

# *The Dying Detective*





## Blueprint for Reading

### BACKGROUND BYTES

Put on your thinking caps. Grab your notepad and pencil. Tuck your magnifying glass into your pocket. And turn up your brain power to full-strength. You are about to meet the one and only Sherlock Holmes! Who is Holmes? Why, he is the famous A-1 detective, super-sleuth, mastermind, and champion of justice! Mr. Holmes is a very, very famous guy—world-famous. If you’ve heard of him, here he is again. If not, it’s time you did: Sherlock Holmes is the best-known detective in literature.

Sherlock Holmes was created by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle in 1886. Doyle was an eye doctor and a literary genius. He sketched out Sherlock Holmes like this:

In height he was rather over six feet, and so excessively lean that he seemed to be considerably taller. His eyes were sharp and piercing . . . His thin, hawk-like nose gave his whole expression an air of alertness and decision.

The world of Sherlock Holmes, his ability to problem-solve, and his friendship with Dr. Watson, grew on readers. Holmes and Watson came alive, as though they were real people. They shared a home: Holmes and Watson lived at 221b Baker Street. There, Sherlock had his famous study, complete with notebook,

magnifying glass, a considerable odd-lot of varied disguises, his deerstalker cap, calabash pipe, violin, and chemistry set.

In fact, Holmes’ expertise was chemistry, and his favorite readings were the actual sensational horror stories of his century. But he was sharp at anatomy, and knew just enough about botany and geology. He knew the laws of England. He could box and fence. And he had a certain flair for being dramatic, as you will see in *The Dying Detective*. Among his many enemies were Professor Moriarty, “the Napoleon of Crime,” Colonel Moran (the second most dangerous man in London), and Charles Augustus Milverton (the worst man in London).

But for Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, who had created him, Sherlock Holmes was a character who took time away from his other writing. He tried to kill off Holmes in *The Final Solution*, but there was a public outcry. Holmes returned from the brink of death in the next novel.

Sherlock Holmes stories have been translated into more than fifty languages, and made into plays, films, a radio series, a musical comedy, a ballet, advertisements, comic books, and cartoons. By 1920, Doyle, who had grown up very poor, was one of the most highly paid writers in the world.

## INTO . . . *The Dying Detective*

To Sherlock Holmes, there was no better pastime than the dangerous game of unraveling a terrible mystery. He was a lover of his game. And there was no more thrilling moment than when he could declare with glee, “The game is afoot.”

About himself, the detective says: “Give me problems, give me work . . . I abhor the dull routine of existence.” He adds, “My mind is like a racing engine . . . It is my business to know what other people don’t know.” In any of the cases that he cracked, did he ever guess? Says Sherlock, “No, no, I *never* guess. It is a shocking habit . . .”

---

## FOCUS

### • **Mystery and Drama**

Welcome to mystery—to the scene of a crime—and to the world of detective work. Welcome to drama—to the staging of a story by actors playing parts. Will you be one of them?

When the curtain rises, there’s our hero, right in the middle of the stage, precisely where the star of the show should be. Why, it is Sherlock Holmes, acting a part in a play. Will we find out that he is also acting a part in front of Mrs. Hudson and Dr. Watson?

The point of detective stories is not what you know, but what you don’t know. It is the job of the detective to find the truth. Sherlock always acts a part until he is ready to share the solution and his deductions with the reader and Dr. Watson.

### • **Language Arts Skill**

If you wanted to write a play, would you know how to begin? Take a look at the first page of *The Dying Detective*. What do you see?

Every play has a title, a list of characters in the order that they appear, and a list of the scenes. Each scene has a heading.

The play opens with the setting described in italics within brackets. Next, the playwright gives stage directions also in italics in brackets.

Now the drama begins. Notice on page 159 that every time a new character speaks, their name is given in capital letters, followed by a period, and then their words. This is what you need to get started, if you are going to write your own play.

# The Dying Detective

*From a story by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle  
Michael and Mollie Hardwick*



## CHARACTERS, IN ORDER OF APPEARANCE

**MRS. HUDSON**

**DR. WATSON**

**SHERLOCK HOLMES**

**CULVERTON SMITH:** “A great yellow face,  
coarse-grained and greasy, with heavy

double chin, and two sullen, menacing  
gray eyes which glared at me from  
under tufted and sandy brows . . .”

**INSPECTOR MORTON:** Middle-aged,  
tough, dressed in plain clothes.

---

*Scene 1:*  
Sherlock Holmes’s  
bedroom, *afternoon*

*Scene 2:*  
The same, *dusk*

*Scene 3:*  
The same, *evening*

## Scene One

[SHERLOCK HOLMES’s bedroom at 221B Baker Street. The essential features are: a bed with a large wooden head, placed crosswise on the stage, the head a foot or two from one side wall; a small table near the bed-head, on the audience’s side, on which stand a carafe of water and a glass, and a tiny metal or ivory box; a window in the back wall, the curtains parted; and, under the window, a table or chest of drawers, on which stand a green wine bottle, some wine-glasses, a biscuit-barrel, and a lamp. Of course, there may be further lamps and any amount of furnishing and clutter: Holmes’s bedroom was adorned with pictures of celebrated criminals and littered with everything from tobacco pipes to revolver cartridges.]

