LESTRADE: That carpetbag. *(He steps forward to take it.)*

HOLMES: *(Blocking LESTRADE'S way .)* Oh. This. In point of fact, Inspector, I did not steal it.

LESTRADE: Constable Roberts insists you did.

HOLMES: I'll forgive the constable for his mistake. You see -- it was a boy who borrowed this carpetbag from the ship, not I.

LESTRADE: No matter. Possession of stolen goods -- particularly when known to be stolen -- is undeniably a criminal offence.

HOLMES: "Offence?! Offence, sir?!" I am offended at your insinuations and your methods of interrogation. In future. I suggest you make a thorough investigation of the circumstances before you make your next arrest. *(He pulls a letter from his shirt pocket and hands it to LESTRADE .)*

LESTRADE: *(Reading.)* Morrison, Morrison & Dodd ...

HOLMES: Attorneys for Sebastian & Sons. *(LESTRADE looks puzzled.)* Tea brokers. *(Still puzzled.)* Who had, in their employ, The Matilda Briggs and, as you can see by the letter, hired me as well.

LESTRADE: What for?

HOLMES: Not to jump to conclusions.

LESTRADE: *(After a stony pause.)* Be that as it may, I believe I'll still have a look at this carpetbag.... *(He lunges at the bag; HOLMES intervenes. The bag, however, opens in the scuffle and the contents within, at HOLMES' cry of pain and quick closing of the bag, evidently bites him.)*

HOLMES: No! You idiot! Look what you've done! I've been bitten!

LESTRADE: How was I to know you had a dog in there?

HOLMES: A dog?

LESTRADE: By the size of it, I'd say a Scottish terrier. *(HOLMES laughs.)* A Yorkshire terrier?

HOLMES: Guess again.

LESTRADE: Guess nothing -- I'll have another look ...

HOLMES: No, Inspector! No! I'll tell you. It's a rat.

LESTRADE: A rat that big? Impossible! A musk rat, maybe.

HOLMES: Or maybe not. Inspector, thanks to you, I have been bitten by a somewhat rare creature known as rhizomys sumatrensis.

LESTRADE: "Rhizomys suma-what-sis?"

HOLMES: "Sumatrensis", sir. Commonly called, by common people. . .
"The Giant Rat of Sumatra.* *(Lights fade to Blackout.)*