

**SHERLOCK HOLMES
AND THE CASE OF THE
CHRISTMAS CAROL**

BY JOHN LONGENBAUGH



**DRAMATISTS
PLAY SERVICE
INC.**

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SPECIAL NOTE

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SHERLOCK HOLMES AND THE CASE OF THE CHRISTMAS CAROL
received its world premiere at the Taproot Theatre Company
(Scott Nolte, Producing Artistic Director; Karen Lund, Associate Artistic Director)
in Seattle, Washington, in November 2010.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

This play has been performed successfully with professional companies using extensive doubling of roles, and in some cases casting some of the minor roles as different genders than is indicated in the text. Additional lines of dialogue and scenes to make this possible appear in the Appendix of the play. To facilitate a production with a smaller cast, such flexible casting is encouraged.

SHERLOCK HOLMES AND THE CASE OF THE CHRISTMAS CAROL received its world premiere at the Taproot Theatre Company (Scott Nolte, Producing Artistic Director; Karen Lund, Associate Artistic Director) in Seattle, Washington, opening on November 26, 2010. It was directed by Scott Nolte; the set and sound design were by Mark Lund; the costume design was by Sara Burch Gordon; the lighting design was by Jody Briggs; the stage manger was Britney Smallwood; the dramaturg was Judy Naegli; and the dialect coach was Shanna Ridenour. The cast was as follows:

HOLMES Terry Edward Moore
 WATSON, THIRD SPIRIT, MYCROFT Stephen Grenley
 MRS. HUDSON, FIRST SPIRIT, GENERAL #1 Pam Nolte
 BECKY, TOFF'S GIRLFRIEND,
 LIEUTENANT RUSSELL Jesse Notehelfer
 MORIARTY, SECOND SPIRIT, MAN OF
 THE CITY #1, PROFESSOR Alex Robertson
 YOUNG HOLMES, ELI, WIGGINS, ALBERT Aaron Lamb
 LESTRADE, UNCLE TIM, MAN OF THE CITY #2,
 TOFF, GERMAN SOLDIER David Dorrian
 TOPPER, GARRISON, GENERAL #2 Eric Riedmann

SHERLOCK HOLMES AND THE CASE OF THE CHRISTMAS CAROL was produced at Artist's Repertory Theatre (Dámaso Rodriguez, Artistic Director; Sarah Horton, Managing Director) in Portland, Oregon, opening on November 18, 2011. It was directed by Jon Kretzu; the set design was by Jeff Seats; the costume design was by Jessica Bobillot; the lighting design was by Jeff Forbes; and the sound design was by Rodolfo Ortega. The cast was as follows:

HOLMES Michael Mendelson
 WATSON Todd Van Voris
 MRS. HUDSON Vana O'Brien
 BECKY Amy Newman
 MORIARTY Tobias Andersen
 YOUNG HOLMES Matthew Kerrigan
 LESTRADE Nathan Crosby
 OLD GARRISON Gary Powell

CHARACTERS

HOLMES
WATSON
MRS. HUDSON
BECKY
MORIARTY
YOUNG HOLMES
LESTRADE
FIRST SPIRIT
VIOLET HOLMES (voice)
WILLIAM HOLMES (voice)
MYCROFT
SECOND SPIRIT
GARRISON
UNCLE TIM
ELI
TOPPER
THIRD SPIRIT
MAN OF THE CITY #1
MAN OF THE CITY #2
WIGGINS
TOFF
TOFF'S GIRL
ALBERT
OLD GARRISON
GERMAN SOLDIER
HEAD NURSE
GENERAL
RUSSELL
THE PROFESSOR

PLACE

London, England.

TIME

Around Christmas.

SHERLOCK HOLMES AND THE CASE OF THE CHRISTMAS CAROL

The jingle of a hansom cab. The sound of London streets. Then the floating sound of a violin. Lights up on Watson.

WATSON. (*To audience.*) Moriarty was dead, to begin with. There is no doubt whatever about that. Professor James Moriarity, the “Napoleon of Crime,” was as dead as a door nail at the time of this story, though the great detective Sherlock Holmes, my dearest friend, would fault that as an unnecessary metaphor and an inappropriate way to begin a narrative founded on fact. These then are the facts: the year was 1894, the evening was Christmas Eve, and the location 221B Baker Street, the lodgings I had at one time shared with Holmes. Three years before, Moriarity, the criminal mastermind and mathematical genius known to the underworld as “The Professor,” fell while locked in mortal combat with Holmes into the destructive torrent of Reichenbach Falls in central Switzerland. At the time I, and the rest of the world, mourned Holmes, supposing him as dead as his nemesis. Ordinary Londoners who knew him only by repute wore black armbands for weeks afterward. But Holmes was not dead. My friend, a master of the deadly martial art known as baritsu, had instead flung his enemy into the dreadful cauldron of swirling foam below. He spent the next three years eluding Moriarity’s henchmen, traveling to some of the most mysterious and inaccessible parts of the globe, Tibet, Mecca, and Khartoum. Upon his return from the dead I had greeted him enthusiastically, but in the months since I had seen little of him, and my letters to him received no reply. (*Music — Carols singing “God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen.” Continuing.*) My own story begins with a Christmas carol. It was snowing in London that

