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Cast of Characters

SHERLOCK HOLMES

DR. WATSON / MAN 2

MRS. LILLIE LANGTRY

OSCAR WILDE

MRS. IRMA TORY / MRS. MCGLYNN

JOHN SMYTHE / ABDUL KARIM/MAN 1

PROFESSOR MORIARTY

Character Note

The character of Oscar Wilde is not to be played as inferior to Sherlock Holmes. Mr. Wilde possesses an incandescent wit and a massive intellect. He simply recognizes a good line when he hears one.

Place

London.

Time

Early 1890s.

Set

Setting elements for Lillie's dressing room, Moriarty's office and the Hamilton Works should be minimal—the dressing room scene almost like “the memory” of the incident.

Author Note

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Henrietta Alsdorf
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Sadie Schaefer
Harriet Goldsmith
Shirley Fox
Kenneth Miller
Helen Fitzgerald
Helen Gregutt
Idie Hanna
Dorothy Lund
Stewart Ballinger
Rose Frazier
Eva Halferty
Iola Hemke
Hilda Kahle
Jayne Lord
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Sherlock Holmes and The Case of the Jersey Lily was originally produced by People's Light & Theatre (Abigail Adams, Artistic Director; Grace Grillet, Managing Director) in Malvern, Pennsylvania, opening on June 20, 2008. It was directed by Steve Umberger; the set design was by James F. Pyne, Jr.; the costume design was by Marla Jurglanis; the lighting design was by Dennis Parichy; the sound design was by Christopher Colucci; the stage manager was Kate McSorley. It premiered with the following cast:

SHERLOCK HOLMES	Peter DeLaurier
DR. WATSON.	Mark Lazar
MRS. LILLIE LANGTRY	Susan McKey
OSCAR WILDE	Jeb Kreager
MRS. TORY / MRS. MCGLYNN.	Alda Cortese
JOHN SMYTHE / ABDUL KARIM	Lenny Haas
PROFESSOR MORIARTY	Graham Smith



The World Premiere of *Sherlock Holmes and the Case of the Jersey Lily*, The People's Light & Theatre Company, Malvern, Pennsylvania (2008). Photo: Mark Garvin

SHERLOCK HOLMES AND THE CASE OF THE JERSEY LILY

by Katie Forgette

LOOSELY ADAPTED FROM *SHERLOCK HOLMES*
BY DOYLE AND GILLETTE (1899) AND FROM THE WRITINGS
OF OSCAR WILDE AND WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

ACT I

Scene 1

Lillie Langtry's backstage dressing room.

(LILLIE sits in front of a mirror refreshing her make-up. Sounds of a play and audience can be heard. She suddenly stops what she is doing, cocks her head to listen—there is a collective gasp from the audience. She smiles. She gets up and goes to a closet door—opens it—sees that an object is still there—closes the door.)

(Suddenly, a MAN appears. LILLIE opens her mouth to scream and at the same time there is a huge cry from the audience masking her shriek. She quickly picks up a revolver from the table and points it at him, but the man grabs her and holds a cloth to her nose. She struggles for a moment, then slumps to the floor. The MAN goes to the closet—takes out a small bundle—and is gone.)

Scene 2

Baker Street.

(SHERLOCK HOLMES is mixing some sort of concoction in a test-tube—his back to WATSON—WATSON is looking out the window.)

WATSON. Do you have even the vaguest recollection of... sunlight?

HOLMES. It has broken through in dreams.

WATSON. Remarkably impenetrable; almost mythical. *(He sits down—then to himself:)* Did the Gods smite anyone with fog?

HOLMES. I believe Zeus blew some Jason's way.

WATSON. New formula?

HOLMES. A serum which, when ingested, diminishes all signs of life from breathing to heart beat to such a degree as to resemble death.

WATSON. Why would you want someone to think you were dead when you weren't?

HOLMES. The Milne-Smith case...?

WATSON. Ah, of course.

(MRS. MCGLYNN enters—an elderly, stooped woman, all in black with an ear trumpet hanging from her neck—a sheer veil. She wheels in a tea cart and parks it.)

HOLMES. *(Loud:)* Thank you, Mrs. McGlynn!

(She stops and inserts her trumpet.)

MRS. MCGLYNN. What's that?

HOLMES. *(Louder:)* Thank you for the tea!!

MRS. MCGLYNN. Corn beef and cabbage!

(She hiccups and exits.)

WATSON. *(Taking a sip of tea and grimacing:)* Mrs. Hudson...?

HOLMES. Still nursing her sick friend, I'm afraid. She sent Mrs. McGlynn 'round this morning—a cousin several times removed.

WATSON. I see she's in mourning.

HOLMES. Yes. Her husband died...thirty years ago.

WATSON. The Irish are a sentimental people.

(WATSON casually looks down at a newspaper lying next to him.)

HOLMES. Anything of interest in the paper, Watson?

WATSON. I believe you have eyes in the back of your head.

HOLMES. I have, at least, a well-polished, silver-plated coffee pot in front of me.

WATSON. There have been numerous petty thefts.

(*HOLMES snorts with contempt.*)

HOLMES. The London criminal is certainly a dull fellow. It is fortunate for this community that I am not a criminal.

WATSON. It is indeed!

HOLMES. Suppose that I were Brooks or Woodhouse, or any of the fifty men who have good reason for taking my life, how long could I survive against my own pursuit? A summons, a bogus appointment, and all would be over. It is well they don't have fog in the Latin countries — the countries of assassination. (*He sighs.*) My mind is like a racing engine, tearing itself to pieces because it is not connected up with the work for which it was built. Life is commonplace; the papers are sterile; audacity and romance seem to have passed forever from the criminal world. (*He looks at his friend.*) So, Watson, you do not propose to invest in South African securities?

WATSON. How on earth do you know that?

HOLMES. Confess yourself utterly taken aback.

WATSON. I am.

HOLMES. I ought to make you sign a paper to that effect.

WATSON. Why?

HOLMES. Because in two minutes you will say "how absurdly simple!"

WATSON. I am sure that I shall say nothing of the kind.

HOLMES. You see, my dear Watson, it is not really difficult to construct a series of inferences, each dependent upon its predecessor and each simple in itself. If, after doing so, one simply knocks out all the central inferences and presents one's audience with the starting-point and the conclusion, one may produce a startling effect. Now, it

was not really difficult, by inspection of the groove between your left forefinger and thumb, to feel sure that you did not propose to invest your small capital in the gold fields.

WATSON. I see no connection.

HOLMES. Here are the missing links of the very simple chain: 1. You had chalk between your left finger and thumb when you returned from the club last night. 2. You put chalk there when you play billiards. 3. You never play billiards except with Thurston. 4. You told me, four weeks ago, that Thurston had an option on some South African property which would expire in a month, and which he desired you to share with him. 5. Your checkbook is locked in my drawer, and you have not asked for the key. 6. You do not propose to invest your money in this manner.

WATSON. How absurdly simple! Would that my eyes were as good as yours.

HOLMES. They are, Watson. You *see*, but you do not *observe*. For example, you have frequently seen the steps which lead up from the hall to this room.

WATSON. Frequently.

HOLMES. How often?

WATSON. Some hundreds of times.

HOLMES. Then how many are there?

WATSON. How many? I don't know.

HOLMES. Quite so! You have not observed. And yet you have seen. That is just my point. Now, I know that there are seventeen steps, because I have both seen and observed.

WATSON. So you have...

HOLMES. Have you set a date for your nuptials?

WATSON. Hm?...oh, not yet.

HOLMES. No misgivings, I hope.

WATSON. None. I am supremely contented and eternally entranced.

(There is a knock at the door.)

HOLMES. Come in!

(A WOMAN enters. She is simply dressed; her hair and hat conspire somewhat to hide her features. Her voice and body are tentative. Lower class accent.)

WOMAN. Mr. Holmes? Mr. Sherlock Holmes?

HOLMES. I am he. And who are you?

WOMAN. Turner is the name, sir. Mrs. Turner.

HOLMES. Pray, take a seat.

WOMAN. Thank you, sir.

HOLMES. How may I be of assistance to you?

WOMAN. It is I who wishes to be of assistance to you, sir. I was given to understand by a neighbor that Mrs. Hudson is currently indisposed and I'm here to offer myself as a replacement—cooking, washing and the like.

HOLMES. I'm afraid you're a little late. Mrs. Hudson has already—

WOMAN. I work very hard, sir, no one works harder than I do—certainly not that old woman who opened the door.

HOLMES. I see. Tell me, how long have you been a domestic servant?

WOMAN. All my life, sir. Since I was a child.

HOLMES. When were you last employed?

WOMAN. Just today, sir. I've just come from there.

HOLMES. Really. What were your duties today?

WOMAN. Scrubbing floors, hauling coal and the like.

HOLMES. I see.

WOMAN. I think you'll find my fee quite modest.

HOLMES. I'm sure I will.

WOMAN. Mightn't you be interested?

HOLMES. Oh, I'm interested all right.

WOMAN. You are!?

HOLMES. Yes. I'm interested in how a day of backbreaking work hauling coal — which you have just come from — has left not a trace of dust on your shoes and clothes but has in fact managed to scent your hair with (*He sniffs:*) lavender. Further, although you attempt to hide it, you are in possession of an iridescent complexion and your hands would appear to have been upbraided only by the lifting of fine bone china and, perhaps, the occasional petit four.

(The WOMAN takes off her hat and lets out a warm laugh. We see that she is quite beautiful.)

WOMAN. (*To the door:*) You win, Oscar! (*To SHERLOCK:*) He said you would.

HOLMES. Who said I would?

WOMAN. (*Yelling towards the door:*) You may come in now, Oscar! It's all over! You've won!

(OSCAR WILDE enters, triumphant.)

OSCAR. And now for the most satisfying of all retorts: *I told you so.* Good evening, Mr. Holmes.

HOLMES. Mr. Wilde, always a surprise, even when you're expected. And Mrs. Turner...

OSCAR. May I present: Helen, Formerly of Troy. Better known to the clamoring multitudes as —

HOLMES. —Mrs. Lillie Langtry, or The Jersey Lily.

OSCAR. Very good. Mrs. Langtry, Mr. Sherlock Holmes.

HOLMES. Dear lady.

LILLIE. Mr. Holmes.

HOLMES. Mrs. Langtry, Oscar, allow me to introduce my assistant, Dr. John Watson.

LILLIE. Dr. Watson.

WATSON. (*Instantly besotted:*) You look just as you do in Edward Poynter's portrait of you.

OSCAR. Lillie has been sketched and painted so often that I sometimes fear she poses without realizing it.

LILLIE. Oscar.

WATSON. (*Consumed:*) A great, great pleasure, Mrs. Langtry, a great, great, great...

LILLIE. Are you all right, Dr. Watson?

HOLMES. Dr. Watson is no doubt lost in thoughts of his upcoming nuptials.

LILLIE. You're getting married, how wonderful!

WATSON. I'm getting married? ...oh, yes, I'm getting married, yes, thank you.

HOLMES. He is "supremely contented and eternally entranced."

