



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 1890s

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 15th 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 dangerously sharp Teutonic fire axe rather nicely.

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

WATSON I'm sure that the Duke of Oslo's secretary said that it was a harpoon.

HOLMES It was an Arctic javelin. Donated by the Duke 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 20th Century consulting detective they say.

HOLMES Oh do they? Well the 19th Century isn't over yet. I've still got... **(GROANS)** Who am I fooling? I'm in danger of seeing out the century 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!