

THE GREAT CASES OF SHERLOCK HOLMES

By Jon Jory

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ISBN: 978-1-61588-442-1

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THE GREAT CASES OF SHERLOCK HOLMES*Adapted from the Stories of Arthur Conan Doyle***By Jon Jory**

SYNOPSIS: A glimpse into the life of the great Sherlock Holmes through his friend Dr. Watson. Dr. Watson takes the audience through three short cases. Deception, poison, and a wild curiosity of life anchor these works together and provides the audience with a deeper understanding of this great detective.

CAST OF CHARACTERS*(5-6 females, 1 male, 3 either)*

SHERLOCK HOLMES (m/f)	(114 lines)
DR. WATSON (m/f)	(67 lines)
MISS SUTHERLAND (f)	(20 lines)
MR. WINDIBANK (m)	(7 lines)
MRS. HUDSON (f)	(3 lines)
INSPECTOR MORTON (m/f)	(5 lines)
MADAME CULVERTON (f)	(21 lines)
MRS. MERRILOW (f)	(10 lines)
MRS. RONDO (f)	(19 lines)
MAID (f)	Mrs. Culverton's Maid. (4 lines)

AUTHOR'S NOTE

Out of the company of nine, I would hope that in the second playlet, Holmes would be played by the woman who played Mrs. Hudson in the first. In the third playlet we would see Holmes played by the man who played the first Watson. Also in the third, Watson would be played by the woman who played Miss Sutherland to advance the cause of genderless casting. However, if wished, this suggestion does not have to be followed.

SCENE 1

SETTING: *The stage has two platforms and the stage floor as playing areas. Level one: stage floor. Level two: a platform eight inches higher. Level three: eight inches higher than level two. This provides easy access among the three. On level three we have Sherlock Holmes's office on Baker Street with a small desk and three chairs. The other levels are empty.*

AT START: *HOLMES is seated in his Baker Street office reading a paper. WATSON is on level one.*

WATSON: *(Addresses the audience directly.)* I am John H. Watson. I took my medical degree at the University of London in 1878 and became an army surgeon. Having been wounded in Afghanistan I left the service, returned to London and in looking for a flat met Mr. Sherlock Holmes, detective. As we had little money between us we rented rooms together in Baker Street from a kind landlady, Mrs. Hudson. When I first met Holmes his first words were, "You have been in Afghanistan, I presume." It was the first of many astonishing deductions I have seen Holmes make. Recognizing the man's genius I have spent thirty years annotating Holmes's cases, believing they must have a public life. Holmes, remarkably, knows nothing of literature, philosophy, or politics, but everything of chemistry, anatomy, and boxing. His brilliance in observation and deduction is entirely unmatched in our generation. Of this, I would hope to convince you.

The light comes up on HOLMES. WATSON moves up to him.

WATSON: So, Holmes, have you anything of interest by way of a case?

HOLMES: *(Looking out an imaginary window.)* Not at the moment, Watson, but I believe one is arriving.

WATSON: And how, pray tell, do you know it is of interest?

HOLMES: One has a sense of the thing, Watson. But here she comes in person to resolve our doubts.

MISS SUTHERLAND: (*At the edge of the Baker Street level.*) May I come in?

HOLMES: By all means, madam, pray have a chair.

MISS SUTHERLAND sits.

HOLMES: Do you not find that, being short sighted, it is trying to do so much typewriting?

MISS SUTHERLAND: (*Vastly surprised.*) How could you know all that?

HOLMES: It is my business to know things.

MISS SUTHERLAND: Yes. Yes, of course. A friend, whose husband you found when he was given up for dead, suggested you. I'm not rich, but have a hundred a year and a bit more I make from the typewriting. I would give all I have to know what has become of Mr. Hosmer Angel.

HOLMES: You have come in a hurry.

MISS SUTHERLAND: I did bang out of the house. My father, Mr. Windibank, would not go to the police, nor to you. It made me mad and I hurried out.