[There is daylight outside the window. SHERLOCK HOLMES lies in the bed on his back, tucked up to the chin and evidently asleep. He is very pale. MRS. HUDSON enters followed by DR. WATSON, who is wearing his coat and hat and carrying his small medical bag. MRS. HUDSON pauses for a moment.]

## WORD BANK

**carafe** (kuh RAF) *n.*: a wide-mouthed container for holding liquids

**MRS. HUDSON.** He's asleep, sir.

*[They approach the bed. WATSON comes round to the audience's side and looks down at HOLMES for a moment. He shakes his head gravely, then he and MRS. HUDSON move away beyond the foot of the bed. WATSON takes off his hat and coat as they talk and she takes them from him.]*

**WATSON.** This is dreadful, Mrs. Hudson. He was perfectly hale and hearty when I went away only three days ago.

**MRS. HUDSON.** I know, sir. Oh, Dr. Watson, sir, I'm glad that you've come back. If anyone can save Mr. Holmes, I'm sure you can.

**WATSON.** I shall have to know what is the matter with him first. Mrs. Hudson, please tell me, as quickly as you can, how it all came about.

**MRS. HUDSON.** Yes, sir. Mr. Holmes has been working lately on some case down near the river—Rotherhithe, I think.

**WATSON.** Yes, yes. I know.

**MRS. HUDSON.** Well, you know what he is for coming in at all hours. I was just taking my lamp to go to my bed on



Wednesday night when I heard a faint knocking at the street door. I . . . I found Mr. Holmes there. He could hardly stand. Just muttered to me to help him up to his bed here, and he's barely spoken since.

**WATSON.** Dear me!

**MRS. HUDSON.** Won't take food or drink. Just lies there, sleeping or staring in a wild sort of way.

**WATSON.** But, goodness gracious, Mrs. Hudson, why did you not send for another doctor in my absence?

**MRS. HUDSON.** Oh, I told him straightaway I was going to do that, sir. But he got so agitated—almost shouted that he wouldn't allow any doctor on the premises. You know how masterful he is, Dr. Watson.

## WORD BANK

**agitated** (AJ uh tayt ed) *v.*: disturbed; emotional and upset

**premises** (PREM us ez) *n.*: a building and its grounds

WATSON. Indeed. But you could have telegraphed for me.

[MRS. HUDSON *appears embarrassed.*]

MRS. HUDSON. Well, sir . . .

WATSON. But you didn't. Why, Mrs. Hudson?

MRS. HUDSON. Sir, I don't like to tell you, but . . . well, Mr. Holmes said he wouldn't even have you to see him.

WATSON. What? This is monstrous! I, his oldest friend, and . . .

[HOLMES *groans and stirs slightly.*]

Ssh! He's waking! You go along, Mrs. Hudson, and leave this to me. Whether he likes it or not, I shall ensure that everything possible is done.

MRS. HUDSON. Thank you, sir. You'll ring if I can be of help.

[*She exits with WATSON'S things.* HOLMES *groans again and flings out an arm restlessly.* WATSON *comes to the audience's side of the bed and sits on it.*]

WATSON. Holmes? It's I—Watson.

HOLMES. [*Sighs*] Ahh! Well, Watson? We . . . we seem to have fallen on evil days.

WATSON. My dear fellow!

[*He moves to reach for HOLMES'S pulse.*]

HOLMES. [*Urgently*] No, no! Keep back!

WATSON. Eh?

HOLMES. Mustn't come near.

WATSON. Now, look here, Holmes . . . !

HOLMES. If you come near . . . order you out of the house.

WATSON. [*defiantly*] Hah!

HOLMES. For your own sake, Watson. Contracted . . . a disease—from Sumatra.<sup>1</sup> Very little known, except that most deadly. Contagious by touch. So . . . must keep away.

WATSON. Utter rubbish. Holmes! Mrs. Hudson tells me she helped you to your bed. There's nothing the matter with her.

HOLMES. Period of . . . incubation.<sup>2</sup> Only dangerous after two or three days. Deadly by now.

WATSON. Good heavens, do you suppose such a consideration weighs with me? Even if I weren't a doctor, d'you think it would stop me doing my duty to an old

---

1. *Sumatra* (soo MAH truh) is the largest island of Indonesia, a country comprised of a chain of islands in the Indian Ocean.

2. The *period of incubation* (in kyuh BAY shun) of an illness is the period of time between when a person first becomes infected with a disease and the time the symptoms of the disease appear.

friend? Now, let's have a good look at you. [*He moves forward again.*]

**HOLMES.** [*Harshly*] I tell you to keep back!

**WATSON.** See here, Holmes . . .

**HOLMES.** If you will stay where you are, I will talk to you. If you will not, you can get out.

**WATSON.** Holmes! [*Recovering*] Holmes, you aren't yourself. You're sick and as helpless as a child. Whether you like it or not, I'm going to examine you and treat you.