WATSON. Quite. (*Changing the subject:*) I...I was just wondering, Holmes, how it is that you and Mr. Wilde—

HOLMES. —are acquainted with one another?

WATSON. I've never known you to have a penchant for the theatre—

HOLMES. I don't. But I do have a taste for logic, which is essential for the construction of a satisfying stage play. Some time ago Mr. Wilde wrote to me regarding his struggle with a minor literary necessity. While he possesses in abundance the skills of his craft, Mr. Wilde, like many brilliant men, has an Achilles heel.

OSCAR. Titles.

WATSON. Titles?

HOLMES. Titles. That small thread which pulls together all the others. I have, on occasion, suggested a title or two to Mr. Wilde.

WATSON. Are you working on a play now?

OSCAR. Yes, with Mrs. Langtry actually. And I'm afraid I won't be needing your services for this one, Mr. Holmes.

HOLMES. Glad to hear it. What's the latest called?

OSCAR. "The Importance of Being Forthright."

HOLMES. Hmm.

OSCAR. What?!

HOLMES. Nothing...

LILLIE. It's a wonderful play, his best yet I think.

OSCAR. A few mesmerizing scenes for your perusal.

(He tosses several pages on Holmes' desk.)

WATSON. Will you be appearing in it Mrs. Langtry? Do say you will be, oh, please say it is true.

LILLIE. No.

OSCAR. There's a perfect part for her – Gwendolyn – but she insists she's too old.

LILLIE. I *am* too old. Gwendolyn should be in her twenties not forty.

OSCAR. Forty is a very attractive age. London society is full of women of the very highest birth who have, of their own free choice, remained forty for years.

LILLIE. Is that from the new third act?

OSCAR. Do you like it?

LILLIE. Very much. What do you think Mr. Holmes, could I play a woman in her twenties?

WATSON. You could play anything, anyone, anytime.

HOLMES. Shall I tell you the truth, Mrs. Langtry?

LILLIE. I wish you would.

HOLMES. You are too old.

WATSON. Holmes!

LILLIE. I think I'm going to like you Mr. Holmes.

OSCAR. (*To HOLMES:*) Didn't I hear that you once had a go at Hamlet?

HOLMES. In my school days.

OSCAR. Could you be persuaded to return to the stage? I have a character named Algernon Moncreiff—

HOLMES. You may stop there. I'm afraid it would be impossible for me to give my undivided attention to anything named Algernon. Now then, let me ask you a question: what was the purpose of this little gambit?

OSCAR. (*To LILLIE:*) Shall I begin?

LILLIE. Please.

OSCAR. Mrs. Langtry is being blackmailed.

WATSON. Oh, dear!

OSCAR. Unaware of the scope of your successes, Mr. Holmes, she refused to seek your assistance stating that no one would be able to handle the case. I appealed to her ego, suggesting that if you could see through a disguise worn by our country's greatest actress then perhaps you could also see through this mystery and identify the criminal.

LILLIE. You saw right through my scullery maid.

HOLMES. It wasn't difficult.

LILLIE. That's because I'm not nearly as accomplished an actress as Mr. Wilde thinks.

OSCAR. Liar. She was assaulted in her dressing room at the Lyceum on Saturday evening during the closing night performance of the play "Danger." A cache of letters, of a highly personal nature, written by Mrs. Langtry and a certain gentleman, was stolen.

WATSON. Are you all right, Mrs. Langtry? Did the brute hurt you?

LILLIE. I have recovered, thank you, Dr. Watson.

HOLMES. Did no one hear you scream?

LILLIE. It was covered by a cry from the audience when the hero of the play makes a surprise entrance and stabs the madman. I was able to aim my prop gun at the assailant, but even that did not deter him.

HOLMES. Is your prop gun an authentic firearm?

LILLIE. Yes. Altered, of course, so that it can never discharge.

HOLMES. What were the letters doing in your dressing room?

LILLIE. I brought them there for safekeeping. A message had been sent to me hours before, right as I was to leave for the theatre (*She gets the note from her purse.*) This person said that they knew the letters were in my home and that a burglary was intended for that very night.

(**HOLMES** examines the note.)

HOLMES. They were bluffing, of course. In all likelihood they had no idea where or if the letters existed. All they needed to do was watch the house and when you left for the theatre with a bulging purse they would know that they had guessed correctly.

LILLIE. I had been burgled just weeks before.

HOLMES. And nothing was taken.

LILLIE. Nothing of any value.

HOLMES. They couldn't find the correspondence on their own so they decided to let you help them.

OSCAR. Then another note.

HOLMES. Saying...?

OSCAR. That unless she turned over 10,000 pounds, the compromising letters would be made public.

WATSON. Ten thousand pounds?! Outrageous!

HOLMES. May I see that note, Mrs. Langtry?

LILLIE. I'm sorry — I burned it. I don't know why. I — I panicked and threw it into the fire. It was typed as well.

HOLMES. Could you raise the sum demanded?

OSCAR. Of course she could, the woman is worth —

HOLMES. Oscar, I am addressing Mrs. Langtry.

LILLIE. Yes, I could raise it.

HOLMES. I take it these are *intimate* letters?

LILLIE. Highly.

WATSON. From a youthful indiscretion, no doubt.

LILLIE. Exactly. I'm afraid you must think me a bad person.

WATSON. Nonsense!

OSCAR. It is absurd to divide people into good and bad. People are either charming or tedious. You are charming.

LILLIE. "I don't know that women are always rewarded for being charming. I think they are usually punished for it."

OSCAR. Is that mine?

(She smiles and nods.)

HOLMES. How is the blackmailer to prove authenticity?

LILLIE. The handwriting.

HOLMES. Say it is a forgery.

LILLIE. My private notepaper — and the gentleman's.

HOLMES. Stolen.

LILLIE. The seal.

HOLMES. Imitated.

LILLIE. The photograph.

HOLMES. Bought.

LILLIE. We are both in the photograph.

HOLMES. That is very bad.

LILLIE. There you have it—the pure and simple truth of the matter.

OSCAR. The truth is rarely pure and never simple.

(OSCAR WILDE takes out a small notepad and jots this down.)

Oh, I like that...

HOLMES. Hindsight shows us that the truth is always simple—it is man's thinking that is muddled.

OSCAR. Yes, but what I said sounds so much better.

HOLMES. Mrs. Langtry, it could hardly be said that I am a man who pays attention to the idle gossip of the day, but it seems to me, a few years back, there was an inescapable story making the rounds...

LILLIE. The insidious aspect of gossip is that so much of it is true.

OSCAR. Darling, Lillie, remember, I like persons better than principles and I like persons with no principles better than anything else in the world.

HOLMES. I believe the gentleman in question was: the future King Edward VII.

WATSON. Good God, the Prince of Wales?!

OSCAR. Bertie, to his friends—of which he has none.

LILLIE. Oscar.

OSCAR. Yes?

LILLIE. Shut up.

OSCAR. All right.

LILLIE. You see why I must reclaim this correspondence.

HOLMES. I do indeed.

WATSON. But Mrs. Langtry, why didn't you see fit to trust those letters with your lawyer or banker?

HOLMES. I should imagine that – given the power of the other party involved – it would be difficult to tell what indirect or political influence might be brought to bear upon a business man.

LILLIE. Exactly.

OSCAR. Mr. Holmes, will you help us? You can solve anything – you've never been beaten.

HOLMES. Ah, but I have. Four times by men and, once (*He looks at LILLIE:*) by a woman.

OSCAR. But what is that compared with the number of your successes?

HOLMES. If I take up your plight, I must understand every detail. Take time to consider. The smallest point may be the most essential.

OSCAR. That, of course, is understood.

HOLMES. Mrs. Langtry?

LILLIE. Yes.

HOLMES. How is the ransom to be collected?

OSCAR. He's calling for it this evening.

LILLIE. Here.

(She hands WATSON a piece of paper.)

WATSON. "Tonight. At your home. Do not change your plans. There will be a knock on the door. Give the ransom to the man who appears. Do this or else publication will follow and an innocent heart will be broken."

HOLMES. Who is the innocent heart?

LILLIE. I'm assuming Edward's wife, Princess Alexandra.

WATSON. Perhaps the blackmailer is referring to you.

LILLIE. (*Touched:*) You're sweet.

HOLMES. Was Princess Alexandra aware of the affair?

LILLIE. I really couldn't say. This was some time ago.

WATSON. I repeat, a youthful indiscretion.

HOLMES. What are the plans you are requested not to change?

OSCAR. We're reading a new scene tonight.

HOLMES. Is this common knowledge?

LILLIE. Oscar and I meet regularly, a fact which is well known in theatrical circles.

HOLMES. Who will be present?

OSCAR. Myself and Lillie, of course, and Mrs. Padgett will be reading Lady Bracknell.

HOLMES. Who is this Mrs. Padgett?

OSCAR. I've never actually made her acquaintance, but by all accounts an astonishing performer. Spent many years on the stage in America, nevertheless they say her talent is still intact.

LILLIE. She was recommended to me by my leading man in "Danger." Oh, Oscar, I forgot to tell you, she sent a note that she's been suffering a chest cold —

OSCAR. — No —

LILLIE. —But she said she wouldn't miss the opportunity to read for you.

OSCAR. Don't frighten me like that.

HOLMES. Just you three then?

LILLIE. And my housekeeper, Mrs. Tory.

HOLMES. How long has she been with you?

LILLIE. Over a year. She's with me constantly, at my home, the theatre, travels with me. I'd be lost without her.

OSCAR. More to the point, you'd never be on time. She's a God-send.

HOLMES. Have you informed her of your situation?

LILLIE. I didn't want to concern her. She's very maternal toward me. Oh, and Mrs. Drake, my cook—she's beyond reproach—the dearest creature—if I miss a meal she nearly collapses with concern. She's been with me, oh, (*She looks at OSCAR.*), six, seven months?

OSCAR. (*Fingering his waistband.*) Long enough that this no longer fits me properly.

HOLMES. What is your address, Mrs. Langtry?

LILLIE. 21 Pont Street.

HOLMES. (*Handing her paper and pencil.*) Kindly draw me the floor plan of your home. Do as the note says. Say nothing to the three ladies. Proceed just as you would were it any other evening. If you should find yourself in danger—

OSCAR. Danger! What danger do you foresee?

HOLMES. It would cease to be a danger if we could define it. In which room will you and your guests be gathered this evening?

LILLIE. The sitting room.

HOLMES. Are there windows?

LILLIE. Yes.

HOLMES. Do this: Put the ransom in an envelope and secret it in your sitting room.

WATSON. Surely you're not suggesting she pay the blackguard?

HOLMES. I am suggesting she put the ransom in an envelope and secret it in her sitting room.

WATSON. Oh.

HOLMES. During the course of the evening I will make myself known to you.

OSCAR. Can you make a guess as to who these people might be?

HOLMES. I never guess. It is a shocking habit—destructive to the logical faculty.

LILLIE. Mr. Holmes, how can I ever thank you?

HOLMES. I have done nothing yet which deserves your thanks.