HOLMES: Your stepfather surely, with a different name.

MISS SUTHERLAND: And only five years older than myself. My father had a plumbing business but he passed and when Mr. Windibank came he saw it sold for four thousand pounds. Father would have got much more for it. My hundred a year was left to me by my Uncle Ned who struck out for New Zealand. As I can get along for far less than a hundred, I let stepfather and my mother have use of it. Mr. Windibank gives me an allowance from it.

HOLMES: This gentleman is Dr. Watson, my collaborator, you may speak freely. Now, who is Hosmer Angel?

MISS SUTHERLAND: I met him first at the Gasfitters Ball. Mr. Windibank did not wish me to go there, or anywhere, but I was set on it and denied him. Mr. Windibank had to go on business to France and thus I went in his absence.

HOLMES: Was Windibank angry when he returned?

MISS SUTHERLAND: Surprisingly not. He said I would always have my way. I met Hosmer that night and he came to the house the next day. Then Windibank returned and Hosmer came no more.

HOLMES: And despite the rebuff, you saw Hosmer again?

MISS SUTHERLAND: We walked out when possible.

HOLMES: Did you become engaged to the gentleman?

MISS SUTHERLAND: Oh yes, after our first walk. We were quite struck. Hosmer was a cashier in an office in Leadenhall Street.

HOLMES: What office?

MISS SUTHERLAND: I don't know.

HOLMES: Where did he live?

MISS SUTHERLAND: He slept on the premises.

HOLMES: Where did you address your letters?

MISS SUTHERLAND: To the Leadenhall post office, to be left 'til called for. He said the clerks at his office would make fun of him if I sent them there.

HOLMES: What other things do you recall of Mr. Angel?

MISS SUTHERLAND: Very shy. He preferred to walk in the evening for he said he hated to be conspicuous. He'd had swollen glands as a child which left him with a whispering style of speech. Always well dressed and a gentleman, but his eyes were weak and he wore tinted glasses against the glare. He was very fond of me, Mr. Holmes, and made me swear on the Bible that whatever happened I would always be true. My mother was fond of him and said she would make it all right with Windibank and said I should marry Hosmer. I didn't want to do anything on the sly, and as he was in France again I wrote to his French offices but the letter missed him as he came back on the very morning of the wedding.

HOLMES: Was it to be in church?

MISS SUTHERLAND: Yes, but very quietly. Hosmer came for mother and myself in a carriage but followed in another as we were cramped. We arrived at the church but Hosmer never came. That was last Friday and I have heard nothing since. I can only imagine some unforeseen catastrophe.

HOLMES: And your stepfather? Did you tell him?

MISS SUTHERLAND: He was very kind and said he was sure I would hear from Hosmer again. He said, why would Hosmer bring me to church? He said if he had borrowed money from me or tried to get my money settled on him, it might be suspicious, but neither was the case so there was sure to be more to our story. Oh, it drives me half-mad to think of it!

HOLMES: Do not despair. I will look into it and I promise a definite result.

MISS SUTHERLAND: Do you think I will see him again?

HOLMES: I fear not, Miss Sutherland.

MISS SUTHERLAND: Then what has happened to him?

HOLMES: We shall know quickly. Have you letters from Mr. Angel?

MISS SUTHERLAND: (*Taking them out.*) I have brought you four. My address is on the piece of paper.

HOLMES: Where is your father's place of business?

MISS SUTHERLAND: He travels for the wine merchants, Westhouse and Marbank.

HOLMES: Try not to think of Mr. Angel. Let the whole incident be a sealed book and do not allow it to affect your life.

MISS SUTHERLAND: That I cannot do, Mr. Holmes. I shall be true to Hosmer. He shall find me ready when he comes back. I put all my faith in you, Mr. Holmes. (*Exits.*)

HOLMES: The lady was most instructive.

WATSON: In what way I cannot imagine and could not see.