**HOLMES.** [*Sneering*] If I'm to be forced to have a doctor, let him at least be someone I've some confidence in.

**WATSON.** Oh! You . . . After all these years, Holmes, you haven't . . . confidence in me?

**HOLMES.** In your friendship, Watson—yes. But facts are facts. As a medical man you're a mere general practitioner, of limited experience and mediocre qualifications.

**WATSON.** Well . . . ! Well, really!

**HOLMES.** It is painful to say such things,

but you leave me no choice.

**WATSON.** [*Coldly*] Thank you. I'll tell you this, Holmes. Such a remark, coming from you, merely serves to tell me what state your nerves are in. Still, if you insist that you have no confidence in me, I will not intrude my services. But what I shall do is to summon Sir Jasper Meek or Penrose Fisher, or any of the other best men in London.

**HOLMES.** [*Groans*] My . . . dear Watson. You mean well. But do you suppose they—any of them—know of the Tapanuli Fever?

**WATSON.** The Tap . . . ?

**HOLMES.** What do you yourself know of the Black Formosa Corruption?

**WATSON.** Tapanuli Fever? Black Formosa Corruption? I've never heard of either of 'em.

**HOLMES.** Nor have your colleagues. There are many problems of disease, many pathological<sup>3</sup> possibilities, peculiar to the East. So I've learned during some of my recent researches. It was in the

---

3. *Pathological* (PATH uh LOJ ih kul) means caused or affected by disease.

## WORD BANK

**mediocre** (meed ee OH kur) *adj.*: average; not very good, but not too bad



course of one of them that I contracted this complaint. I assure you, Watson, you can do nothing.

WATSON. Can't I? I happen to know, Holmes, that the greatest living authority on tropical disease, Dr.

Ainstree, is in London just now.

HOLMES. [*Beseeching*] Watson!

WATSON. All remonstrance is useless. I am going this instant to fetch him. [*He gets up*]

HOLMES. [*A great cry*] No!

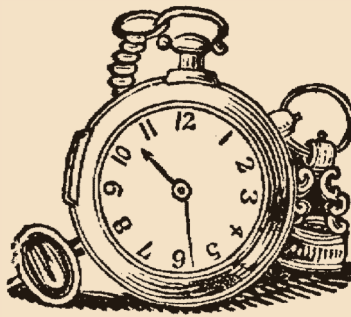
WATSON. Eh? Holmes . . . my dear fellow . . .

HOLMES. Watson, in the name of our old friendship, do as I ask.

WATSON. But . . .

HOLMES. You have only my own good at heart. Of course, I know that. You . . . you shall have your way. Only . . . give me time to . . . to collect my strength. What is the time now?

[WATSON sits again and consults his watch.]



WATSON. Four o'clock.

HOLMES. Then at six you can go.

WATSON. This is insanity!

HOLMES. Only two hours, Watson. I promise you may go then.

WATSON. Hang it, this is urgent, man!

HOLMES. I will see no one before six. I will not be examined. I shall resist!

WATSON. [*Sighing*] Oh, have it your own way, then. But I insist on staying with you in the meantime. You need an eye keeping on you, Holmes.

HOLMES. Very well, Watson. And now I must sleep. I feel exhausted. [*Drowsily*] I wonder how a battery feels when it pours electricity into a non-conductor?

WATSON. Eh?

HOLMES. [*Yawning*] At six, Watson, we resume our conversation.

[*He lies back and closes his eyes.*]

WATSON *makes as though to move, but thinks better of it. He sits still, watching*

HOLMES. *A slow black-out*]

## WORD BANK

**remonstrance** (rih MAHN struns) *n.*: objection; protest





## Scene Two

*[The stage lights up again, though more dimly than before, to disclose the same scene. Twilight is apparent through the window. HOLMES lies motionless. WATSON sits as before, though with his head sagging, half asleep. His chin drops suddenly and he wakes with a jerk. He glances around, sees the twilight outside, and consults his watch. He yawns, flexes his arms, then proceeds to glance idly about him. His attention is caught by the little box on the bedside table. Stealthily, he reaches over and picks it up.]*

**HOLMES.** *[Very loudly and urgently]* No! No, Watson, no!

**WATSON.** *[Startled]* Eh? What?

*[HOLMES starts up onto his elbow.]*

**HOLMES.** Put it down! Down this instant! Do as I say, Watson!

**WATSON.** Oh! All right, then. *[Putting the box down.]* Look here, Holmes, I really think . . .

**HOLMES.** I hate to have my things touched. You know perfectly well I do.

**WATSON.** Holmes . . . !

**HOLMES.** You fidget me beyond endurance. You, a doctor—you're enough to drive a patient into an asylum!

**WATSON.** Really!

**HOLMES.** Now, for heaven's sake, sit still, and let me have my rest.

**WATSON.** Holmes, it is almost six o'clock, and I refuse to delay another instant. *[He gets up determinedly.]*

**HOLMES.** Really? Watson, have you any change in your pocket?

**WATSON.** Yes.

**HOLMES.** Any silver?

**WATSON.** *[Fishing out his change]* A good deal.

**HOLMES.** How many half-crowns?

**WATSON.** Er, five.

**HOLMES.** *[Sighing]* Ah, too few, too few. However, such as they are, you can put them in your watch-pocket—and all the rest of your money in your left trouser-pocket. It will balance you so much better like that.