Christmas Eve, with a crisp wind that was a welcome respite from the pea soup fogs we had suffered through the season. On my way home, fortified with a bag of roast chestnuts, I heard a group singing a good old-fashioned English carol, my favorite. As it happens, it is Holmes' favorite as well, particularly the verse about He "who saved us all from Satan's power when we had gone astray," because if any man's familiar with the lure of evil, it is Holmes. The song, and the season, precipitated a detour to our old lodgings at Baker Street. Mrs. Hudson, his long-suffering landlady, let me in with her key. Thank you so much, Mrs. Hudson.

MRS. HUDSON. Of course, sir.

WATSON. I could always wait downstairs ...

MRS. HUDSON. Nonsense. You are always welcome here, sir. Even if Mr. Holmes is out, he would never object to a visit from you.

WATSON. I hope not.

MRS. HUDSON. Though some of his visitors ... I have had the most awful little boys coming around here the past several days, real guttersnipes, badgering me to speak with him.

WATSON. Perhaps young Wiggins, or one of his other Baker Street Irregulars?

MRS. HUDSON. "Unsanitaries" would be a better name for them. *(She brings the gas lights up. A large laboratory table at one side is the only aspect of the room that's clean and meticulous. Next to the door, a stack of mail and papers. Watson looks at the stack.)*

WATSON. Oh. A new place for letters. And there are mine. Unopened, I see.

MRS. HUDSON. Oh dear. I'll clean up some of these. No wonder I've been short of plates in the kitchen.

WATSON. What is all of this?

MRS. HUDSON. He's been distracted, sir.

WATSON. By what?

MRS. HUDSON. His chemistry, apparently. That's all he's been working on lately.

WATSON. Some sort of forensic inquiry?

MRS. HUDSON. Whatever it is, it smells awful. Often. Or perhaps it's just this room. He has been a bear. Never letting me in for a good cleaning.

WATSON. Well, that's Holmes.

MRS. HUDSON. He's ... changed, sir. Very solitary.

WATSON. That has always been his way! He has a great distaste for society.

MRS. HUDSON. Alone in this place, pacing the floors, scarcely taking time to eat ...

WATSON. Deep thinking, I'll warrant. Must be a particularly trying case.

MRS. HUDSON. Mr. Watson, he has not been seeing any clients!

WATSON. No clients?

MRS. HUDSON. No, sir.

WATSON. That scarcely seems likely, Mrs. Hudson.

MRS. HUDSON. Not for months. He's been turning them away. He's even canceled his subscription to the *Times*!

WATSON. That doesn't sound like Holmes at all.

MRS. HUDSON. He is so very changed, sir. Very distant. More than usual, even. Slides notes and the rent under my door, and never even a moment for a chat. I saw him this afternoon as he went out, and wished him a Merry Christmas, and he said ... oh Dr. Watson.

WATSON. What did he say, Mrs. Hudson?

MRS. HUDSON. He said nothing! He walked past me without saying a single word! Now Dr. Watson, that man, who has caused me such grief, with his smells and his tempers and his late night callers, that man has never cut me more deeply than when he looked right through me this afternoon. Dr. Watson, could I have done something to anger him?

WATSON. I'm sure not, my dear Mrs. Hudson.

MRS. HUDSON. Always so polite. Always so interested in everything. And now ... he makes me feel like an imposition. In my own house.

WATSON. He has his moods.

MRS. HUDSON. I know that, sir. But I am not sure if this one will ever lift. (*Beat.*) How are things in your household, Dr. Watson?

WATSON. Oh, well enough. I have been invited to spend the holiday with my late wife's uncle and her family.

MRS. HUDSON. I am glad to hear that. I've thought of you often these last few months, sir. How have you been?

WATSON. There are good days ... and poor days. I can but thank the Almighty for the time that we had together, though it was but three brief years.

MRS. HUDSON. Mrs. Watson was such a lovely woman, and had such a great heart.

WATSON. A great heart, indeed.

MRS. HUDSON. She shone like a jewel and was positively the nicest woman I have ever met. I mourn your loss, sir.

WATSON. Thank you.

MRS. HUDSON. It's been eleven years since I lost my Robert, and I still miss him every day. Well. A spot of tea, perhaps?

WATSON. No thank you.

MRS. HUDSON. I'll leave you to await Mr. Holmes, then. Merry Christmas, sir.