HOLMES: Perhaps you did not know where to look, Watson. Always look at the hands. A double line above her wrist where the typewriter presses against the table. Then her face; observing the slight indentation on either side of her nose made by glasses. I ventured a remark about short sight and typewriting if you remember. Then her boots which looked the same but were mismatched. One was laced only two out of five and the other the first, third, and fifth showing she came away in a hurry. All this is amusing, though rather elementary. As to the letters, no clue in them. There is one remarkable point though, the signature is typed.

WATSON: (*Looking.*) So it is.

HOLMES: The point is, I think, conclusive.

WATSON: Of what?

HOLMES: We shall see. I shall write two letters. One to a firm in the city, the other to this Windibank asking him to meet us here tomorrow evening at six.

Blackout. Lights immediately back on.

WATSON: So, almost time for Windibank, have you solved it?

HOLMES: There was never any mystery. There is only the drawback that there is no law that can touch the scoundrel.

The bell rings.

HOLMES: The girl's stepfather, Mr. James Windibank. Timely.

MR. WINDIBANK enters.

HOLMES: Good evening, Mr. Windibank. This typed letter from you says six o'clock and six o'clock it is.

MR. WINDIBANK: Good evening. I am sorry that Miss Sutherland has troubled you for I am of the opinion that it is better not to wash linen of this sort in public. She is a very excitable and impulsive girl but I respect her doing what she thinks necessary. I fear it is a useless expense for how would we find this Hosmer Angel?

HOLMES: On the contrary, I have no doubt I will succeed.

MR. WINDIBANK: I am delighted to hear it.

HOLMES: It is a curious thing that a typewriter has as much individuality as handwriting does. No two of them write exactly alike. Some letters, for instance are more worn than others. In your note accepting our meeting, see there is slight slurring on the "E" and a defect in the tail of the "T". There are fourteen other characteristics, but those are less obvious.

MR. WINDIBANK: I use the machine at my office, no doubt it is a little worn.

HOLMES: I have here four letters from the missing man with the exact characteristics of your office machine.

MR. WINDIBANK: (*Leaping up.*) I cannot waste time over this fantastic talk. If you can catch the man, catch him, and let me know when you have done it.

HOLMES: I have caught him.

MR. WINDIBANK: What?! Where?

HOLMES: (*Suavely.*) Oh, it won't do – really it won't. There is no possible getting out of it, Mr. Windibank. Sit down, and let us talk it over.

MR. WINDIBANK: It... it is not actionable.

HOLMES: I am very much afraid that it is not, but it is cruel and selfish and heartless. A man marries a woman very much older for her money. He imagined the daughter would not stay unmarried long so he would lose a hundred pounds a year. He tries to keep her at home but she insists on going to a certain ball. He disguises himself with tinted glasses, whiskers and a mustache and speaks in a whisper. He depends on the daughter's short sight and keeps off other lovers by making love himself.

MR. WINDIBANK: It was only a joke, we never thought she would be so carried away.

HOLMES: Then a cruel joke, sir. You came upon the idea of the "vow of fidelity" so she would not be tempted by another man. However, it could not be kept up beyond the church door so he conveniently disappeared. The law as you say cannot touch you, but I can.... (*Picks up a carriage whip.*) I think I shall treat you to a good beating!

MR. WINDIBANK flees out the door and exits.

HOLMES: There's a cold-blooded scoundrel. He will go from crime to crime until he ends on the gallows. (*Puts the whip back.*)

WATSON: But how...

HOLMES: He would be the only person who profited. The men were never seen together. The spectacles, the curious voice, the whiskers and the typewriter slammed the door. For verification I went to his firm's offices and they said he never traveled for the firm. Done.

WATSON: And Miss Sutherland?

HOLMES: In a week or so, when she is calmer, I will tell her. She will clearly see that she must leave that house and go on about her life. I believe her to be fully strong enough to do so. Tea, Watson! We must have a cup of tea.