**WATSON.** Balance . . . ? Holmes, you're raving! This has gone too far . . . !

**HOLMES.** You will now light that lamp by the window, Watson, but you will be very careful that not for one instant shall it be more than at half flame.

**WATSON.** Oh, very well. *[WATSON goes to the lamp and strikes a match.]*

**HOLMES.** I implore you to be careful.

**WATSON.** [*As though humoring him*] Yes, Holmes.

[*He lights the lamp, carefully keeping the flame low. He moves to draw the curtains.*]

**HOLMES.** No, you need not draw the curtains.

[*WATSON leaves them and comes back round the bed.*]

So! Good. You may now go and fetch a specialist.

**WATSON.** Well, thank heaven for that.

**HOLMES.** His name is Mr. Culverton Smith, of 13 Lower Burke Street.

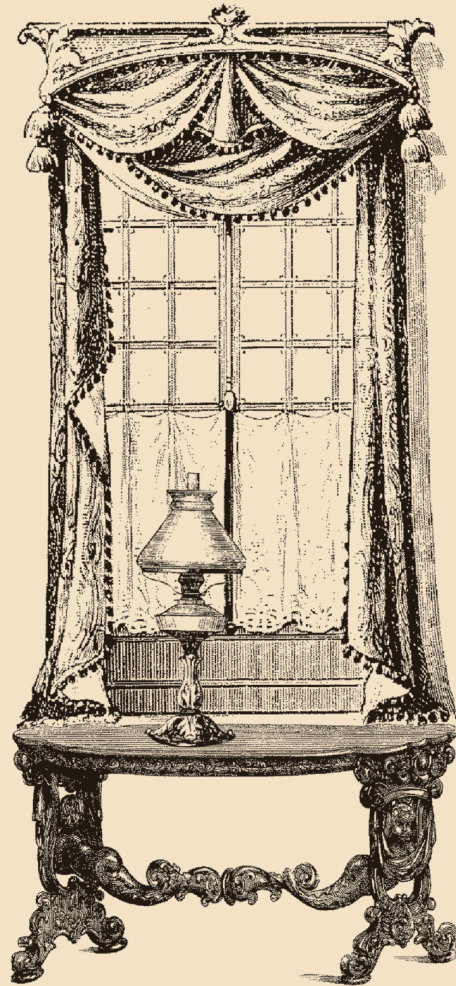
**WATSON.** [*Staring*] Eh?

**HOLMES.** Well, go on, man. You could hardly wait to fetch someone before.

**WATSON.** Yes, but . . . Culverton Smith? I've never heard the name!

**HOLMES.** Possibly not. It may surprise you to know that the one man who knows everything about this disease is not a medical man. He's a planter.

**WATSON.** A planter!



**HOLMES.** His plantation is far from medical aid. An outbreak of this disease there caused him to study it intensely.

## WORD BANK

**implore** (im PLORE) v.: beg; plead

He's a very methodical man, and I asked you not to go before six because I knew you wouldn't find him in his study till then.

WATSON. Holmes, I . . . I never heard such a . . . !

HOLMES. You will tell him exactly how you have left me. A dying man.

WATSON. No, Holmes!

HOLMES. At any rate, delirious. Yes, not dying, delirious. [*Chuckles*] No, I really can't think why the whole ocean bed isn't one solid mass of oysters.

WATSON. Oysters?

HOLMES. They're so prolific, you know.

WATSON. Great Heavens! Now, Holmes, you just lie quiet, and . . .

HOLMES. Strange how the mind controls the brain. Er, what was I saying, Watson?

WATSON. You were . . .

HOLMES. Ah, I remember. Culverton Smith. My life depends on him, Watson. But you will have to plead with him to come. There is no good feeling between us. He has . . . a grudge. I rely on you to soften him. Beg, Watson. Pray. But get

him here by any means.

WATSON. Very well. I'll bring him in a cab, if I have to carry him down to it.

HOLMES. You will do nothing of the sort. You will persuade him to come—and then return before him. [*Deliberately*] Make any excuse so as not to come with him. Don't forget that, Watson. You won't fail me. You never did fail me.

WATSON. That's all very well, Holmes, but . . .

HOLMES. [*Interrupting*] Then, shall the world be overrun by oysters? No doubt there are natural enemies which limit their increase. And yet . . . No, horrible, horrible!

WATSON. [*Grimly*] I'm going, Holmes. Say no more, I'm going!

