

Excerpt terms and conditions

This excerpt is available to assist you in the play selection process.

Excerpts are not intended for performance, classroom or other academic use. In any of these cases you will need to purchase playbooks via our website or by phone, fax or mail.

A short excerpt is not always indicative of the entire work, and we strongly suggest you read the whole play before planning a production or ordering a cast quantity.

Miss Holmes Returns

By

CHRISTOPHER M. WALSH

Based on characters by

SIR ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE

Dramatic Publishing Company

Woodstock, Illinois • Australia • New Zealand • South Africa

© Dramatic Publishing

*** NOTICE ***

The amateur and stock acting rights to this work are controlled exclusively by THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY, INC., without whose permission in writing no performance of it may be given. Royalty must be paid every time a play is performed whether or not it is presented for profit and whether or not admission is charged. A play is performed any time it is acted before an audience. Current royalty rates, applications and restrictions may be found at our website: www.dramaticpublishing.com, or we may be contacted by mail at: THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY, INC., 311 Washington St., Woodstock, IL 60098.

COPYRIGHT LAW GIVES THE AUTHOR OR THE AUTHOR'S AGENT THE EXCLUSIVE RIGHT TO MAKE COPIES. This law provides authors with a fair return for their creative efforts. Authors earn their living from the royalties they receive from book sales and from the performance of their work. Conscientious observance of copyright law is not only ethical, it encourages authors to continue their creative work. This work is fully protected by copyright. No alterations, deletions or substitutions may be made in the work without the prior written consent of the publisher. No part of this work may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording, videotape, film, or any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher. It may not be performed either by professionals or amateurs without payment of royalty. All rights, including, but not limited to, the professional, motion picture, radio, television, videotape, foreign language, tabloid, recitation, lecturing, publication and reading, are reserved.

For performance of any songs, music and recordings mentioned in this play that are in copyright, the permission of the copyright owners must be obtained or other songs and recordings in the public domain substituted.

©MMXXIII by
CHRISTOPHER M. WALSH

Printed in the United States of America
All Rights Reserved
(MISS HOLMES RETURNS)

ISBN: 978-1-61959-307-7

IMPORTANT BILLING AND CREDIT REQUIREMENTS

All producers of the play *must* give credit to the author of the play in all programs distributed in connection with performances of the play and in all instances in which the title of the play appears for purposes of advertising, publicizing or otherwise exploiting the play and/or a production. The name of the author *must* also appear on a separate line, on which no other name appears, immediately following the title, and *must* appear in size of type not less than fifty percent (50%) the size of the title type. Biographical information on the author, if included in the playbook, may be used in all programs. *In all programs this notice must appear:*

“Produced by special arrangement with
THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY, INC., of Woodstock, Illinois.”

Miss Holmes Returns was originally produced by the Greater Boston Stage Company in April 2022.

CAST:

SHERLOCK HOLMES Marge Dunn
DR. DOROTHY WATSONShonna Cirone
PRIYA SINGHShubhangi Kuchibhotla
JOSEPHINE BUTLER/ROBERTA Emme Shaw
OLIVE MCGANN/AGNES Lily Steven
MRS. HUDSON/MRS. WIGGINS..... Cheryl McMahon
GEOFFREY LESTRADE..... Joshua Wolf Coleman
MYCROFT HOLMES/
DOCK WORKER Alexander Platt
DANIEL BURKE/
ADAM WORTHINGTON Paul Melendy

PRODUCTION:

Director Weylin Simes
Stage Manager Shauwna Dias Grillo
Assistant Stage Managers Emily Fitzgerald,
Autumn Blazon-Brown
Set Designer Katy Monthei
Scenery ConstructionMisfit Toys Theatrical LLC
Costume DesignerDeirdre Gerrard
Lighting DesignerCorey Whittimore
Sound DesignerDavid Remedios
Properties Manager Emme Shaw
Production Manager Casey Leone Blackbird

After a workshop and extensive rewrites, the play opened in its current form at Lifeline Theatre in Chicago in September 2022.