(LILLIE and OSCAR prepare to leave.)

OSCAR. I know we can count on you, Holmes. You have a way of seeing through the accepted reality to what really exists. Thank God—otherwise I would be the author of "The Picture of Dorian Green."

HOLMES. Good to see you again, Mr. Wilde. Mrs. Langtry, a pleasure to have made your acquaintance.

LILLIE. Good afternoon, Mr. Holmes. Dr. Watson—

WATSON. Mrs. Langtry, I can't begin to tell you, to express—your performance in "As You Like It" alone was...it has been, a great, great, great...

OSCAR. Oh dear.

LILLIE. Oscar.

OSCAR. Yes?

LILLIE. Shut up.

OSCAR. All right.

LILLIE. Goodbye, Dr. Watson.

WATSON. Goodbye...

(LILLIE exits. OSCAR hangs back a moment.)

OSCAR. Holmes, old boy, you know, Lillie's led a rather unconventional life—I hope that won't—

HOLMES. It is not my business to judge the client, Mr. Wilde. Furthermore, the most outwardly moral woman I ever knew was hanged for poisoning three little children for their insurance-money, and the most repellant man of my acquaintance is a philanthropist who has spent nearly a quarter of a million upon the London poor.

(OSCAR smiles.)

OSCAR. Brilliant.

(He exits.)

HOLMES. Kindly look up the name Langtry in my index, Doctor.

(WATSON flips through the cards in the box; HOLMES fills his pipe.)

WATSON. ...Keats, Kelvin, Kierkegaard—ah, Langtry. “Lillie Langtry (otherwise known as *the Jersey Lily*): Born Emilie Charlotte Le Breton in 1853, Jersey, Channel Islands, raised a ‘tomboy’ amongst six brothers. Denied a formal education, she received lessons from a French governess during the day and her brothers’ tutor during the evenings. From these humble beginnings she has made a name for herself as popular actress, captivating raconteur and devastating companion (see Royal Family)—she has done this with nothing to aid her except perhaps her enchanting sense of humor and her exceptional, some would say, startling beauty.” “Some would say...” indeed. All would say.

HOLMES. I believe you are taken with the lady, Watson.

WATSON. As is every man who lays eyes on her. Don't you find her countenance beyond compare?

HOLMES. Her features are remarkably even; her skin well cared for and she is nearly perfectly proportioned.

WATSON. Yes, yes, but beyond that even, beyond any...

HOLMES. Watson.

WATSON. Hm?

HOLMES. "To gild refined gold is to paint the lily."

WATSON. Ah.

HOLMES. I am more captivated with the question of why Mrs. Langtry has not been altogether truthful with us.

WATSON. What do you mean?

HOLMES. To begin with, her charade as a domestic servant.

WATSON. She said herself she wasn't a consummate actress.

HOLMES. No one is that unconvincing – unless they want to be.

WATSON. To what purpose?

HOLMES. To demonstrate that she is incapable of even the slightest deception; that when she speaks, she tells the truth because she hasn't the skill to lie. And then there are the notes.

WATSON. Surely, you believe their authenticity?

HOLMES. I do. The two that I saw. But there is a third. The note that she burned.

WATSON. She panicked.

HOLMES. Mrs. Langtry makes her living – and a very fine one – by controlling her emotions. And then there is her fear of scandal...

WATSON. Nothing unusual about that.

HOLMES. If she were any other woman, no. But Bertie's hedonistic adventures have already been hinted at in the more scurrilous journals – this is old news.

WATSON. Perhaps, but aren't letters quite a different matter? People write the most ridiculously honest things in letters.

HOLMES. They do. *(Pause.)* I shall need your assistance, Watson.

WATSON. Anything.

HOLMES. You are to station yourself outside Mrs. Langtry's this evening. Remain as inconspicuous as possible.

WATSON. *(Disappointed:)* I am to be neutral?

HOLMES. Do nothing whatsoever. At some point the sitting room window will open. Situate yourself close to that open window.

WATSON. Yes.

HOLMES. You are to watch for a figure that comes to that window.

WATSON. Yes.

HOLMES. When the individual raises his hand — so — *(He touches his head and then drops his hand down.)* you will run to the front of the residence and throw into the foyer what I give you to throw, and will, at the same time, raise the cry of fire. You quite follow me?

WATSON. Entirely.

(HOLMES retrieves a long cigar-shaped roll from his desk.)

HOLMES. It is nothing very formidable—an ordinary plumber's smoke-rocket, fitted with a cap at either end to make it self-lighting. Your task is confined to that. When you raise your cry of fire, it will be taken up by a number of people. When the smoke has cleared, you may join me inside Mrs. Langtry's residence. I hope that I have made myself clear?

WATSON. I am to remain neutral, get near the window, watch for the signal, throw in the object, raise the cry of fire, join you when the smoke has cleared.

HOLMES. Precisely.

WATSON. You may rely on me entirely.

HOLMES. That is excellent. This evening Mrs. Langtry is going to show me what the blackmailer is really after.

WATSON. "Show you"?

HOLMES. I believe it is time that I prepare for the new role I have to play. Come, Watson. The game's afoot!

(There is a distinctive knock at the door.)

HOLMES. Come in!

(ABDUL KARIM enters.)

KARIM. Good day, gentlemen. I am in search of Mr. Sherlock Holmes.

HOLMES. I am Sherlock Holmes.

KARIM. May I speak with you alone, sir.

HOLMES. This is Dr. John Watson, my assistant. You may trust him as thoroughly as you intend to trust me.

KARIM. Do you know who I am, sir?

HOLMES. I believe you are, Abdul Karim, attendant and confidante to her Majesty Queen Victoria.

KARIM. You are correct. I am here at the request of a certain person, regarding a most delicate matter.

WATSON. You may tell the Royal Family that they have nothing to fear—Sherlock Holmes is already on "The Case of the Missing Letters."

KARIM. Letters? What letters?

(HOLMES and WATSON turn to look at one another.)

HOLMES. The plot thickens...!

Scene 3

Lillie Langtry's Residence – 21 Pont Street.

(A well appointed room with a good deal of theatrical memorabilia.)

(MRS. TORY enters, perhaps a stocky woman of 40. She is setting out some light refreshments.)

MRS. TORY. *(Singing:)*
I'm called little Buttercup,
dear little Buttercup
Though I could never tell why
But still I'm called Buttercup
poor little Buttercup, sweet little –

(LILLIE enters, anxious.)

LILLIE. Lovely, Mrs. Tory, thank you. I thought we might try some of the tea I brought back from Paris – if there's any left – would you mind –

MRS. TORY. I'll ask Mrs. Drake... *(Turning back:)* ...Mrs. Langtry, are you all right?

LILLIE. I'm quite well.

MRS. TORY. I wish you'd confide in me, ma'am – maybe –

LILLIE. Thank you, Mrs. Tory, no, I couldn't possibly burden you.

MRS. TORY. It would be no burden. Is it reading the new play, ma'am? Are you nervous about that?

LILLIE. Yes, that's it, you've guessed it.

MRS. TORY. I thought as much. Remember how nervous you were before "My Heart's Desire" and "Angel Without Wings" and the last one, "Danger"? Mrs. Langtry, you're a great actress.

(LILLIE protests.)

No, no, now listen to me – you're a national treasure – that's what the critics call you. You'll be magnificent. Mark my words.

LILLIE. Thank you, Mrs. Tory, I feel better all ready.

MRS. TORY. I'll ask Mrs. Drake about the tea, ma'am.

(MRS. TORY exits.)

(LILLIE takes an envelope out from under her arm and quickly looks about the room. She finds a hiding spot—it could be in a drawer or behind some books.)

(A door bell chimes. LILLIE gasps.)

(MRS. TORY enters, followed by OSCAR.)

Mr. Oscar Wilde to see you, ma'am.

LILLIE. Oscar.

(MRS. TORY exits.)

OSCAR. Sweetheart.

(He embraces her.)

LILLIE. Oh, Oscar.

OSCAR. Your heart is racing faster than a Derby winner's.

LILLIE. I know, I know. Distract me.

OSCAR. How?

LILLIE. I don't know, anything, uh—what have you been doing since we left Mr. Holmes?

OSCAR. I've been working on the proof of one of my poems all the afternoon. I took out a comma. Then I put it back again. I'm exhausted. Ah, cucumber sandwiches!

(He starts to eat from the refreshments.)

LILLIE. Oscar!

OSCAR. *(His mouth full!)* Simple pleasures!—the last refuge of the complex.

LILLIE. How can you eat at a time like this?

OSCAR. Lillie, my love, if I stopped eating every time the world proved to be a hostile place I should cease to exist. (*Going to her:*) Listen to me. Sherlock Holmes is with us now. You couldn't be in better hands if you were locked in the embrace of Jesus Christ.

LILLIE. Given my past, I'm afraid Jesus Christ would have nothing to do with me.

OSCAR. Are you joking? He'd take one look at you and tell dear Papa: "Sorry old man, there's been a change in plans." Where did you hide the ransom?

(The door bell chimes.)

LILLIE. Oh dear...what if that's the blackmailer? Why hasn't Mr. Holmes shown up? What should I do?

OSCAR. First things first – calm yourself.

(MRS. TORY enters.)

MRS. TORY. A Mrs. Padgett to see you, ma'am.

LILLIE. Thank god.

(MRS. PADGETT enters. 60-ish. Bundled up, especially at the neck, holding a hankie to her face.)

LILLIE. Mrs. Padgett! I'm so glad to finally make your acquaintance. I'm Lillie, welcome to my home. May I introduce, Mr. Oscar Wilde.

OSCAR. Just Oscar, Mrs. Padgett – a delight I'm sure. I've heard a great deal about you.

MRS. PADGETT. And I, you. Please, call me Gertrude.

LILLIE. Mrs. Tory, will you take Gertrude's wrap?

MRS. TORY. I tried to, ma'am, but –

MRS. PADGETT. I must keep warm. Doctor's orders. My chest, you know, in a weakened state, I'm afraid.

LILLIE. I understand.

MRS. PADGETT. But otherwise I'm fit as a fiddle and ready to read Lady Bracknell.

OSCAR. Do you like her?

MRS. PADGETT. Do I like her?! I love her! What a creature!

LILLIE. Please take a seat—is it possible—have we met one another before?

MRS. PADGETT. Oh, I'd certainly remember if we had.

(She makes herself comfortable.)

OSCAR. Did you enjoy your time in the colonies?

MRS. PADGETT. Oh, yes. You know, we really have everything in common with America nowadays except, of course, language.

(MRS. TORY enters with tea.)

OSCAR. Well said.

MRS. PADGETT. Oh, tea! May I?

MRS. TORY. Let me get you some, ma'am.

MRS. PADGETT. Just tea, no milk. For the voice, you know. Every precaution.

LILLIE. Of course.

MRS. PADGETT. Tell me, Oscar, do you prefer writing comedy or drama?

OSCAR. Comedy. The possibilities are endless.

MRS. PADGETT. Why is that?

OSCAR. People cry for the same handful of reasons, but they laugh for as many reasons as there are people.