[*He hurries out. HOLMES remains propped up for a moment, staring after WATSON, then sinks back into a sleeping posture as the stage blacks out.*]

## WORD BANK

**methodical** (muh THAHHD ih kul) *adj.*: orderly and organized

**prolific** (pruh LIF ik) *adj.*: highly productive





## Scene Three

*[The stage lights up on the same scene. HOLMES lies still. It is now quite dark outside. After a moment WATSON bustles in, pulling off his coat. He pauses to hand it to MRS. HUDSON, who is behind him.]*

**WATSON.** Thank you, Mrs. Hudson. A gentleman will be calling very shortly. Kindly show him up here immediately.

**MRS. HUDSON.** Yes, sir.

*[She exits. Watson approaches the bed.]*

**HOLMES.** *[Drowsily]* Watson?

**WATSON.** Yes, Holmes. How are you feeling?

**HOLMES.** Much the same, I fear. Is Culverton Smith coming?

**WATSON.** Should be here any minute. It took me some minutes to find a cab, and I almost expected him to have got here first.

**HOLMES.** Well done, my dear Watson.

**WATSON.** I must say, Holmes, I'm only doing this to humor you. Frankly, I didn't take to your planter friend at all.

**HOLMES.** Oh? How so?

**WATSON.** Rudeness itself. He almost showed me the door before I could give

him your message. It wasn't until I mentioned the name, Sherlock Holmes . .

**HOLMES.** Ah!

**WATSON.** Quite changed him—but I wouldn't say it was for the better.

**HOLMES.** Tell me what he said.

**WATSON.** Said you'd had some business dealings together, and that he respected your character and talents. Described you as an amateur of crime, in the way that he regards himself as an amateur of disease.

**HOLMES.** Quite typical—and surely, quite fair?

**WATSON.** Quite fair—if he hadn't put such sarcasm into saying it. No, Holmes, you said he bears you some grudge. Mark my words, as soon as he has left this house I insist upon calling a recognized specialist.

**HOLMES.** My dear Watson, you are the best of messengers. Thank you again.

**WATSON.** Not at all. Holmes, Holmes—let me help you without any of this nonsense. The whole of Great Britain will condemn me otherwise. Why, my cabmen both inquired anxiously after you; and so did Inspector Morton . . .

**HOLMES.** Morton?

**WATSON.** Of the Yard. He was passing our door just now as I came in. Seemed extremely concerned.

**HOLMES.** Scotland Yard concerned for me? How very touching! And now, Watson, you may disappear from the scene.

**WATSON.** Disappear! I shall do no such thing. I wish to be present when this Culverton Smith arrives. I wish to hear every word of this so-called medical expert's opinion.

**HOLMES.** [*Turning his head*] Yes, of course. Then I think you will just find room behind the head of the bed.

**WATSON.** What? Hide?

**HOLMES.** I have reason to suppose that his opinion will be much more frank and valuable if he imagines he is alone with me.

[*We hear the murmur of MRS. HUDSON'S and CULVERTON SMITH'S voices off-stage.*]

Listen! I hear him coming. Get behind the bed, Watson, and do not budge, whatever happens. *Whatever* happens, you understand?

**WATSON.** Oh, all right, Holmes. Anything to please you. But I don't like this. Not

at all.

[*He goes behind the bed-head and conceals himself.* MRS. HUDSON *enters*, looks round the room and then at HOLMES. SMITH *enters behind her.*]

**MRS. HUDSON.** [*To SMITH*] Oh, Dr. Watson must have let himself out. No doubt he'll be back directly, sir.

**SMITH.** No matter, my good woman.

[MRS. HUDSON *bristles at this form of address.*]

You may leave me alone with your master.

**MRS. HUDSON.** As you wish—*sir*.

[*She sweeps out.* SMITH *advances slowly to the bed and stands at the foot, staring at the reclining* HOLMES.]

**SMITH.** [*Almost to himself*] So, Holmes. It has come to this, then.

[HOLMES *stirs.* SMITH *chuckles and leans his arms on the bed-foot and his chin on them, continuing to watch* HOLMES.]

**HOLMES.** [*Weakly*] Watson? Who . . . ? Smith? Smith, is that you?

**SMITH.** [*Chuckles*]

**HOLMES.** I . . . I hardly dared hope you would come.

SMITH. I should imagine not. And yet, you see, I'm here. Coals of fire,<sup>4</sup> Holmes—coals of fire!

HOLMES. Noble of you . . .

SMITH. Yes, isn't it?

HOLMES. I appreciate your special knowledge.

SMITH. Then you're the only man in London who does. Do you know what is the matter with you?

HOLMES. The same as young Victor—your cousin.

SMITH. Ah, then you recognize the symptoms. Well, then, it's a bad look-out for you. Victor was a strong, hearty young fellow—but a dead man on the fourth day. As you said at the time, it *was* rather surprising that he should contract an out-of-the-way Asiatic disease in the heart of London—a disease of which I have made such a very special study. [*Chuckles*] And now, you, Holmes. Singular coincidence, eh? Or are you going to start making accusations once again—about cause and effect and so on?