Blackout. Lights immediately back up on WATSON on level 1 speaking to the audience. Behind him a bed and chair are placed on level two. HOLMES, during WATSON'S speech moves down to the bed and lies on it.

WATSON: My life is an orderly one, arranged, I think, to keep surprise and the unusual—the undreamed of—at a safe distance. My love for my wife is, of course, its centerpiece. There is, I think, in me a hidden desire for the unpredictable, even the dangerous and this, beyond doubt, my relationship to Holmes provided in multiples. Rather than a little talk about it, allow me to show you.

WATSON races up to level three, Baker Street, where he meets an alarmed MRS. HUDSON, the landlady.

WATSON: I have come as soon as I could, Mrs. Hudson. Your news is very disturbing.

MRS. HUDSON: I knew not where to turn, Dr. Watson. As Mr. Holmes's landlady I often hear him on the stairs but hearing nothing for several days, I came up to have a look. He's dying, Dr. Watson. For three days he has been sinking and I doubt he will last a day. He would not let me get a doctor.

Lights up on level two. HOLMES lies motionless in a bed.

MRS. HUDSON: Saying I would disregard him he replied, "Let it be Watson then."

WATSON: I have heard nothing of this illness.

MRS. HUDSON: There is little I can tell you, sir. He has been working down by the river and has brought this illness back with him. He took to his bed Wednesday and neither food nor drink has passed his lips. He is not long for the world, sir, as you will see when you set eyes on him. Come quickly, sir.

They move down to level two where HOLMES is in bed.

WATSON: Sherlock, what has happened?

HOLMES: (*Feebly.*) Well, Watson, we seem to have fallen on evil days.

WATSON: My dear fellow!

HOLMES: Stand back! Stand back!

WATSON: But why? I only wish to help.

HOLMES: You will help best by doing what you are told.

WATSON: Certainly, Holmes.

HOLMES: It is for your own sake, Watson. I know my disease. It is an East Indian fever and I have been working with watermen from that place. It is infallibly deadly and horribly contagious. Contagious by touch. Keep your distance.

WATSON: But...

HOLMES: If you will stand there I will talk. If not, you must leave the room.

WATSON: Whether you like it or not. I will examine and treat you.

HOLMES: You are only a general practitioner, Watson, with limited experience and mediocre qualifications. It is painful to say so but you leave me no choice.

WATSON: Such a remark is unworthy of you, Holmes. I will not stand here and let you die.

HOLMES: You can do nothing.

WATSON: Possibly not. But I know that Doctor Ainstree, a great authority on tropical diseases, is new in London. I will go and...

HOLMES leaps from his bed and locks the door. He then staggers back to his bed.

HOLMES: You won't take the key from me by force. I've got you, my friend.

WATSON: So I have no choice?

HOLMES: None in the world, Watson. Now, I wish medical help, not from your suggestion but from one I choose. Light the gas, Watson, but no more than half on. Now place some letters and papers on the table within my reach. There are sugar tongs there. With them place that small ivory box within my reach. Good! You can now go and fetch Madame Culverton of 13 Lower Burke Street.

WATSON: I have not heard the name.

HOLMES: She is the one person on earth who is best versed in this disease. She is not a medical doctor but has run for many years the largest tea plantation in Sumatra, and who has studied the disease among her workers for many years with far reaching consequences. I cannot doubt she could help me. Convey to her I am a dying man. There is no good feeling between us. I had suspicions involving her nephew in foul play. He was imprisoned and she has a grudge against me. Beg her. Only she can save me.

WATSON: I will bring her if I have to carry her.

HOLMES: Persuade her. Put her in a cab. Make any excuse so as not to come with her. You will not fail me, you never have. I – I must rest. Bring her Watson. I beg of you.

The lights change. WATSON comes to the front of the stage and talks to us.

WATSON: I left him babbling to himself.

INSPECTOR MORTON enters behind WATSON.

INSPECTOR MORTON: How is Mr. Holmes, sir?

WATSON: Who asks me?