(MRS. TORY brings her a cup of tea.)

MRS. PADGETT. Ah!

MRS. TORY. Here you are, ma'am.

MRS. PADGETT. Call me, Gertrude, won't you.

MRS. TORY. (*Looking to LILLIE:*) Well, I don't know, ma'am, I'm not used to—

LILLIE. It's all right, Mrs. Tory.

OSCAR. Go ahead and live a little, Mrs. Tory. You have her permission.

MRS. PADGETT. Yes, let's live a little, shall we?

MRS. TORY. Well, if that is your wish.

MRS. PADGETT. It is indeed. Our only hope in saving this world is complete and utter parity. What is your Christian name, my dear?

MRS. TORY. It's...Irma, ma'am.

OSCAR. Oh, dear.

MRS. PADGETT. Irma...of course. The short form of names beginning with the Germanic element "irmen", which means "whole" or "universal" and in some cases "large" or "powerful". I absolutely dote on names. Is it short for Ermintrude? Ermengard? Irmina?

MRS. TORY. Just plain Irma, ma'am.

MRS. PADGETT. It suits you perfectly. It is a divine name. It has a music of its own. It produces vibrations.

OSCAR. What wonderful words!—did I write them?

(*MRS. PADGETT smiles and nods.*)

MRS. TORY. I've never much cared for the name myself.

MRS. PADGETT. Poor thing...well, shall we get started?

LILLIE. I should probably mention, Mrs. Padgett—

MRS. PADGETT. Gertrude.

LILLIE. Gertrude – that we may be interrupted this evening. I’m expecting, well, some one may be joining us briefly.

OSCAR. But don’t let that interfere with your reading –

LILLIE. Oscar –

OSCAR. What? We might as well make constructive use of the time.

MRS. PADGETT. Never fear. If this grippe didn’t stop me I shall certainly not be distracted by anything other than the Grim Reaper himself.

OSCAR. Oh, I hope not, I’m not dressed well enough to meet my Maker.

MRS. PADGETT. (*Taking papers from her purse:*) I’m Lady Bracknell and my niece, Gwendolyn – (*To LILLIE:*) a wonderful role for you darling –

OSCAR. (*Looking at LILLIE:*) Thank you.

MRS. PADGETT. –my niece, Gwendolyn, has decided that she will only marry a man whose...let me see here...whose profession is that of a banker, correct?

OSCAR. You’ve stated it perfectly.

MRS. PADGETT. It’s important that he be a banker...

OSCAR. Yes.

MRS. PADGETT. Well...

OSCAR. (*Taking his script:*) I’ll read Jack...let’s begin just after my proposal of marriage to Gwendolyn. (*Pointing to Mrs. Padgett’s script:*) “Mr. Worthing!” We’ll start there.

MRS. PADGETT. She’s just a gorgon, isn’t she? I love her!

(OSCAR gets down on bended knee before LILLIE.)

MRS. PADGETT. “Mr. Worthing! Rise, sir, from this semi recumbent posture. It is most indecorous.”

LILLIE. “Mamma! I must beg you to retire. Mr. Worthing has not quite finished yet.”

MRS. PADGETT. “Finished what, may I ask?”

LILLIE. “I am engaged to Mr. Worthing, mamma.”

MRS. PADGETT. “Pardon me, you are not engaged to any one. When you do become engaged to some one, I, or your father, should his health permit, will inform you of the fact. An engagement should come on a young girl as a surprise, pleasant or unpleasant, as the case may be—”

(The door bell chimes.)

LILLIE. Oh, dear God!

MRS. PADGETT. Ah, the interruption you spoke of has arrived.

(Pause.)

(MRS. TORY enters.)

MRS. TORY. Someone to see you, ma’am. He won’t give his name, but he’s says you’re expecting him.

LILLIE. Yes, it’s all right, show him in...oh, Oscar!

OSCAR. Hold steady, old girl.

MRS. PADGETT. From the look on your face may I assume it’s a relative?

(MRS. TORY returns with a strapping young MAN.)

MRS. TORY. Mrs. Langtry may I present...?

MAN. I told you, no need for names. Mrs. Langtry—

(Pause. He sees LILLIE and is instantly struck by her.)

LILLIE. Yes.

MAN. I—I—*(Regaining composure:)* I think you know why I’m here.

LILLIE. Yes. I do.

MAN. You have something for me then?

LILLIE. Yes.

OSCAR. You're not exactly what I expected.

MAN. And just what did you expect?

OSCAR. I don't know, someone more unwholesome-looking, I suppose.

MAN. I can be plenty unwholesome if the situation warrants, believe you me.

OSCAR. Well, when you say it like that, I do.

MRS. PADGETT. I hate to call anyone's manners into question, but I'm used to being introduced.

LILLIE. Oh—Mrs. Padgett this is—

MRS. PADGETT. Gertrude... (*Addressing the MAN:*) ...Gertrude Padgett, and you are...?

MAN. As I said, no need for names.

MRS. PADGETT. Nonsense, we were just discussing the importance of names—without names we'd just be anonymous animals living in a brick and mortar jungle. I'm Gertrude, this is Lillie and Oscar and Irma.

MAN. Irma. Suits you.

MRS. TORY. What's that supposed to mean?!

MAN. Never mind.

MRS. TORY. Why you little gutter rat, coming here to frighten Mrs. Langtry—

LILLIE. Mrs. Tory—

MRS. TORY. I don't know what you're after, but if you hurt this women so help me—

LILLIE. Mrs. Tory, please!

MRS. TORY. Sorry, ma'am.

MAN. You should be. *(To LILLIE:)* The package, Mrs. Langtry, if you please.

MRS. PADGETT. COME HERE!

(Pause — he moves toward her.)

Sit down. Sit down immediately!

(He does.)

Hesitation of any kind is a sign of mental decay in the young, of physical weakness in the old. Irma, a cup of tea for the gentleman. Lillie is not going to give you anything until you behave like a gentleman and tell us who you are and where you come from and drink your tea.

MAN. Madam —

MRS. PADGETT. You are wasting your time if you are planning to do battle with me, sir. I shall not be moved. Name?

MAN. Smythe. John.

MRS. TORY. How original.

MAN. You best be careful, *Irma*.

MRS. PADGETT. Now, now. Who are your parents?

MAN. *(Standing:)* That's enough —

MRS. PADGETT. *(Pulling him down:)* You want your package, don't you? Who are your parents?

MAN. I lost both my parents.

MRS. TORY. Or they ran away.

MRS. PADGETT. To lose one parent, Mr. Smythe, may be regarded as a misfortune; to lose both looks like carelessness. Where are your glasses?

MAN. What glasses?

MRS. PADGETT. The ones you usually wear. You've taken a good squint at nearly everyone in this room and then there are the two rather deep impressions on either side of your nose.

MAN. What kind of a witch are you?!

MRS. PADGETT. Not a witch, I assure you—beyond the obvious facts that you are a bachelor, a Freemason, and a somnambulist with a fondness for toffee, I know nothing whatever about you.

(The MAN's hand starts to go for his inside pocket and at the same moment MRS. PADGETT cries out.)

MRS. PADGETT. *(Clutching her chest:)* OH! Oh, my...!

LILLIE. Gertrude, what is it?! Are you ill?!

MRS. PADGETT. Air. I need air. Please...

LILLIE. Oscar, the window!

OSCAR. What? Oh, yes...

MAN. What's going on here?

MRS. TORY. The lady's not well, can't you see!

(OSCAR draws back the curtains and opens a window.)

OSCAR. Is that all right?

LILLIE. Is that better, Gertrude?

MRS. PADGETT. Help me up...

MAN. Give me that package!

(LILLIE and MRS. TORY help her up.)

MRS. PADGETT. Oscar, what's that on your head?

(OSCAR reaches up to his head.)

MRS. PADGETT. Just a cowlick, never mind.

(OSCAR drops his hand down — thereby creating the signal to WATSON.)

MAN. I want that package and I want it now!!

MRS. PADGETT. ...Take me to the window...air, please...

(LILLIE and MRS. TORY guide her to the window where she now has full view of the room.)

MAN. You asked for it!

(He pulls out a pistol — at almost the same time, smoke enters the room from the entryway and cries of “fire!” can be heard, first by one man, then by several. MRS. TORY tries to investigate but can’t see.)

MRS. TORY. Fire, Mrs. Langtry, fire! We’ve got to get you out!!

LILLIE. Oh my God...!

(LILLIE then looks to a point in the room — not where she put the money — trying to decide if she should retrieve something there.)

OSCAR. We’ve got to get out, quickly!

MRS. TORY. How?!

OSCAR. (Pointing:) There!?

MRS. TORY. There’s no exit there!!

(The MAN suddenly shoves his pistol in his pocket and leaps out the window.)

MRS. PADGETT. That takes care of that.

OSCAR. Let’s do the same...ladies, quickly...!

MRS. PADGETT. One moment, Oscar —

(She walks into the smoke.)

(Returning:) Just as I suspected. A false alarm.

LILLIE. What?

MRS. TORY. Are you sure?

MRS. PADGETT. Irma, go and calm the people in the street, will you?

MRS. TORY. Yes, ma'am, if you think I should.

MRS. PADGETT. (*Guiding her:*) Off you go now...probably just some precocious boys making mischief...

(*MRS. TORY is gone.*)

(*SHERLOCK HOLMES reveals himself. *The audience may not have been fooled for more than a moment or two, but the disguise should still be marvelous. Also, HOLMES' portrayal is not a flamboyant drag act – not Dame Edna – it is a simple and convincing performance.*)

LILLIE. Mr. Holmes, it's you!!

HOLMES. It is I.

(*As he speaks, he "unravels" his costume. He is wearing a suit underneath. OSCAR claps.*)

OSCAR. Well done!

HOLMES. Please forgive my foray into your territory, Mrs. Langtry, but I'm afraid it was necessary.

LILLIE. If you say so, Mr. Holmes.

(*WATSON enters.*)

WATSON. Was I satisfactory?

HOLMES. Admirably done, my friend.

OSCAR. Dr. Watson, you missed a performance that surely would have gone down in the annals of theatrical history had anyone had the opportunity to witness it.

WATSON. Was he good?

OSCAR. Good? His expression, his manner, his very soul seemed utterly transformed. The stage lost a fine actor when you became a specialist in crime, sir.

HOLMES. I will admit that, for a moment during my performance, I felt the surge of something like, oh, say, cocaine in my veins.

WATSON. Holmes!

OSCAR. Had I not been apprised of the gambit on my way in, I'm not sure I would have known.

LILLIE. You knew?

HOLMES. I felt that I may need Mr. Wilde's assistance at some point and I wanted to ready him for any possible violence.

WATSON. Mrs. Langtry, you look peaked—a bit of whiskey, perhaps?

LILLIE. No thank you, Dr. Watson.

HOLMES. Mrs. Langtry, it has become clear to me that you have not been altogether forthcoming about the circumstances of your distress. There were two pieces of vital information in that second note, which you so conveniently burned—one of them was the specificity of the ransom. What did John Smythe really come to collect?

