



## THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING SHERLOCK

by Steve Tolmie

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# CAST

Sherlock Holmes	(a detective whose business is in decline)
Doctor Watson	(loyal friend of Holmes)
Mrs Hudson	(landlady and housekeeper to the above)
Billy	(errand boy to the above)
Oscar Wilde	(playwright whose business is thriving)
Cecily Dilbeck	(secretary to Mr Wilde)
Evadne Bradley	(a detective whose star is rising)

SETTING - the sitting room of 221B Baker Street during the summer of 1895

## SCENE 1

**SITTING ROOM 221 BAKER STREET.**

***WATSON IS DOZING IN AN ARMCHAIR. SOUND EFFECT AS HOLMES ENTERS, AUDIBLY ANGRY, IN SHABBY WORKMEN'S CLOTHES. HE STOMPS ACROSS THE ROOM***

HOLMES        Damn the working classes, Watson!

WATSON        **(WAKING UP)** Oh? Oh yes. Organised labour is indeed a malignant tumour within the body of our British industry. Hullo, what's this? Workmen's clothes? **(SNIFFS UNHAPPILY)** On a case are you?

HOLMES        Of course I'm on a case! Why shouldn't I be on a case?

WATSON        Um... well...

HOLMES        Perhaps your poorly disguised surprise has its roots in the one or two mildly inconclusive investigations that I have conducted recently.

WATSON        Mildly inconclusive? Mildly incon... I wouldn't call the Blatant Bond Street Battering 'mildly inconclusive'. Lestrade wrapped that one up in half an hour while you were looking at insects squashed on the sole of a tennis shoe. I don't know how I'm going to write that one up.

HOLMES        Lestrade was lucky.

WATSON        You mean lucky he actually read the written confession which was scrunched up inside the tennis shoe?

HOLMES        You see. Pure chance.

WATSON        And was it pure chance that you failed to solve the Obvious Acton Arson Attack?

HOLMES        That was down to pure agony from my headache that day.

WATSON        Hmm. The Easy Peasy Lemon Squeezy Soho Sapphire Snatch. You didn't complain about a headache then... well, not until you got stuck.

HOLMES        Yes, yes, yes... I prostrate myself before your forensic debating skills, doctor. It is true that of my last 14 cases, across the last 18 months, only one has been brought to a successful conclusion.

WATSON        Which one was that?

HOLMES        The Peripatetic Preacher Puzzle. **(PAUSE)** Of Baker Street.

WATSON You mean young Billy punching that vicar?

HOLMES Indeed. What of it?

WATSON You told him to punch the vicar. You said his recitation of the 15<sup>th</sup> psalm was 'atonal'... My goodness, Holmes, you are in dire straits. No wonder everyone was going on about that splendid up and coming fellow... what was his name... the one who was found harpooned to a jetty in Limehouse...

HOLMES You're thinking of Herbert Simpson. Yes, people were talking him up somewhat... rum business that.

WATSON That reminds me. Whatever happened to that harpoon you used to have above the mantelpiece? Used to set off that Teutonic fire axe rather nicely

HOLMES **(EVASIVE)** That wasn't a harpoon

WATSON I'm sure that the grateful Norwegian client who gave it to you said that it was a harpoon

HOLMES It was an Arctic javelin. Donated in appreciation of my deductive skills

WATSON You were at your peak then Holmes. Anyway, there's that woman now.

HOLMES Woman?

WATSON **(RUSTLES NEWSPAPER)** In The Times today: Evadne Bradley. Burgeoning reputation, incisive mind... The epitome of a 20<sup>th</sup> Century consulting detective they say.

HOLMES Oh do they? Well there are still five years of the old century left. Three score months to regain my place at the summit... um.. **(CALCULATING FURIOUSLY)** 255 no 265 weeks... damnation. Five more years of slumming it with those bestial masses if my outlook doesn't improve. Damn them, damn them. Damn the working man's vile gin-swilling, his cloying love of ridiculous songs and plague upon his sense of humour!

WATSON His sense of humour?

HOLMES Yes, Watson. I have always recognised that a sense of humour is a worthy, if non-essential, aspect of human nature. The build-up of tension caused by the structured narration of empathetic data which can be dissipated instantly via a contradictory, and ideally unanticipated, concluding remark leads to grisly emotional release through the triggering of the laughter impulse.

I yield to no man in my acceptance of this characteristic.

WATSON Unless, perhaps, it is manifested by a working man.

HOLMES Exactly, Watson. And not just working men. Women too. And not just workers. Loafers, loungers, low-bred ne'er do wells. I have spent the whole day being laughed at by such....creatures.

WATSON But then congratulations, Holmes. To have the gift to entertain these hollow-chested, knock-kneed lumps is most singular. I confess I doubted you of all people might... Did you tell them the one about the wide mouthed frog?...

HOLMES Oh do listen, Watson. Laughing *at* me. I made no conscious attempt to induce their laughter reflex, yet, with the exception of one matchstick seller, they howled like baboons at me whenever I attempted to make their acquaintance.

WATSON But why go to such lengths in the first place? That outfit smells like a Whitechapel sewer in a heatwave.

HOLMES I was trying to gather intelligence. My case. I act for Sir Mortimer Head, the chalk magnate, whose son Arthur has disappeared. Arthur is known to have sympathies with the writings of Karl Marx, so I donned this disguise and made my way through the drinking dens of the working class.