INSPECTOR MORTON: Inspector Morton of Scotland Yard. We have often worked together.

WATSON: He is very ill.

INSPECTOR MORTON: I have heard rumors of it.

WATSON: I must leave you.

INSPECTOR MORTON: Of course.

A slight bow and he leaves. Lights change. A MAID enters.

MAID: May I ask who is calling?

WATSON: Dr. Watson on behalf of Sherlock Holmes.

MAID: This is her study hour, sir, she cannot be disturbed.

WATSON: I tell you I must see her.

MAID: You may call in the morning, sir.

WATSON: (*Brushes past her. Shouts.*) Madame Culverton!

MAID: Sir!

WATSON: Madame Culverton!

MADAME CULVERTON appears.

MADAME CULVERTON: What is the meaning of this intrusion?

WATSON: I am sorry the matter cannot be delayed, Mr. Sherlock Holmes...

MADAME CULVERTON: Have you come from Holmes?

WATSON: He is desperately ill. That is why I have come.

MADAME CULVERTON: I know him only through business dealings but I respect his talents. He is an amateur of crime as I am of disease. For him the villain, for me the microbe. Why should Mr. Holmes think I could help him in his trouble?

WATSON: Because of your knowledge of eastern diseases.

MADAME CULVERTON: I trust the matter is not so grave as you suppose. How long has he been ill?

WATSON: Three days.

MADAME CULVERTON: Is he delirious?

WATSON: At times.

MADAME CULVERTON: This sounds serious. It would be inhuman not to answer his call. I must be careful of my time but I will come with you at once.

WATSON: I must pursue another appointment.

MADAME CULVERTON: I will go alone. I have a note of his address. I will be there in an hour.

MADAME CULVERTON and WATSON exit in different directions. Lights up on HOLMES in bed. WATSON enters.

WATSON: She is coming. I have raced here ahead of her.

HOLMES: Excellent, Watson, you have done all a good friend could.

WATSON: I will leave you to see her alone.

HOLMES: Wait. I have a thought. I now ask you to conceal yourself under my bed.

WATSON: (*Astounded.*) Under your bed?!

HOLMES: You will soon see why. I hear a carriage, quickly.

WATSON: I'm really to get under your bed?

HOLMES: Hurry!

WATSON does. HOLMES coughs and breathes heavily. MADAME CULVERTON enters.

MADAME CULVERTON: I am here, Sherlock Holmes.

HOLMES: *(Coughing and whispering.)* I hardly dared hope you would come Madame Culverton.

MADAME CULVERTON: I should imagine not.

HOLMES: It is very noble of you.

MADAME CULVERTON: You recognize the symptoms?

HOLMES: Only too well.

MADAME CULVERTON: A bad lookout for you if you're right. My Victor, was a dead man on the fourth day. Strange he contracted this rare Asiatic disease here in London. And surprisingly a disease I had made such a study of. Strange coincidence, eh Holmes? Uncharitable of you to think it was murder.

HOLMES: I know you did it.

MADAME CULVERTON: But you couldn't prove it anyhow. *(A laugh.)* And now you come crawling to me.

HOLMES: *(Piteously.)* Only cure me and I'll forget it.

MADAME CULVERTON: Forget what?

HOLMES: Victor Savage's death. You just admitted your guilt. Only cure me and I'll forget it.

MADAME CULVERTON: I don't see you in the witness box, Holmes. It's another box you are destined for now. Do you know how you got this thing?

HOLMES: The river.

MADAME CULVERTON: Think again.

HOLMES: I am too ill to think.

MADAME CULVERTON: Do you remember a box that came by post? An ivory box?

HOLMES: I opened it. There was a sharp spring inside. Some joke.

MADAME CULVERTON: No joke. If you had left me alone I would not have hurt you.

HOLMES: The spring, it drew blood. The box is on my table.

MADAME CULVERTON: And it will leave the room in my coat pocket; I have killed you, Holmes, and I will sit and watch you die.

HOLMES: Will you indeed?

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