OSCAR. Ten thousand pounds, we told you.

HOLMES. Mrs. Langtry?

LILLIE. I don't know what you mean.

HOLMES. I feel certain that you do. Are you protecting someone?

OSCAR. Good God, Lillie, not that twit, Bertie?

LILLIE. Oscar, please—

OSCAR. I'm afraid God somewhat overestimated His abilities when he fashioned the Prince of Wales.

HOLMES. Mrs. Langtry, when a woman thinks that her house is on fire, her instinct is at once to rush to the thing which she values most. It is a perfectly overpowering impulse, and I have more than

once taken advantage of it. A married woman looks to her baby; an unmarried woman looks to her most valuable possession. Where did you hide the ransom?

(LILLIE doesn't respond.)

When the cry of fire was raised, your eyes immediately went... there.

(He points to the place LILLIE looked.)

If there are 10,000 pounds in a recess behind a sliding panel just above that right bell-pull, I will return to the stage portraying Algernon Moncrieff in "The Importance of Being Forthright."

OSCAR. Oh, let it be the 10,000 pounds!

HOLMES. Mrs. Langtry.

WATSON. Holmes, Mrs. Langtry is unwell, perhaps we should—

LILLIE. *(To WATSON:)* You're very sweet. Bravo, Mr. Holmes.

HOLMES. May I see what the blackmailer is really after?

(LILLIE opens the panel and takes out a velvet box. she hands it to HOLMES. All gather around him. He opens it. There is, perhaps, a choral intake of breath.)

OSCAR. Good God!

WATSON. Astounding!

LILLIE. It is, isn't it?

OSCAR. A bit on the meretricious side.

WATSON. *(Pointing:)* Look, that one's as large as an egg!

OSCAR. I can see why you don't wear it in public. Garish, even by Cleopatra's standards.

WATSON. It takes a great woman to wear a necklace such as this, and Mrs. Langtry is just such a woman.

OSCAR. Where have I seen that diamond before? ...Lillie!

LILLIE. You are the only man I know who could make such a connection, (*Turning to HOLMES:*) or have you made it as well?

HOLMES. It was made for me. Her Majesty's attendant, Abdul Karim, paid me a visit this afternoon.

LILLIE. What did he say?

HOLMES. I would rather you tell us the story, Mrs. Langtry.

OSCAR. I insist that you tell us the story!

(Pause.)

LILLIE. A lifetime ago...

OSCAR. Go on...

LILLIE. I was in love with Bertie.

OSCAR. Can you skip this part?

LILLIE. You didn't know him, Oscar. No one did. Fifteen years ago, Bertie was a different person from the one we've come to recognize. He wasn't shiftless and irresponsible—a corpulent philistine to be made fun of—not then. He was young and he was—we fell in love—I mean, really, truly in love. He wanted to divorce Alexandra and marry me.

OSCAR. The Prince of Wales giving up the throne for the woman he loves? Not bloody likely.

WATSON. Language, Mr. Wilde!

LILLIE. I know that now. The night we met for the last time he brought me the necklace—the stones were taken from the Crown Jewels, the best from every piece of the collection. He said, “if you cannot be part of England's history, then, at the very least, you should be allowed to wear it.” He had breathtaking counterfeits made up in countless countries and replaced the gems himself.

HOLMES. But these counterfeits were not genuine stones.

LILLIE. No.

OSCAR. Why not? God knows he could afford it.

LILLIE. He liked the idea of his mother wearing colored glass...and being ignorant of the fact. Victoria, you know, was very hard on Bertie. She blamed him for Albert's death. Can you imagine? Blaming a child like that? He wanted to work, to contribute, but she denied him any official role. He's been humiliated for years, privately, publicly—jokes are made about him: "How is the Queen like the weather? She reigns and reigns and reigns and never gives the poor son a chance."

OSCAR. (*Laughing:*) I hadn't heard that one...

(*LILLIE looks at him.*)

...sorry.

LILLIE. And now I'm being blackmailed—the letters and photograph for the necklace.

HOLMES. And so is the Crown. A quarter of a million pounds or the story of Bertie's surreptitious exchange appears on the front page of every newspaper in the world.

WATSON. I must say, without the necklace in his hands, the criminal is counting his chickens before they are hatched.

OSCAR. I think people who count their chickens before they are hatched act very wisely, because chickens run about so absurdly that it is impossible to count them accurately.

LILLIE. Oscar.

OSCAR. Yes?

LILLIE. Shut up.

OSCAR. All right.

LILLIE. So she finally knows—oh, dear—the Queen doesn't like scandal.

HOLMES. The Queen doesn't know.

LILLIE. But you said...

HOLMES. It was Bertie who sent Abdul Karim. It is Bertie who is requesting you return the necklace.

LILLIE. That's not true!

HOLMES. I am sorry to say that it is.

(Pause.)

LILLIE. It's mine. It was his to give and he gave it to me.

HOLMES. Does a person plot and scheme and arrange for counterfeits so as to go undetected when he is simply taking what belongs to him? *(Pause.)* Mrs. Langtry, are you unable to relinquish this necklace because it represents the love you once shared with the Prince of Wales, or are you unwilling to part with it because so long as it remains in your possession you can bask in the thought that you have the Queen of England at a disadvantage?

LILLIE. I am keeping the necklace for the simple reason that it belongs to me. And now you know everything, Mr. Holmes.

HOLMES. I don't think I do. It has been my experience that when a person unburdens herself, tells everything there is to be told, there is a general relaxation of the facial muscles. At no point have I seen that telltale sign of tranquility on your singularly symmetrical countenance.

(Pause. They stare at one another. LILLIE slowly approaches HOLMES.)

LILLIE. May I?

(Pause.)

(He gives her the box.)

LILLIE. Thank you.

WATSON. *(A whisper:)* Holmes—!

(LILLIE puts the box back in its hiding place.)

(MRS. TORY enters.)

MRS. TORY. Pardon me, Mrs. Langtry, but—

(She sees HOLMES.)

HOLMES. Good evening.

MRS. TORY. *(Confused:)* Good evening, sir.

LILLIE. You were saying, Mrs. Tory?

MRS. TORY. There's a constable outside—

LILLIE. Tell him there's no need for concern.

MRS. TORY. He's very adamant—he wants to know that everything—

LILLIE. Oscar, would you?

OSCAR. Consider him gone.

(OSCAR begins to go.)

MRS. TORY. No, ma'am, he insists on hearing it from the owner of the residence.

LILLIE. Good lord—

OSCAR. Come on old girl, we'll quiet the authorities together.

(MRS. TORY exits.)

(LILLIE and OSCAR start out—LILLIE turns back.)

LILLIE. I suppose this means you will no longer pursue the case of my missing letters.

HOLMES. It means nothing of the kind.

(LILLIE and OSCAR exit.)

WATSON. You had the necklace in your hand—why did you give it back to her?

HOLMES. My dear, Watson, that necklace is the absolute property of Mrs. Langtry. Had I taken it from her, I could have been accused of theft.

WATSON. So we have gained nothing from this evening's adventure?

HOLMES. On the contrary. I have gained Mrs. Langtry's confidence and, I think perhaps, her regard. It was not possible for me to take the necklace without her consent; therefore, my mission now is to gain that consent. She must hand me – or the Crown – that necklace of her own free will.

WATSON. How on earth will you get her to do that? You heard her – "it belongs to me."

HOLMES. I didn't say it would be easy. It is going to be a delicate task – and one I am not sure I will relish completing. I will be forced to resort to a piece of trickery which I find, at this point, wholly unappetizing. *(Pause.)* Well, onward. We must deal with the awesome piece of the puzzle we were handed tonight – we now know with whom we're dealing.

(He begins to gather his costume, handing it off to WATSON.)

WATSON. We do?!

HOLMES. You have heard me speak of Professor Moriarty?

WATSON. The famous scientific criminal.

HOLMES. In calling Moriarty a criminal you are uttering libel in the eyes of the law. *(Spoken in a kind of trance of fascination:)* The greatest schemer of all time, the organizer of every deviltry, the controlling brain of the underworld, a brain which might have made or marred the destiny of nations – that's the man! He is the Napoleon of crime, Watson. He is the organizer of half that is evil and of nearly all that is undetected in this great city. He is a genius, a philosopher, an abstract thinker. He sits motionless, like a spider in the center of its web, but that web has a thousand radiations, and he knows well every quiver of each of them. He does little himself. He only plans – but what plans! The only chink in his armor – and our only hope to defeat him – is his use of emissaries that are not his equal.

(HOLMES starts to leave.)

WATSON. *(Following:)* How do you know he's involved in this?

HOLMES. Ah, yes, you weren't here for the introductions. Come, I'll enlighten you as we travel!

(Quick exit.)

Scene 4

Professor Moriarty's underground office.

(A spare, dark room—table, a couple of chairs, a typewriter, a heavily bolted door. PROFESSOR MORIARTY is at his desk. He is not a large man but there is something about him which "gives the impression that he is a violent person.")

MORIARTY. You confounded idiot!!

SMYTHE. What could I do?! Stay there and be burned alive?

MORIARTY. You should have followed the plan! Collected the ransom and then left!

SMYTHE. I couldn't, there was some old cow there that kept asking me questions.

MORIARTY. What "old cow"?

SMYTHE. Gertrude...something.

MORIARTY. Gertrude Padgett?

SMYTHE. That's it.

MORIARTY. Let me correct myself. You are not a "confounded idiot." You are a BLITHERING MORON! I had Roddick watching Gertrude Padgett's house all day. She never left. She was febrile and confined to her bed.

SMYTHE. She was there I tell you! I saw her.

MORIARTY. You saw an impostor!

(SMYTHE takes a piece of toffee from his pocket and begins to unwrap it.)

SMYTHE. You know, I've grown a little tired of the way you treat me.

MORIARTY. Have you.

SMYTHE. In fact, I'm not sure I want to go on with this.

MORIARTY. You'll go on until the job is done.

SMYTHE. Why should I?

MORIARTY. Why? First, you accepted the job. Second, you need the money.

(SMYTHE puts the toffee to his mouth.)

Third, I wouldn't eat that toffee if I were you.

SMYTHE. Why not?

MORIARTY. Take a good look at it.

(He does.)

SMYTHE. I don't see anything.

MORIARTY. A minute perforation at one end?

(SMYTHE takes out his pen knife and opens the toffee.)

SMYTHE. What's this powder?

MORIARTY. What do you suppose it might be, Mr. Smythe?

SMYTHE. *(Realizing:)* I almost ate this on the way here!

MORIARTY. But you didn't. You're more predictable than the rising sun.

(A loud buzzer sounds. MORIARTY picks up a kind of listening device, then unbolts the door.)

Should you think of leaving my employ before you have been dismissed, bear in mind that you will feel the full force of my displeasure at the most unexpected moment.

(MRS. TORY *bursts in the room. at some point she bolts the door.*)

Where have you been, Kitty?

MRS. TORY. Convincing a bobby that he has not seen my face “somewhere before,” that’s where.