HOLMES. I . . . I knew you caused Victor Savage's death.

[SMITH *comes round the bed.*]

SMITH. [*Snarling*] Did you? Well, proving it is a different matter, Holmes. But what sort of a game is this, then—spreading lying reports about me one moment, then crawling to me for help the next?

HOLMES. [*Gasping*] Give . . . give me water. For . . . pity's sake, Smith. Water!

[SMITH *hesitates momentarily, then goes to the table and pours a glass from the carafe.*]

SMITH. You're precious near your end, my friend, but I don't want you to go till I've had a word with you.

[*He holds out the glass to HOLMES, who struggles up feebly to take it and drinks.*]

HOLMES. [*Gulping water*] Ah! Thank . . . thank you. Please . . . do what you can for me. Only cure me, and I promise to forget.

SMITH. Forget what?

HOLMES. About Victor Savage's death. You as good as admitted just now that you had done it. I swear I will forget it.

SMITH. [*Laughs*] Forget it, remember it—

---

4. *Coals of fire* refers to a phrase in the Book of Proverbs wherein hot coals are heaped on the head of the enemy.



do as you like. I don't see you in any witness-box, Holmes. Quite another shape of box, I assure you. But you must hear first how it came about.

**HOLMES.** Working amongst Chinese sailors. Down at the docks.

**SMITH.** Proud of your brains, aren't you? Think yourself smart? Well, you've met a smarter one this time.

[*HOLMES falls back, groaning loudly.*]

Getting painful, is it?

[*HOLMES cries out, writhing in agony.*]

**SMITH.** That's the way. Takes you as a cramp, I fancy?

**HOLMES.** Cramp! Cramp!

**SMITH.** Well, you can still hear me. Now, can't you just remember any unusual incident—just about the time your symptoms began?

**HOLMES.** I . . . can't think. My mind is gone! Help me, Smith!

**SMITH.** Did nothing come to you through the post, for instance?

**HOLMES.** Post? Post?

**SMITH.** Yes. A little box, perhaps?

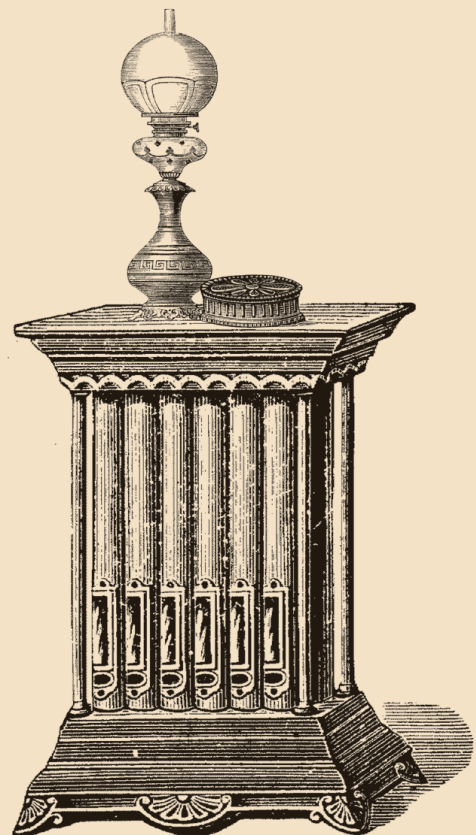
**HOLMES.** [*A shuddering groan*]

**SMITH.** [*Closer; deadly*] Listen! You

*shall* hear me! Don't you remember a box—a little ivory box? [*He sees it on the table and holds it up.*] Yes, here it is on your bedside table. It came on Wednesday. You opened it—do you remember?

**HOLMES.** Box? Opened? Yes, yes! There was . . . sharp spring inside. Pricked my finger. Some sort of joke . . .

**SMITH.** It was no joke, Holmes. You fool! Who asked you to cross my path? If you'd only left me alone I would never



have hurt you.

**HOLMES.** Box! Yes! Pricked finger.  
Poison!

**SMITH.** [*Triumphantly*] So you do remember. Good, good! I'm glad indeed. Well, the box leaves this room in my pocket, and there's your last shred of evidence gone. [*He pockets it.*] But you have the truth now, Holmes. You can die knowing that I killed you. You knew too much about what happened to Victor Savage, so you must share his fate. Yes, Holmes, you are very near your end now. I think I shall sit here and watch you die. [*He sits on the bed.*]

**HOLMES.** [*Almost a whisper*] The . . . shadows . . . falling. Getting . . . so dark. I can't see. Smith! Smith, are you there? The light . . . for charity's sake, turn up the light!

[*SMITH laughs, gets up and goes to the light.*]

**SMITH.** Entering the valley of the shadow, eh, Holmes? Yes, I'll turn up the light for you. I can watch your face more plainly, then. [*He turns the flame up full.*] There! Now, is there any further service I can render you?