CAST:

SHERLOCK HOLMESKatie McLean Hainsworth
DR. DOROTHY WATSON Mandy Walsh
PRIYA SINGH Vinithra Raj
JOSEPHINE BUTLERJulie Partyka
OLIVE MCGANN.....Hilary Williams
MRS. HUDSON/MRS. WIGGINS..... Annie Slivinski
GEOFFREY LESTRADE.....Linsey Falls
MYCROFT HOLMES/
DOCK WORKER Christopher Hainsworth
DANIEL BURKE/
ADAM WORTHINGTON..... Tommy Malouf
UNDERSTUDIES Areeba Ahmed,
Daniel Dauphin, Laura Fudacz,
Alex Hultman, Barry Irving,
Jean Marie Koon, Elise Soeder

PRODUCTION:

Director/Dialect Coach Elise Kauzlaric
Stage ManagerMorgan Gire
Assistant Stage Manager..... Olivia Ash
DramaturgMaren Robinson
Scenic & Properties Designer Alan Donahue
Lighting DesignerDiane D. Fairchild
Composer/Sound Designer Eric Backus
Costume Designer.....Emily McConnell
Violence Designer.....Christina Gorman
Technical Director..... Harrison Ornelas

For Mandy and Katie,
without whom the *Miss Holmes* plays would not exist.

Miss Holmes Returns

CHARACTERS

SHERLOCK HOLMES

DR. DOROTHY WATSON

PRIYA SINGH: A nurse and activist, the daughter of Indian immigrants.

JOSEPHINE BUTLER: A feminist political activist and organizer.

OLIVE MCGANN: A former prostitute, now an assistant to Josephine Butler.

MRS. HUDSON: Sherlock and Watson's disapproving landlady.

MRS. WIGGINS: A member of Sherlock's Knitting Circle.

GEOFFREY LESTRADE: A Scotland Yard inspector.

MYCROFT HOLMES: Sherlock's older brother.

DANIEL BURKE: A banker with ties to organized crime.

ADAM WORTHINGTON: A bookish teacher.

DOCK WORKER

SETTING: Various locations in and around London circa 1885.

CASTING NOTE: The following characters may be doubled:

JOSEPHINE and MRS. WIGGINS

MYCROFT and DOCK WORKER

WORTHINGTON and DANIEL

Special thanks to the following:

Kevin Alves, Elizabeth Bagby, Scottie Barsotti,
Kim Boler, Scott Cupper, Stephanie Diaz, Dan Granata,
Marsha Harman, Joshua K. Harris, Paul S. Holmquist,
Robert Kauzlaric, Priya Mohanty, Corrbette Pasko,
Michael Reyes, Sarah Scanlon, Sara Sevigny, John Taflan,
Meg Thalken, Vahishta Vafadari, Christopher Wayland and
the Lifeline Theatre artistic ensemble.

Miss Holmes Returns

ACT I

THE FIRST CRIME SCENE

(London, England. Mid-1880s.

Lights up on a posh office, late at night. A dead body lies on the floor. A bloody letter opener lies nearby.

Two women, SHERLOCK HOLMES and DR. DOROTHY WATSON, occupy the room. WATSON examines the body. SHERLOCK takes in the room. Something feels out of place, but she isn't sure what yet.

Inspector GEOFFREY LESTRADE enters.)

LESTRADE. All right. I've got my officers out canvassing the area. That should give us a few minutes. What can you tell us, Dr. Watson?

WATSON. Single stab wound to the solar plexus. Cause of death is most likely loss of blood.

LESTRADE. I don't see a whole lot of blood. Where'd it go?

WATSON. My guess is that the murder weapon severed an artery and led to massive internal bleeding. *(Pointing to the letter opener.)* I think it's safe to assume that that is the murder weapon.

LESTRADE. Letter opener. Right. But what I really want to know is why? I don't like the timing of this at all.

WATSON. Are we sure it's him, Lestrade?

LESTRADE (*takes out a notebook and reads*). Our victim: Daniel Burke, banker, son of Sir Edmund Burke. The footman says he saw what he described as a “foreign woman” entering the offices around seven o’clock, but as our victim was known to entertain female visitors after hours, he didn’t take much note of her at the time. When he saw her leave, apparently very upset and in a hurry, he decided to check on Mr. Burke. She wasn’t here long. Maybe fifteen minutes, tops. (*He puts the notebook away.*) Daniel Burke was our first real lead in months. We could be right back where we started, unless we can find out what happened here. It can’t be a coincidence that this just happens to be the one man who might have led us to you-know-who.

SHERLOCK. The Professor.