MORIARTY. Did you follow Mrs. Langtry this afternoon as I instructed?

MRS. TORY. Yes...but...

MORIARTY. But what?

MRS. TORY. I lost her.

MORIARTY. MUST I DO EVERYTHING MYSELF!? Your only responsibility was to track the movements of one woman—

MRS. TORY. I was carrying three of little Miss Langtry’s hat boxes at the time—

MORIARTY. YOU WERE TO FOLLOW HER!

MRS. TORY. She sent me on an errand! I couldn’t very well say “no” to *my mistress* could I? I had to run to the milliners, then take a message to her dressmaker, there was the fog— (*Turning to SMYTHE:*) and you, my courageous nephew, jumping out the window like a little girl—

SMYTHE. Why were you giving me such a hard time, all that about my runaway parents, and imitating my accent, making fun of my name—?!

MRS. TORY. I was playing the part! I’m the loyal servant, remember? And you were supposed to be the menacing blackmailer (*She claps.*), bravo!

SMYTHE. Sorry I don’t have your theatrical background, Aunt Kitty— what was it again? A knife-throwing act on the pier at Blackpool, when you weren’t forging payroll checks?

MRS. TORY. Don’t you dare make fun of my career you besotted ninny, “Mrs. Langtry, I...I...”

MORIARTY. Silence!!

(Pause.)

Can you confirm the obvious for me? – that Mrs. Padgett was Holmes in disguise?

MRS. TORY. It was him all right. But he doesn't know you're in this.

MORIARTY. He knows. I left a calling card.

(MORIARTY smiles.)

Welcome aboard, Mr. Holmes, I've been expecting you.

SMYTHE. We're not taking on Sherlock Holmes are we?

MORIARTY. I told you it was possible she might go to him.

SMYTHE. Yes, but –

MORIARTY. Don't tell me you're afraid.

MRS. TORY. Listen – this isn't turning out quite the way you said it would.

MORIARTY. Things might be different if you had succeeded in your part of the plan. I gave you the role of a lifetime playing opposite one of England's greatest actresses –

MRS. TORY. – according to the love addled male critics –

MORIARTY. – a year in that household and yet you were unable to uncover the whereabouts of either the letters or the necklace!

MRS. TORY. I wasn't informed that she's the most secretive person on the planet and confides only in effeminate Irish playwrights! I've spent a year of my life waiting hand and foot on that talentless slattern – and not for one minute did anyone ever suspect me – now that's a performance! And all because you said I would be rewarded with more money than I could spend in ten lifetimes!

MORIARTY. That reward still awaits you – If you do as you are told!

MRS. TORY. And that name – Irma – what was the point of that?

SMYTHER. It suits you, Kitty.

MRS. TORY. Shut up!

SMYTHER. Touchy.

MRS. TORY. What my sister ever saw in your half-witted father —!

(MORIARTY is suddenly on MRS. TORY — one hand pressing two points on her throat — another hand at the back of her head. He seems to use very little pressure and yet she is incapacitated.)

...can't...breathe...

MORIARTY. If you two can keep your emotions in check and follow my orders to the letter you will look back on this experience as no more than a slight inconvenience on your way to untold riches. Do you think you can do that?!

MRS. TORY / SMYTHER. Yes, sir.

(He releases her.)

MORIARTY. *(To MRS. TORY:)* Type this note to Mr. Holmes:

(MRS. TORY immediately sits at the typewriter.)

“There will be a windowless cab at the unlit corner of Baker street at 11:30 tonight. Enter the cab alone. If you fail to appear, I cannot be held responsible for the fate of a certain party.” *(To MRS. TORY:)* Get the note to him in the same manner as the others — not before nine o'clock tomorrow evening.

MRS. TORY. Yes, sir.

MORIARTY. *(To SMYTHER:)* Prepare the Hamilton Gas Works as instructed.

SMYTHER. We shoulda done what I wanted — bust into her place, hold a knife to her throat and say, “Gimme the necklace lady or I slit you a new smile from ear to ear.”

MORIARTY. Smythe. If the hunter doesn't stalk his prey, it isn't really a hunt. When and if extreme measures of persuasion are called for, don't you think an abandoned building on a lonely stretch of

road miles from civilization would be a less fool hearty location to conduct the proceedings than the lady's residence?

(The buzzer sounds. MORIARTY picks up the listening device.)

Flynn and Roddick are here. I suggest you get to work.

(MORIARTY unbolts the door and exits.)

MRS. TORY. I'm not sure I like this.

SMYTHE. Not a whole lot you can do about it.

MRS. TORY. Oh, isn't there?

SMYTHE. Not if you want to remain alive. The man almost poisoned me with my own toffee.

(MRS. TORY stares at SMYTHE.)

What? *(Pause.)* Don't do that. You make me nervous when you do that—cut it out!

MRS. TORY. I don't think there is a pot of gold at the end of this rainbow. But I think there might be a nice consolation sum if we're smart enough to grab it. Only I'll need your help.

SMYTHE. What do you mean?

MRS. TORY. She's got lots of ready cash. She had 10,000 pounds all ready to buy you off. I saw it. What if we were to give her her letters back for that—forget some stupid necklace he'd have to fence.

SMYTHE. We don't have the letters—hell, we've never even seen them.

MRS. TORY. We don't need them. I know her handwriting well enough. And the Professor was kind enough to read me that one passage.

SMYTHE. Why'd he do that anyway? He knows what you do for a living.

MRS. TORY. Because he's not as bright as he thinks he is. I show her a bit of a letter, like this *(She demonstrates.)*, we collect the money, hand over the forgeries and disappear into the night.

SMYTHE. What if we fail?

MRS. TORY. “But screw your courage to the sticking place, and we’ll not fail.”

SMYTHE. He’d find us.

MRS. TORY. Not in America. Big country, America. Lots of theatre. I could start over—finally be appreciated for the talent that I am. And you—you could do whatever you like!

SMYTHE. Maybe buy a farm somewhere...?

MRS. TORY. Now you’re thinking.

SMYTHE. Animals, fresh air...

MRS. TORY. All of it yours...

(She takes something out of her purse.)

Hullo—what do we have here? Why it’s some of Mrs. Langtry’s personal stationary...

(They both take a seat. MRS. TORY picks up the pen from the table.)

Let me see now...how did it go? “My darling Bertie...”

(Lights fade to black.)

Scene 5

(A park. Perhaps a bench, a tree.)

(LILLIE is pacing, looking one direction, then another—obviously anxious.)

LILLIE. Where are you?! Please come... I’ve got to see you...

(One man appears. Then another. Their faces hidden by their collars and hats and scarves.)

MAN 1. Hello, miss. Nice day, isn’t it?

LILLIE. (*Backing up.*) What?...oh, yes, I—

(*She backs up into the second man.*)

Pardon me.

MAN 2. No need to apologize.

(*The two men are on either side of her now. She looks from one to the other.*)

LILLIE. (*Realizing:*) NO—!

(*She is instantly subdued and carried off.*)

(*Blackout.*)

End of Act I

ACT II

Scene 1

The Hamilton Gas Works.

(A nondescript room. A table, a chair, a window, a lamp.)

(MORIARTY and SMYTHE enter.)

MORIARTY. Light the lamp.

SMYTHE. What about leftover gas?

MORIARTY. There is none. Light it.

SMYTHE. Right.

MORIARTY. No exit?

SMYTHE. None.

MORIARTY. Airtight?

SMYTHE. Freshly caulked.

MORIARTY. The window?

SMYTHE. Nailed down.

MORIARTY. What if he breaks the glass?

SMYTHE. Iron bars.

MORIARTY. Show me how the gas is released.

(SMYTHE goes to a metal wheel on the wall.)

SMYTHE. Like this – remove the pin –

MORIARTY. Careful.

SMYTHE. I'm not really doing it – pin out – three quick turns to the right – bon voyage. Once it's cranked, you can't turn it off.

MORIARTY. Where's Kitty?

SMYTHE. Probably going over Pont Street with a fine toothed comb.

MORIARTY. I admire her tenacity.

SMYTHE. All this – it’s only if we don’t get the necklace, right?

MORIARTY. How secure is that door?

SMYTHE. Planks as thick as my head and bolts to match.

MORIARTY. Let me hear it.

(SMYTHE goes to the door and calls out.)

SMYTHE. The Professor wants to hear the door!

(He closes the door and a cacophony of locks and slamming iron devices is heard. When it’s over, MORIARTY nods – SMYTHE pounds on the door, followed by the sounds of unlocking.)

MORIARTY. Bring her in.

SMYTHE. *(Calling off:)* Bring her here!

(LILLIE is shoved into the room. She is blindfolded and her hands are tied behind her back. SMYTHE guides her to the chair.)

MORIARTY. Give the lady her sight.

(SMYTHE takes off the blindfold.)

Mrs. Langtry. Allow me to introduce myself: I am Professor Moriarty. I hope you haven’t been terribly inconvenienced by this detour.

LILLIE. Would it matter?

MORIARTY. No. Your new friend, Mr. Sherlock Holmes, will be arriving shortly. How would you like to save his life?

LILLIE. What do you mean?

MORIARTY. If you tell me where the necklace is, I will not only see to it that the letters and photograph are burned, I will allow Mr. Holmes to go on living.

LILLIE. You underestimate the man.

MORIARTY. Is that a “no”?

LILLIE. You're quick.

MORIARTY. *(To SMYTHE:)* As we planned.

SMYTHE. Yes, sir.

MORIARTY. The boys will be here with Holmes soon. I'll be back in one hour.

(SMYTHE takes a watch out of his vest pocket – notes the time.)

SMYTHE. Yes, sir.

(MORIARTY exits. SMYTHE leans up against the wall and stares at LILLIE. A long pause.)

LILLIE. Leave something on me – I'll catch a chill.

SMYTHE. Listen to you. I bet people are always telling you how pretty you are. You must get tired of it.

(Pause.)

Too good to talk to a bloke like me?

LILLIE. That's not it.

SMYTHE. Well then?

LILLIE. What?

SMYTHE. Do you get tired of people complimenting you all the time?

LILLIE. I'm not complimented all the time – just occasionally. It's nice, I suppose.

SMYTHE. I bet it is. Rich blokes, toffs, princes and kings and the like.

LILLIE. Not always.

SMYTHE. You mean you get it from the street peddlers and urchins and gutter-rat types as well?

LILLIE. Not that exactly.

SMYTHE. Well, what exactly? I'm not a "blithering moron," I can understand things with, you know, *nuance*.

LILLIE. I just meant that you never know who might find whom attractive. Desire is a strange science – the laws of desire, that is.

SMYTHE. I've noted that myself. Take my mum and dad. What'd she ever see in him? But she did and so here I am – not exactly fair to me but no one asked my opinion being that I wasn't born yet.

LILLIE. Exactly.

SMYTHE. Right, what do you know about what's fair? To the man-or born, servants, jewels and the like.

LILLIE. You don't know much about me do you?

SMYTHE. Enough.