WATSON. And to you as well, Mrs. Hudson. *(She exits. Watson walks about the room a bit, touching the furniture with a fond familiarity. He makes his way over to the laboratory table and sniffs at a couple of beakers. He finds the smell unpleasant. He's peering into one of the tubes when the door opens. It's Holmes, carrying a collection of small brown parcels.)*

HOLMES. I would advise against a closer examination, Doctor.

WATSON. Holmes!

HOLMES. That beaker contains ethanoic acid, as you might guess from that sour vinegar odor. Or perhaps not. Chemistry was never your strong suit.

WATSON. Sorry, old man. Didn't mean to surprise you.

HOLMES. You didn't. The faint imprint of your boot in the hall was tell-tale, despite your customary efforts to clear the mud from your heel. Well? Why are you here?

WATSON. Rather brusque greeting, old chap.

HOLMES. I'm tremendously busy today and have no time for social calls.

WATSON. What's got you so busy?

HOLMES. A series of chemical experiments. I won't waste time trying to explain them to you — quite beyond your understanding. Now that I've replenished my supplies ...

WATSON. Ah. The parcels.

HOLMES. Elementary. You had perhaps expected gifts for my nonexistent nieces and nephews?

WATSON. Holmes, your rooms are not looking their best.

HOLMES. I am an untidy housekeeper. You of all people should know that.

WATSON. Untidy, yes, but this verges on squalor.

HOLMES. I'll leave a note for Mrs. Hudson. I'll be traveling to Liverpool next week to supervise a small shipment of chemicals,

and I will be absent for two days. She can clean then.

WATSON. Holmes, your recent behavior to her ...

HOLMES. Yes?

WATSON. I understand you've been uncivil.

HOLMES. Uncivil? I've scarcely seen the woman.

WATSON. Your avoidance of her then. How do you think that makes her feel?

HOLMES. I have no idea. A woman's heart and mind are insoluble puzzles to me. That was always your department, was it not?

WATSON. Women are, after all, as human as the rest of us.

HOLMES. Oh, Doctor. You are ever capable of a compliment to the Fair Sex. No wonder you have been so popular with them. Let me see — how many times have you married?

WATSON. Twice.

HOLMES. I have such trouble keeping track. No disrespect meant towards your late wife, of course.

WATSON. (*A beat. Watson's wounded but rallies himself.*) Look here, Holmes. You are no doubt distracted with some case or another ...

HOLMES. Case? Cases, Doctor, are the distraction.

WATSON. "Distraction"?

HOLMES. Clients and their dreary and predictable complaints. Broken marriage contracts. Indiscreet letters that must be retrieved. Crimes of passion clumsily concealed. People are puzzles and problems. Nothing more.

WATSON. You don't believe that.

HOLMES. Indeed I do, Doctor. Humanity is a vast complaining collection of uninteresting dilemmas, with each person believing their quota unprecedented and unique. What was written on the walls of Pompeii is true to this day: "*Sub sole nihil novi est*": There is nothing new under the sun. Now again: Might I ask why are you here?

WATSON. A visit in honor of the season.

HOLMES. Christmas?

WATSON. Indeed.

HOLMES. An occasion chiefly celebrated by the thoughtless exchanging the unnecessary.

WATSON. I am unaware of Christmas ever doing you any harm, Holmes.

HOLMES. It wearies me. As do unexpected visitors, more often than not.

SHERLOCK HOLMES AND THE CASE OF THE CHRISTMAS CAROL

by John Longenbaugh

16M, 6W, 2 children (doubling, flexible casting)

In this ingenious meeting of two Victorian classics, Dr. Watson visits his old friend Sherlock Holmes on Christmas Eve, finding him in a dark and misanthropic mood, planning to retire from the dull work of solving crimes. But soon, Holmes is visited by the ghost of his great enemy Professor Moriarity, who warns Holmes that he is heading towards his own damnation and tells him of an upcoming visit by three spirits. During the visits that follow, we learn about Holmes' childhood and his lost love, the chaos that his early retirement has caused his friends and associates throughout London, and finally a terrifying future: Holmes sees himself, a cold creature of pure intellect, supplying weapons to the battlefields of the First World War. Waking on Christmas morning, the repentant Holmes makes amends with his friends and rededicates himself to his higher purpose.

"An enormous success ... It's a new take on an old standard. And in the spirit of the season, [it] ends with a message of hope, charity, and forgiveness."

—ArtsStage-SeattleRage.com

"Strikingly original, tightly written and thoroughly entertaining."

—SeattleActor.com

"Sherlock is desperately in need of a spiritual transformation and Longenbaugh is up to the challenge ... [a] well crafted, thought provoking play ... Longenbaugh is also able to imbed a couple of crafty mysteries within the storyline ... a heartwarming tale."

—DramaInTheHood.net

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