**HOLMES.** [*In a clear, strong voice*] A match and my pipe, if you please.

[*He sits bolt upright. SMITH spins round to see him.*]

**SMITH.** Eh? What the blazes is the meaning of this?

**HOLMES.** [*Cheerfully*] The best way of successfully acting a part is to *be* it. I give you my word that for three days I have neither tasted food nor drink until you were good enough to pour me out that glass of water. But it's the tobacco I find most irksome.

[*We hear the thud of footsteps running upstairs off-stage.*]

Hello, hello! Do I hear the step of a friend?

[*INSPECTOR MORTON hurries in.*]

**MORTON.** Mr. Holmes?

**HOLMES.** Inspector Morton, this is your man.

**SMITH.** What is the meaning of . . . ?

**MORTON.** Culverton Smith, I arrest you on the charge of the murder of one Victor Savage, and I must warn you that anything you say . . .

**WORD BANK**     **irksome** (URK sum) *adj.*: irritating

**SMITH.** You've got nothing on me! It's all a trick! A pack of lies!

[*He makes to escape. MORTON restrains him.*]

**MORTON.** Keep still, or you'll get yourself hurt!

**SMITH.** Get off me!

**MORTON.** Hold your hands out!

[*They struggle. MORTON gets out handcuffs and claps them on SMITH's wrists.*]

That'll do.

**HOLMES.** By the way, Inspector, you might add the attempted murder of one Sherlock Holmes to that charge. Oh, and you'll find a small box in the pocket of your prisoner's coat. Pray, leave it on the table, here. Handle it gingerly, though. It may play its part at his trial.

[*MORTON retrieves the box and places it on the table.*]

**SMITH.** Trial! You'll be the one in the dock, Holmes. Inspector, he asked me to come here. He was ill, and I was sorry for him, so I came. Now he'll pretend I've said anything he cares to invent that

will corroborate his insane suspicions. Well, you can lie as you like, Holmes. My word's as good as yours.

**HOLMES.** Good heavens! I'd completely forgotten him!

**MORTON.** Forgotten who, sir?

**HOLMES.** Watson, my dear fellow! Do come out!

[*WATSON emerges with cramped groans.*]

I owe you a thousand apologies. To think that I should have overlooked you!

**WATSON.** It's all right, Holmes. Would have come out before, only you said, whatever happened, I wasn't to budge.

**SMITH.** What's all this about?

**HOLMES.** I needn't introduce you to my witness, my friend Dr. Watson. I understand you met somewhat earlier in the evening.

**SMITH.** You . . . you mean you had all this planned?

**HOLMES.** Of course. To the last detail. I think I may say it worked very well—with your assistance, of course.

**SMITH.** Mine?

## WORD BANK

**corroborate** (kuh RAHB uh rayt) *v.*: support, confirm



**HOLMES.** You saved an invalid trouble by giving my signal to Inspector Morton, waiting outside. You turned up the lamp.

[SMITH *and* WATSON *are equally flabbergasted.*]

**MORTON.** I'd better take him along now, sir. [*To* SMITH] Come on.

[*He bundles* SMITH *roughly toward the door.*]

We'll see you down at the Yard tomorrow, perhaps, Mr. Holmes?

**HOLMES.** Very well, Inspector. And many thanks.

**WATSON.** Goodbye, Inspector.

[MORTON *exits with* SMITH.]

[*Chuckles*]

Well, Holmes?

**HOLMES.** Well, Watson, there's a bottle of claret<sup>5</sup> over there—it is uncorked—and some biscuits in the barrel. If you'll be so kind, I'm badly in need of both.

[WATSON *goes to fetch them.*]

**WATSON.** Certainly. You know, Holmes, all this seems a pretty, well, elaborate way to go about catching that fellow. I

mean, taking in Mrs. Hudson—and *me*—like that. Scared us half to death.

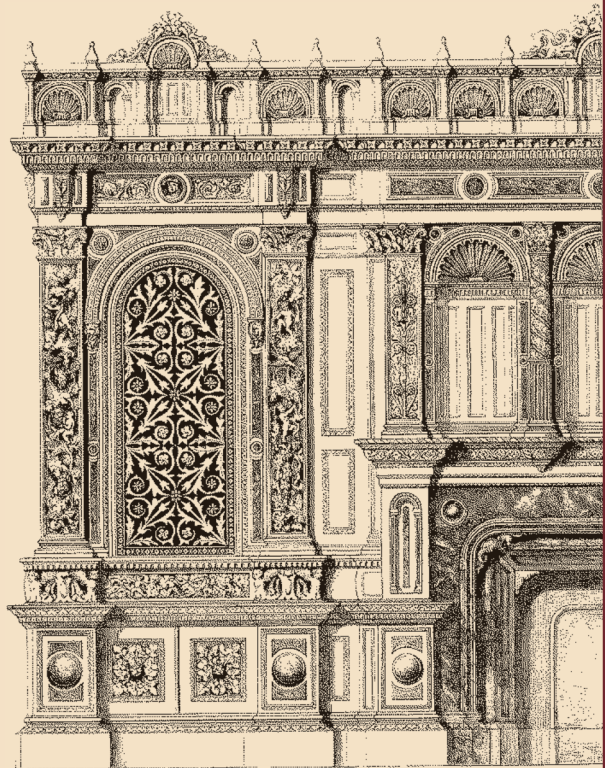
**HOLMES.** It was very essential that I should make Mrs. Hudson believe in my condition. She was to convey it to you, and you to him.