LILLIE. Then you know I was born into a family of six boys – *six* – I was the only girl. My mother died giving birth to me and my father held me accountable. He worked in a livery, so you can imagine the wealth by which I was surrounded. He was a proud man, determined that his sons should have the best education possible and so he worked like a dog to engage private tutors for them. Because I was a girl it was taken for granted that nothing extraordinary in the way of schooling would be provided for me. Meanwhile my brothers were receiving lessons in Latin, Greek, Mathematics. But because I happened to be born female, (*She is getting upset:*) I had to beg and cajole and flatter my way to being taught by my brothers' tutors *after* their lessons were over. When my father discovered the situation he said, "They might as well be trying to teach a monkey to think." Tell me, Mr. Smythe: do you think that was fair?

SMYTHE. Don't cry.

LILLIE. I'm not.

SMYTHE. Well don't. You've done bloody well in your life – look where you are.

LILLIE. Yes – look where I am.

(He goes to comfort her.)

SMYTHE. Come on, this isn't your fault, you know.

LILLIE. Of course it is.

SMYTHE. No it's not—now, don't go all mush on me—

(LILLIE grimaces and moans.)

SMYTHE. What?

LILLIE. My wrists.

SMYTHE. Too tight?

LILLIE. Yes.

SMYTHE. Let me take a look—

(He inspects the rope.)

LILLIE. If you could manage to loosen it a bit—

SMYTHE. Right... Hold on! Oh, you are a clever little wench, aren't you?!

LILLIE. What are you talking about?

SMYTHE. I was just about to untie you!

LILLIE. Because you're a gentleman at heart and because you can see that I'm suffering. Look into my eyes, John.

SMYTHE. No! Don't look at me. Stop looking at me!

(She continues to stare at him.)

All right then—

(He blindfolds her again.)

LILLIE. No, John, please, just hear me out!

SMYTHE. You be quiet! No looking at me. No talking to me. Women's eyes! That's what gets innocent men like me into trouble!

(Suddenly KITTY appears at the door.)

Ten more seconds and you would have gotten me to chauffeur you home and cook you dinner. *(To himself:)* Idiot! Don't be done in by pretty girls!

(KITTY throws something at SMYTHE. He turns and sees her.)

Hey!!

(KITTY motions him to shut up and get out.)

(To LILLIE:) I've — I've got to go and take a p — ... break.

(He takes his watch out and shows KITTY, indicating "one hour!")

(To LILLIE:) I was only having you on, you know! I wanted to see just how far you'd go, that's all. Don't move a bloody inch — you hear me?!!

LILLIE. Yes.

(He is gone.)

(A few seconds pass as KITTY stands and looks at LILLIE — perhaps suppressing a laugh — then, she leaves the room and rushes back in, panting.)

MRS. TORY. Mrs. Langtry, oh, my god, are you all right?

LILLIE. Mrs. Tory! What are you doing here?

(MRS. TORY takes off Lillie's blindfold.)

How did you get here?

MRS. TORY. I followed them, ma'am. I saw them take you and jumped in the nearest cab. They haven't hurt you have they?

LILLIE. No, but Mrs. Tory, we've got to get out of here. Quick — my wrists...!

(KITTY attempts to untie her.)

MRS. TORY. I can't see how they've tied it...oh! I'm so nervous I'm falling apart!

LILLIE. Don't panic. Now listen to me — are you listening?

MRS. TORY. Yes, ma'am.

LILLIE. Is there someone outside the door?

MRS. TORY. There was, but he stepped away, that's how I was able to get in.

LILLIE. Do you know where he went?

MRS. TORY. No.

LILLIE. Was it that man, Smythe, or was it someone else?

MRS. TORY. I'm not sure. It's dark out there. I'm sorry, ma'am, I guess I'm not a very good heroine, am I.

LILLIE. Nonsense—you found me, didn't you. Let me think...can you see anything out the window?

MRS. TORY. (*Looking.*) No, ma'am, they're filthy.

LILLIE. All right—this is what we're going to do—

(*MRS. TORY can't hold it in any longer—she bursts out laughing—perhaps doubling over or falling to the floor.*)

Good god, woman, have you gone mad?

MRS. TORY. That's it exactly, ma'am— (*More laughter.*) —oh, what fun! I haven't felt like this since I was a child at Christmas. You're perplexed, aren't you? Ohhh, of course, you are. And you should be. You know, you're not very bright.

LILLIE. Who are you?

KITTY. Bright enough to ask that question though—perhaps there's hope for you. My real name is Kitty Dupree.

LILLIE. Not much of an improvement over Irma, is it?

(*KITTY slaps her.*)

KITTY. That'll be enough of that!

LILLIE. I guess it will.

KITTY. I've taken all the highhandedness from you I'm going to take. I bet your mind is reeling now — you're thinking, "What's going on? — Who can she possibly be?"

LILLIE. You're in cahoots with this Professor Moriarty and you wormed your way into my household and good graces with the intention of discovering the location of the necklace.

KITTY. Not bad, although I doubt a six-year-old would have had any trouble connecting the dots.

LILLIE. "One may smile, and smile, and be a villain."

KITTY. *Villainess.* Hamlet's not my favorite — too indecisive.

LILLIE. A whole year out of your life Kitty — with nothing to show for it. That must have been frustrating for you.

KITTY. Not half as frustrating as standing in the wings watching you butcher perfectly wonderful characters with your ham-fisted portrayals — meanwhile, I can't get cast as a ticket taker and all because I don't have your face and figure and your magical way with producers and writers.

LILLIE. You're right. It's not fair.

KITTY. I'm not Smythe — that won't work.

LILLIE. What do you want, Kitty?

KITTY. I want what I have coming to me for one year at hard labor: the 10,000 pounds you were prepared to pay.

LILLIE. And what do I get?

KITTY. Your letters and the photograph.

LILLIE. Aren't they currently in the possession of Professor Moriarty?

KITTY. He thinks they are. But what he really possesses are forgeries.

LILLIE. I guess that settles the argument about honor amongst thieves.

KITTY. I'm not a thief, I am an actress! Thieves steal; I am being meagerly compensated for endless hours as your personal handmaiden.

LILLIE. You have the letters on you?

KITTY. *(Patting herself.)* I have one right here.

LILLIE. May I see it?

KITTY. You may have a tantalizing glimpse — no more.

(KITTY steps towards her and unfolds a piece of paper. She quickly shows it to LILLIE and then folds it back up.)

LILLIE. That's my handwriting.

KITTY. It certainly is.

LILLIE. Read me the letter.

KITTY. My, aren't you the suspicious one.

LILLIE. Ten thousand pounds is a lot of money, Kitty. A person could start over with a sum like that.

(Pause.)

KITTY. *(Reading:)* "My darling Bertie, I love you so much that I quite tremble for fear you may get tired of me. Were that the case, I think I should die."

LILLIE. That's enough.

KITTY. Are you sure? It gets better.

LILLIE. You've got to give me more than the letters.

KITTY. Like what?

LILLIE. You've got to get me out of here.

KITTY. I'm not a magician, sweetheart — the only way you're getting out of here is by telling the Professor where that love trinket is.

(MORIARTY suddenly appears.)

MORIARTY. I'm afraid she is right, my dear.

(KITTY *gasps.*)

I'm sorry. Did I frighten you, Kitty?

KITTY. You—

MORIARTY. Yes?

KITTY. It hasn't been an hour.

MORIARTY. No, it hasn't. What do you have in your hand?

KITTY. Oh, this, it's...nothing.

(*She tucks it away.*)

MORIARTY. Let me guess—it's a letter written by Mrs. Langtry to the Prince—or, more accurately, a letter pretending to be written by Mrs. Langtry to the Prince. (*Looking to LILLIE:*) Correct?

(LILLIE *does not respond.*)

(*To LILLIE:*) You see, Mrs. Langtry, I *plan* more than *participate* in my endeavors—and that often necessitates that I associate with persons whose integrity and intelligence is at times somewhat lacking. (*To KITTY:*) Kitty, why would I read one of Mrs. Langtry's letters to a known forger?

(KITTY *struggles to think of an answer.*)

(*To LILLIE:*) You see, this is what I mean. (*To KITTY:*) Because I knew that at some point you would decide to strike out on your own using your greatest talent. Since it was easier to secure your failure than suppress your instincts, I read for you an actual letter that had only been altered in one respect—something I knew Mrs. Langtry could not fail to notice—no matter how fine your duplication of her hand.

(KITTY *looks at LILLIE.*)

LILLIE. I never began a letter "My darling, Bertie".

(KITTY *implodes a little.*)

MORIARTY. Now Kitty, don't fret—I never expect—nor require—an individual to overcome his nature—and I am still in need of your services today.

(SMYTHE shoves HOLMES and OSCAR WILDE into the room. He is pointing a revolver at them. They are both disheveled and it appears that HOLMES has blood on his shirt.)

OSCAR. *(To SMYTHE:)* If I were half a day younger, I'd thrash you!

MORIARTY. Well, well, Mr. Holmes, a pleasure to make your acquaintance.

HOLMES. I'm afraid you will be of a different opinion when this day ends, Professor Moriarty.

MORIARTY. You'll forgive me if I don't tremble at that statement.

HOLMES. A small wager, perhaps?

MORIARTY. Such as?

HOLMES. The return of Mrs. Langtry's personal papers.

MORIARTY. If?

HOLMES. If at the end of the day you find you've been outdone.

MORIARTY. *(Pause.)* Mrs. Langtry's papers it is—delivered personally and set ablaze.

(They smile at one another—the deal is done.)

Mr. Wilde—how do you happen to be here?

SMYTHE. He was lurking around Baker Street—tried to follow Flynn and Roddick—so they nabbed him.

OSCAR. I've come to rescue my friend, Mrs. Langtry.

LILLIE. Oh, Oscar.

MORIARTY. How gallant of you.

OSCAR. *(Seeing KITTY:)* And you!—you should be ashamed of yourself, Mrs. Tory.

KITTY. The name is Kitty Dupree!

OSCAR. Not much of an improvement over Irma, is it?

KITTY. (*Going for him:*) Why you idle weed—!

OSCAR. Counterfeit maid!

MORIARTY. SILENCE!! (*To SMYTHE:*) I thought I told you, it is the unimaginative mind that immediately turns to firearms.

SMYTHE. (*Indicating HOLMES:*) It's his! Roddick jumped him and this gentleman shot him in the arm—blood all over—Flynn's taking him to a doctor now. But Roddick managed to wrestle the gun from him— (*To HOLMES:*) —he wasn't king of the ring for nothing, you know!

MORIARTY. I hadn't heard you were a violent man, Mr. Holmes.

HOLMES. I'm not.

MORIARTY. Mr. Roddick might have something to say about that.

SMYTHE. This one (*Indicating OSCAR:*) was tackled without breaking a sweat.

OSCAR. I haven't eaten in over two hours—I'm in a weakened state!

HOLMES. Have they hurt you, Mrs. Langtry?

LILLIE. I'm all right.

HOLMES. Hello, Irma.

KITTY. Shut up!

HOLMES. (*To MORIARTY:*) Nice touch—her name—if a bit obvious.

MORIARTY. A calling card—no more.