LESTRADE. Such a ridiculous name. I don’t know why people insist on calling him that.

SHERLOCK. Quiet, Inspector. Watson needs to concentrate.

WATSON. Sherlock, take a look at this.

(SHERLOCK joins WATSON to look at the body.)

WATSON (*cont’d*). You can see some fresh bruising here, on the back of his hand. And if you look right there ...

(SHERLOCK takes out a magnifying glass and looks where WATSON has indicated.)

SHERLOCK. Ah. I believe the picture is becoming clear.

LESTRADE. What have you found?

SHERLOCK. Hair. Human, certainly, and most likely female, given the length. Rather dark, and thick. Be sure to instruct your officers to collect it carefully, as it may go a long way to help us identify the victim.

LESTRADE. The murderer, you mean. The victim's lying on the floor.

(SHERLOCK moves about the room as she makes her analysis.)

SHERLOCK. There is nothing to indicate forced entry on either the door or the windows. And note the way he is dressed. Coat, waistcoat, tie in a proper knot. Our Mr. Burke was expecting his visitor. I wonder ... Watson?

WATSON. Flask in his left breast pocket. And you can smell it on him.

SHERLOCK. Dutch courage. Mr. Burke felt the need to strengthen his resolve before his meeting. This wasn't a typical romantic encounter.

LESTRADE. So what did she come here for?

SHERLOCK. The answer to that question will fill in a number of missing details. Whatever the course of the conversation, it resulted in Daniel Burke striking his victim with the back of his hand, then grabbing her by the hair and throwing her to the floor. Note the remains of a handprint just there. These scuff marks tell me she backed away as he stalked her, until she reached the desk. From there, Mr. Burke's victim grabbed the letter opener as he descended upon her. She delivered the fatal blow ... *(She stands before the desk.)* here. Note the drops of blood, just a few, on the floor. He would have stepped back in surprise, and certainly a good deal of pain, at which point ... Watson?

WATSON. At which point he made the fatal error of pulling the letter opener out of his chest. Had he left it where it was and sought immediate medical attention, he might still be alive. And I think our victim knew it, too.

SHERLOCK. Explain.

WATSON. The handkerchief. It's still neatly folded, and centered over the wound. And look how he's lying. Had he been left alone, the pain would've pulled him into a fetal position. He couldn't have managed this on his own. She kept him on his back to prevent blood loss, tried to keep pressure on the wound ... she has some experience. Our victim could be a nurse.

LESTRADE. You keep calling the killer the victim.

SHERLOCK. Inspector Lestrade, surely even you can recognize a case of self-defense when you see it.

LESTRADE. That's a bit of a leap, isn't it?

SHERLOCK. On the contrary, I find the conclusion to be elementary.

LESTRADE. "Elementary"? I don't believe that means what you think it does.

SHERLOCK. I beg your pardon? Have you not heard of Mendeleev's periodic table?

LESTRADE. Who's what table?

SHERLOCK. Watson?

WATSON. It is a list of the chemical elements in tabular arrangement, ordered by atomic weight and recurring chemical properties.

SHERLOCK. When the known elements are laid out according to this pattern, gaps appear in the table. Based on what we know of the information that caused these gaps, we can extrapolate, with a high degree of accuracy, the properties of the as-yet-undiscovered elements that will eventually fill them. It is an application of logic as elegant as it is practical. So you see, when I describe my conclusions as "elementary," I know precisely what I mean.

LESTRADE. All right then, if it's so cut and dried, where is this nurse of yours? Why did she run away? Why not call for help, or go to the police?

SHERLOCK. Because, my dear inspector, there are circumstances for which “help” and “the police” are mutually exclusive concepts.

LESTRADE. I assure you, no one is more aware of that than I am. What are the circumstances, in this case?

SHERLOCK. The description of a “foreign woman” may provide some indication, but beyond that, I have no way of knowing.

LESTRADE. All right then. My men will be back any minute. You know the drill.

SHERLOCK. The scene is yours, Inspector. I believe the victim will need to be located, for her own safety. I shall inform my Knitting Circle at once.

LESTRADE. Right. Your little army of irregulars. Just remember, this is an official case, Miss Holmes. Self-defense or not, you can’t have someone’s death on your hands without at least answering a few questions about it. Anything you find about this nurse, victim, “foreign woman,” will have to go through me.