WATSON Go on.

HOLMES I decided to pose as Arthur's long lost brother, Richard...

WATSON **(BURSTING OUT LAUGHING)** Ha ha ha!

HOLMES What? What's the matter?

WATSON Oh dear, oh dear.... **(LAUGHS MORE TO HOLMES' FURY)** Richard Head....

HOLMES Are you indicating they were laughing at my alias?

WATSON **(STILL SNIGGERING)** Most certainly...

HOLMES But why?

WATSON **(RECOVERING COMPOSURE)** Ah, well. The diminutive of Richard is ah, Dick... which is ah... to say, you act for the Head family... **(SNIGGERS)**

HOLMES Which is what? Why should that be considered humorous? Hmm. I recall that one cabbie said that I looked like a right Dick He-

WATSON **(DOOR OPENS AS MRS H ENTERS)** Mrs Hudson!

MRS H Good morning gentlemen. **(PAUSE AS SHE GETS WIND AND SIGHT OF HOLMES' OUTFIT)** I trust I find you in good humour?

HOLMES Good day Mrs Hudson. Humour is certainly relevant to our current discourse. **(PAUSE)** Mrs Hudson...

MRS H Mr Holmes?

HOLMES Mrs Hudson, I have a mystery that you might be able to help me solve

MRS H **(PUFFED UP AND PROUD)** Indeed Mr Holmes?

WATSON Er.. Holmes...

HOLMES Mrs Hudson, would you consider that your experience below stairs leaves you with a firm understanding of what passes for humour among the lower orders?

MRS H Why of course, Mr Holmes. It is unavoidable that as part of my duties I have to deal with the meanest samples of our great city's dwellers. **(BEAT)** And all those weird clients you have.

WATSON Holmes, please don't

HOLMES Calm yourself, Watson. I am merely testing a hypothesis.

WATSON Holmes, I can assure you that a woman of Mrs Hudson's breeding and deportment would not find...

HOLMES You laughed like a drain.

WATSON I was laughing at your predicament. Not the joke itself.

MRS H Oh a joke! How lovely.

HOLMES **(IGNORING HER)** Oh you were laughing at my predicament were you? Did I laugh at your predicament when John Garrideb shot you in the thigh?

WATSON That was your fault in the first place...

MRS H Is it the one about the horse that goes in to a public house?

**(DOOR OPENS, ENTER BILLY)**

BILLY Horse that goes in to a pub? That's a good one that is. Have you heard the one about the gorilla that goes in a pub?

HOLMES What the deuce are you both talking about? Any self-respecting landlord who wants to maintain trade would surely balk at...

BILLY           It's a joke, Mr Holmes

HOLMES       **(AT A LOSS)** A what?

MRS H         A rib-tickler?

HOLMES       **(NONE THE WISER)** What is going on?  
**(AWKWARD PAUSE)**

WATSON       **(CLEARS THROAT)** I believe you have something for Mr Holmes, Billy?

BILLY         Ah yes. And seeing as how we are all so jocular... **(CHANGING REGISTER TO SHOCKING COCKNEY)** I've got a shoulder for old Retirement here, aint I?

WATSON       A shoulder?

MRS H         Shoulder of ham, tele - gram!  
**(WATSON, MRS H AND BILLY DISSOLVE IN LAUGHTER)**

WATSON       Retirement?

BILLY         **(WITH W AND MRS H JOINING IN, DELIGHTED)** Retirement... Holmes!

HOLMES       What's so funny?

BILLY         Well you ought to retire, the way you've been going.

HOLMES       Just give me the message.  
**(RUSTLES PAPER AND READS MESSAGE)** Well, Watson... what do you make of the power of co-incidence?

WATSON       I confess that I rarely give it much thought.

HOLMES       Well, here's a hall-marked one and no mistake. Here we have been discussing the nature of humour and now I have in my hand a request for help from a man who is, if society talk is to be credited, one of the leading authorities on the subject - Mr Oscar Wilde.

WATSON       Good Lord, what does he say?

HOLMES       **(READS ALOUD)** Find myself at brink, you shall find me teetering. Require your advice; advise my requirements.  
**(WATSON, MRS H AND BILLY DISSOLVE IN LAUGHTER)**



What? What??

MRS H So very witty!

HOLMES Witty?

WATSON Wry, self-deprecating...

HOLMES Wry? Why?

BILLY Is there a reply, Mr Holmes?

HOLMES I'm not sure I understand the question.

WATSON Mr Holmes will be delighted to receive Mr Wilde at his earliest convenience Billy.

HOLMES Will he?

BILLY Mr Holmes, perhaps I can help you... knock, knock

HOLMES Knock knock?

BILLY No, Mr Holmes. You have to say...

MRS H That will be all thank you Billy

**(EXIT BILLY)**

MRS H Now then, Mr Holmes... There are these three nuns, you see..

WATSON Thank you Mrs Hudson!!

**(EXIT MRS H)**

HOLMES A case like this Watson, whatever it may be, could restore me to my rightful place atop my profession!

WATSON Yes, it's a good sign that Mr Wilde didn't approach that clever woman

HOLMES Evadne Bradley. Women solving crime... they'll be voting next.

WATSON **(LAUGHS)** Good one, Holmes!

HOLMES What?

WATSON Nothing.

HOLMES **(HEAVY SIGH)** I suppose you will be adding my lack of sense of humour to your list.