**WATSON.** Well . . .

**HOLMES.** Pray do not be offended, my good Watson. You must admit that

---

5. *Claret* (KLAHR et) is a kind of wine.



## WORD BANK

**dissimulation** (dih sim yoo LAY shun) *n.*: pretending to be what one is not

among your many talents, dissimulation scarcely finds a place. If you'd shared my secret, you would never have been able to impress Smith with the urgent necessity of coming to me. It was the vital point of the whole scheme. I knew his vindictive nature, and I was certain he would come to gloat over his handiwork.

[WATSON *returns with the bottle, glasses and barrel.*]

WATSON. But . . . but your appearance, Holmes. Your face! You really do look ghastly.

HOLMES. Three days of absolute fast does not improve one's beauty, Watson. However, as you know, my habits are irregular, and such a feat means less to me than to most men. For the rest, there is nothing that a sponge won't cure. Vaseline to produce the glistening forehead; belladonna<sup>6</sup> for the watering of the eyes; rouge over the cheekbones and crust of beeswax round one's lips . . . .

WATSON. [*Chuckling*] And that babbling about oysters! [*He begins pouring the wine.*]

HOLMES. Yes. I've sometimes thought of writing a monograph<sup>7</sup> on the subject of pretending.

WATSON. But why wouldn't you let me near you? There was no risk of infection.

HOLMES. Whatever I may have said to the contrary in the grip of delirium, do you imagine that I have no respect for your medical talents? Could I imagine that you would be deceived by a dying man with no rise of pulse or temperature? At four yards' distance I *could* deceive you.

[WATSON *reaches for the box.*]

WATSON. This box, then . . .

HOLMES. No, Watson. I wouldn't touch it. You can just see, if you look at it sideways, where the sharp spring emerges as you open it. I dare say it was by some such device that poor young Savage was done to death. He stood between that monster and an inheritance, you know.

---

6. *Belladonna* (bel uh DAHN uh) is a poisonous plant used both as a medication and as a cosmetic.

7. A *monograph* (MAHN uh graf) is a research paper.

## WORD BANK

**vindictive** (vin DIK tiv) *adj.*: vengeful; wanting to get even with someone

**WATSON.** Then it's true, Holmes! . . . you might have been killed, too!

**HOLMES.** As you know, my correspondence is a varied one. I am somewhat on my guard against any packages which reach me. But I saw that by pretending he had succeeded in his design I might be enabled to surprise a confession from him. That pretense I think I may claim to have carried out with the thoroughness of a true artist.

**WATSON.** [*Warmly*] You certainly did, Holmes. Er, a biscuit? [*He holds out the barrel.*]

**HOLMES.** On second thought, Watson, no thank you. Let us preserve our appetite. By the time I have shaved and dressed, I fancy it will just be a nice time for something nutritious at our little place in the Strand.<sup>8</sup>

[*They raise their glasses to one another and drink. The curtain falls.*]

---

8. *The Strand* is a well-known shopping and entertainment district in London, England.

## WORD BANK

**correspondence** (kor uh SPAHN duns) *n.*: communication by exchange of letters



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**MOLLIE & MICHAEL HARDWICK** were a husband-and-wife British writing team. Their career was notable for their ability to co-write great detective stories. Mollie's birth date in Manchester, England is unknown, but Michael was born in Leeds, England in 1924. They each died in 1991. Mollie individually published several popular works of historical fiction. Her husband was known for writing companion pieces to Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's *Sherlock Holmes* stories. He was also a playwright and a director. The Hardwicks shared a writing study and only interrupted each other's work "by appointment."



## Studying the Selection

### QUICK REVIEW

1. What is the time period in which the drama occurs?
2. Who is Mrs. Hudson?
3. Who is Dr. Watson?
4. Why is Sherlock in bed as the play opens?
5. Who is Culverton Smith?

### FOCUS

1. How is *The Dying Detective* a play within a play?
2. You are beginning to work on a new play. Before you begin to write the actual play, you need to create the first page. You have promised yourself you will complete it by this evening. Your first page should

### FIRST IMPRESSIONS

The show's opening scene features Sherlock Holmes tucked in his bed, Dr. Watson fussing about, and Mrs. Hudson doing her duties. What instantly strikes you?

include your title, your cast of characters, a list of scenes, the words "Scene One," followed by your setting and stage directions in brackets. Refer to the first page of *The Dying Detective* for a model.

### CREATING AND WRITING

1. Write a prose paragraph, summarizing the action in Scene One of the play you began to write in Focus #2.
2. Write the first page of your script. Follow the format on page 159. At least two of your characters should be speaking with each other.