SHERLOCK. I would expect nothing less. Good evening, Inspector. Watson?

WATSON. Ready.

SHERLOCK. Back to Baker Street.

(They exit.)

PRIYA

(The scene shifts to a dark street corner. Gaslight casts ominous shadows on the street below.)

PRIYA SINGH paces. She has just been through a harrowing ordeal and is doing her best to keep it together. A sound in the dark startles PRIYA. She ducks into the shadows.

OLIVE MCGANN enters, cautious. She carries a carpet bag, or something similar, packed with clothing and essentials.)

OLIVE. Priya? Are you there?

PRIYA. Olive?

OLIVE. It's me. I brought the things from your rooms that you asked for. Clothes and whatnot.

PRIYA. What took you so long?

OLIVE. Sorry.

(PRIYA emerges, takes the bag and looks through it. OLIVE sees something on PRIYA's sleeve.)

OLIVE *(cont'd)*. Is that blood?

PRIYA. No, it's ... don't worry about it.

OLIVE. Are you OK? What happened?

PRIYA. Please don't ask. I have to go. When you see Mrs. Butler, please tell her ... tell her ...

JOSEPHINE *(entering)*. Why don't you tell her yourself?

PRIYA. Mrs. Butler! Olive, you promised—

OLIVE. No I didn't! You needed help, Priya. Who better to ask?

JOSEPHINE. Please, Priya. Just come back with us. We can talk this out, whatever it is.

PRIYA. I can't. You shouldn't have come. I don't want you involved. It will look bad.

JOSEPHINE. You think I give a fig about what it looks like? Just talk to us, dear. Are you hurt? Do you need a doctor?

PRIYA. No. I'm all right.

OLIVE. So that blood's not yours, then?

JOSEPHINE. As much as I hate to suggest this, dear, I think we should go to the police.

PRIYA. No.

JOSEPHINE. Why not?

PRIYA. The police ... they won't help me. They won't believe me.

JOSEPHINE. Then come with me. Let me keep you safe. They wouldn't dare invade the home of a respectable vicar and his family.

OLIVE. No offense, Mrs. Butler, but your house is the first place they'll look. And you haven't exactly been making friends with the police.

PRIYA. No. It will be better for all of us if you don't know where I'm going.

JOSEPHINE. Do *you* know where you're going?

PRIYA. I just need to get out of London. If I can make it to the train station—

OLIVE. No! You don't want to do that.

PRIYA. Why not?

OLIVE. A train is a trap. Once you're moving, you can't get off. If anyone sees you, they can just send a wire and have the police waiting for you at the next station.

PRIYA. All right. I'll head toward the river, then. I know some of the Indian families who live near the docks, who might help me hide until I can find a way out of the city.

OLIVE. It's late. It's not safe to be out on unfamiliar streets. Keep your head down and keep moving.

PRIYA. Thank you, Olive. If anyone comes looking for me—

OLIVE. We haven't seen you.

PRIYA. No. Don't lie. I can't have that.

OLIVE. Well, it depends on who's asking, I suppose.

JOSEPHINE. Please, Priya. Think this through.

PRIYA. I have, Mrs. Butler. I'll be all right. I promise.

(PRIYA checks the street, then exits into the shadows.)

JOSEPHINE. I don't like this. There must be someone at Scotland Yard who can be trusted.

OLIVE. What would you tell them? The nurse who runs your clinics got scared by something and ran off? They won't do anything.

JOSEPHINE. This is unacceptable. There must be someone who can help.

OLIVE. There might be.

JOSEPHINE. Might be what?

OLIVE. Someone who can help. If we can find them.

(OLIVE starts to exit.)

JOSEPHINE. Find whom? Olive? Who are you talking about?

(They leave. JOSEPHINE hurries to keep up with OLIVE.)

CONFERENCE AT BAKER STREET

(The scene shifts to the sitting room at 221B Baker Street. A large board covered by a cloth dominates the room.)

MYCROFT HOLMES sits, waiting. SHERLOCK and WATSON enter.)

SHERLOCK. Ah, Mycroft. Early as usual.

MYCROFT. You examined the crime scene?

WATSON. And a pleasant evening to you, as well.

SHERLOCK. We did.

MYCROFT. And your assessment?

SHERLOCK. We are not quite prepared to accept your hypothesis.

MYCROFT. You believe it was a coincidence?

SHERLOCK. I “believe” nothing. But the evidence will not allow us to discount the possibility. Mr. Burke was killed by a woman, someone he knew. The scene had all the hallmarks of an act of self-defense. At worst, it might be classified as a crime of passion, but this is the furthest thing from an assassination.

MYCROFT. So a coincidence, then.

SHERLOCK. Perhaps not. A cursory examination of the crime scene is insufficient for me to entirely rule out a connection between Burke’s death and our investigation.

MYCROFT. Four years. Over four years since this experiment began, after that little adventure with the corrupt police inspector and his diabolical wife. Four years since we learned of the existence of this conspiracy. I agreed to allow you and Dr. Watson to continue with your escapades provided that your energies were directed toward unraveling this web, but after four years all you have to show for your efforts is this.

(MYCROFT removes the cloth from the board, revealing an intricate collage of newspaper clippings, maps, sketches, and a web of threads connecting all of them to an anonymous silhouette in the center, labeled “The Professor.”)

WATSON. I think it’s rather impressive, personally.

MYCROFT. The Professor. Why do they call him that? Professor of what? Is it one man, or some sort of cabal?

SHERLOCK. Why are you so certain the Professor is a man?

MYCROFT *(losing his temper)*. I am certain of nothing in this case, and I find uncertainty intolerable. We require facts and evidence, not theories and conjecture.

SHERLOCK. Calmly, dear brother. If you are right, that would confirm a number of hypotheses regarding the Professor’s organizational structure and influence. We know Daniel Burke was involved in the Professor’s financial dealings. Tonight’s events could cause a good deal of turbulence.

MYCROFT. We had him. We had Burke. A cut of the profits from every criminal act in this city funneled its way through him. We had someone who had almost certainly looked the Professor in the face, perhaps even knew his name. Then, just as we were about to close the circuit, the line was cut short. *(He reaches a decision.)* I believe this has played out as far as it can go. If the Professor is willing to eliminate his own lieutenants to protect himself from justice, then the time has come to adopt a new strategy. The risk is just too great.

SHERLOCK. Mycroft, you disappoint me. Do you honestly expect me to believe you have such a concern for our safety?

MYCROFT. I expect you, as always, to believe the evidence.

SHERLOCK. We have one last thread to follow up on. The foreign woman. I've already put the word out. Let us find her for you.

(MYCROFT considers this.)

MYCROFT. I can give you a few days. After that, I will need to reconsider our options.

SHERLOCK. Thank you, Mycroft.

(MYCROFT exits.)

WATSON. Do you really think the Professor might be a woman?

SHERLOCK. No. I just knew how much the idea would annoy Mycroft.

WATSON. Does he really think he can make us stop, after all we've done?

SHERLOCK. He runs a hidden branch of her majesty's government. I'm sure Mycroft thinks he can do anything.

WATSON. Sherlock, how bad is this, really? I thought Daniel Burke was the break we'd been searching for.

SHERLOCK. He may still be. I'm not sure. As obvious as it seems that Burke was killed to prevent him from speaking to us, there is something elusive here. This murder is either much more complicated, or much simpler, than it appears. I shall have to think on it.

WATSON. Right. I know what that means. Try not to stay up too late.

SHERLOCK. You're off to bed then?

WATSON. Eventually. I thought I might go over some revisions first. It helps me unwind.

SHERLOCK. Revisions?

WATSON. For the magazine. They want another draft of the new story soon.

SHERLOCK. Story?

WATSON. I'm too tired to play this game right now, Sherlock.

You know perfectly well that I've been writing about our work.

SHERLOCK. Oh yes. I shall have to read it some time.

WATSON. You have. You hated it. Good night, Sherlock.

SHERLOCK. Good night, Watson.

(WATSON exits. SHERLOCK sits in her chair, steeple her fingers and thinks.)

A NEW CLIENT

(The scene shifts from night to day as SHERLOCK remains motionless in her chair. As we resolve, we find MRS. HUDSON standing over SHERLOCK.)

MRS. HUDSON. Miss Sherlock. Miss Sherlock. *(She waves a hand in front of SHERLOCK's face.)* Miss Sherlock. *(She snaps her fingers.)* Miss Sherlock!

(WATSON enters, dressed for the day.)