KITTY. What are you saying about me?

HOLMES. Your name, or, alias, rather. Irma Tory. Rearrange the letters—what do you get?

(KITTY and SMYTHE think.)

LILLIE / OSCAR. *(Pause.)* ...Moriarty.

HOLMES. *(To MORIARTY:)* I wanted to return the favor somehow, but the only anagram I could come up with for Sherlock Holmes was “oh, smell her socks.”

(MORIARTY shakes his head.)

That’s what I thought. *(To LILLIE:)* Forgive me, Mrs. Langtry, for not revealing what I had learned of Mrs. Tory — but I didn’t want to frighten you and I felt we might gain an advantage if she were left in the dark a bit longer.

LILLIE. I understand.

KITTY. Some advantage that turned out to be.

MORIARTY. Well then, down to business. Since you seem to like guns so much, Mr. Holmes, Smythe, hold that one to his head, please.

SMYTHE. What?

MORIARTY. You heard me.

(Pause.)

Hold it to his head, or hold it to your own. You’ll be dead before the end of the day if don’t do as you’re told. *(Pause.)* Care for a piece of toffee?

(SMYTHE holds the gun to HOLMES’ head.)

Mrs. Langtry, where is the necklace?

(Pause.)

Mrs. Langtry, I give you my word, as a man of science, I do not make idle threats.

HOLMES. Don’t — you will be in great *danger* if you do.

MORIARTY. Are you prepared to die, Mr. Holmes? All for a handful of baubles?

HOLMES. Which belong to the Crown.

MORIARTY. It is my intention that the Crown should have them back.

KITTY. You didn't tell us—!

MORIARTY. Silence! Mrs. Langtry, I repeat, where is the necklace?

(*HOLMES and LILLIE stare at one another. He shakes his head "no."*)

OSCAR. This suspense is terrible. I hope it will last.

(*Pause.*)

LILLIE. I'm sorry, Mr. Holmes.

HOLMES. You will be if you tell him.

LILLIE. The sitting room. There's a sliding panel, above the right bell-pull.

OSCAR. Oh, Lillie...

HOLMES. I wish you hadn't done that, Mrs. Langtry.

MORIARTY. The lady had no choice. And now, if you'll excuse me—this is one errand I'll see to myself.

SMYTHE. What do we do with them?

MORIARTY. Nothing. Until you hear back from me. I'm sorry, Mrs. Langtry, that I can't simply take your word. If you've told me the truth, you'll be released. If you haven't, then let me wish you and Mr. Holmes and Mr. Wilde a speedy journey to the other side. (*To SMYTHE, indicating HOLMES:*) Stay on him. (*Handing KITTY a knife:*) Take this. I wouldn't provoke Kitty if I were you. She's quite the marksman—used to have an act called "Dupree's Daggers".

OSCAR. Kitty, *you modest thing*, you have carnival experience.

SMYTHE. (*Indicating OSCAR:*) What about him?

MORIARTY. The playwright won't give you any trouble.

OSCAR. (*Offended:*) You think not, do you?

MORIARTY. I think that you would avoid any action that might muss your attire—as it is you’ve already torn that fine Irish linen you’re wearing.

OSCAR. Where, where is it torn?!

LILLIE. Oh, Oscar...

MORIARTY. (*Going out:*) Farewell.

(*MORIARTY exits.*)

(*HOLMES takes out a rather large cigar and is about to light it.*)

SMYTHE. Look at you—in case you haven’t noticed there’s a lady present.

(*KITTY throws her dagger into the wall—or, if that’s not possible, she hits SMYTHE.*)

Ladies present.

(*HOLMES lights it and begins to wander.*)

HOLMES. I am something of an expert on tobacco ash, perhaps you’ve heard?

SMYTHE. Can’t say that I have.

HOLMES. This is my latest specimen—not without merit. (*Sniffing:*) Fresh caulk.

SMYTHE. So what.

HOLMES. (*Looking out the window:*) Those iron bars look rusted out to me.

SMYTHE. I’m sure that’s none of my concern.

HOLMES. It might be to some poor devil who’s been caught in a trap. Didn’t this used to be the Hamilton Gas Works?

SMYTHE. How should I know?

HOLMES. Those tiny letters on that wheel over there: H. G. W. Mrs. Langtry, you're shivering.

(LILLIE immediately starts to shiver.)

Oscar, put something over Mrs. Langtry's shoulders, would you?

(HOLMES gives OSCAR a meaningful look, perhaps down at LILLIE's wrists.)

OSCAR. Right...here you are old girl. We'll have you warmed up in a jiffy.

LILLIE. Thank you.

(OSCAR kneels beside her as though comforting her and begins to, discreetly, untie her hands.)

KITTY. I bet you think you're a lot smarter than we are.

HOLMES. Just more observant. For instance, when Smythe came to Mrs. Langtry's to collect the ransom, you might recall that I—well, Mrs. Padgett—commented that he had squinted at *almost* everyone in the room.

KITTY. So?

HOLMES. The only person he didn't squint at was you—because he already knew you.

OSCAR. Oh, well done!

KITTY. Quiet, you!

HOLMES. Not to mention the fact that the rancor which you and Smythe displayed toward one another is the kind usually reserved for blood relations, not strangers. But then I suspected you before I met you.

KITTY. Now this I've got to hear.

HOLMES. Mrs. Langtry was assaulted in her dressing room at a point in the play when everyone else was on stage and when there was a collective shriek from the audience covering her cry for help. The question became, therefore, was the assailant lucky, or was he

supplied with information from someone who was intimately involved in the production? Mrs. Langtry informed me that you were her dutiful assistant, both at home and *at the theatre*. You told Smythe the exact moment to enter her dressing room, as well as the fact that the firearm on her table was merely a prop. And then, of course, when you told us your Christian name – well.

SMYTHE. Bloody hell if you aren't some kind of machine!

(HOLMES moves about the room. At some point he is near KITTY.)

KITTY. Good god, man, don't you ever bathe? You smell like rotten vegetables.

SMYTHE. Stop moving about!

HOLMES. Why? Are you afraid I'll do something?

KITTY. What could you do?

(HOLMES knocks the lamp off the table and the room goes dark – just the glow of the cigar. Sounds of gasps, shuffling and furniture moving against the floor.)

Shoot him, you fool!

SMYTHE. I can't see!

KITTY. Over there!

(The glow of the cigar moves toward the window.)

Follow the cigar! He's at the window!

(Sound of glass breaking.)

He's getting away! Here's something to remember me by, Mr. Holmes!

(Sound of a knife driving into wood.)

(Suddenly: the room is once again illuminated – SMYTHE has found the lamp. OSCAR and LILLIE are gone. Kitty's knife is in the wall by the window and the cigar is sticking out of a crevice close by. HOLMES appears from behind the nearly closed door.)

HOLMES. (*Pointing:*) You'll find the cigar there—

(*KITTY and SMYTHE turn to look at him.*)

—we'll see ourselves out!

(*KITTY and SMYTHE run to the door—HOLMES shuts it and the cacophony of locks and sliding iron bars is heard once again.*)

(*KITTY and SMYTHE pound on the door as the lights fade.*)

Scene 2

Baker Street.

(*It is the middle of the night now—HOLMES, OSCAR, and LILLIE are in the midst of explaining their adventure to WATSON.*)

WATSON. Then what happened?

OSCAR. I decided that I simply had to take matters into my own hands— (*Suddenly, to HOLMES:*) —you don't think she forgot the sandwiches, do you? I'm feeling rather like a bear waking from hibernation.

HOLMES. Mrs. McGlynn never forgets.

OSCAR. Very well—where was I?—oh, yes—I leapt into action when I realized that Lillie had been taken against her will— (*To LILLIE:*) —Mr. Holmes had instructed me to stay with you at all times since he was now aware that Mrs. Tory was not your dedicated servant. But then you insisted on going out, *unencumbered*, as you put it—

HOLMES. Mrs. Langtry, I gave you specific instructions not to leave your home, for your own safety. What could possibly have enticed you?

LILLIE. I needed—I don't know—to think—to be alone—

WATSON. I often need time to myself—to replenish— (*He touches his chest:*) —here—you know.

LILLIE. You understand then.

OSCAR. Well, I don't. So then I had to stay on Mrs. Tory — I made up some ridiculous excuse — "I'm writing a play about a fascinating domestic servant" — but she was obviously agitated and the next thing I knew she excused herself to — *you know* — and escaped through a window the size of a porthole — (*He shudders.*) — [what a sight that must have been.]¹ That's when I went to Baker Street — saw you getting into a cab when some ruffian pushed me in as well.

WATSON. Yes, but Holmes, how did the blood get on you?

OSCAR. That's the best part — he shot a man — I saw the whole thing!

(The door opens and MRS. MCGLYNN comes in pushing the tea cart from Act One.)

HOLMES. Just anywhere, Mrs. McGlynn.

OSCAR. Careful — that's precious cargo!

(She parks the cart.)

Where are my cucumber sandwiches?!

(Suddenly MRS. MCGLYNN whirls around and reveals herself to be KITTY. She is holding a revolver.)

WATSON. Oh, dear!

OSCAR. Not you again...!

KITTY. You see, Mr. Holmes, you're not the only one who can impersonate a woman! I mean...

OSCAR. No, no, you got it right the first time.

KITTY. You'd be wise not to push Kitty Dupree, my friend.

OSCAR. Dupree — is that *(With a withering tone:)* French?

KITTY. And what's wrong with being FRENCH?!

(OSCAR wipes his eye as though he'd been pelted with spittle.)

OSCAR. I think you just answered that question.

1 Cut if Mrs. Tory is small.

HOLMES. Where is Mrs. McGlynn?

KITTY. Where else—passed out over a bottle of whiskey. (*To OSCAR:*) She is *Irish* after all.

HOLMES. What is it you want, Kitty?

KITTY. Payment—for services rendered.

LILLIE. Kitty wants 10,000 pounds.

WATSON. Perfectly absurd—!

KITTY. It's not enough.

OSCAR. You are a greedy one, aren't you Kitty—and don't point that thing at me!

KITTY. You—you're the one I'd really like to plug! I could never get an audition for one your precious productions!

OSCAR. Isn't it enough that life is badly cast—must plays be too?

KITTY. (*To LILLIE:*) You—stand up!

WATSON. (*Rising:*) Stay where you are, Mrs. Langtry.

KITTY. Don't play the hero, sir, in my story they wind up dead.

WATSON. Fire at will!!

HOLMES. (*To KITTY:*) You will not harm, Dr. Watson.

KITTY. We'll see. You're coming with me, Lillie. Get up!

LILLIE. (*Standing:*) Where are we going?

KITTY. You're taking me to that necklace—must be pretty special if it belongs to the Crown.

LILLIE. Don't you think we're a little late? You heard me tell Professor Moriarty where it was.

KITTY. I don't think you told him the truth.

LILLIE. Are you calling me a liar, Kitty?

KITTY. I'm not sure what I'd call you. A woman who has as many, shall we say, *gentlemen friends*, as you do. Shallow might be the generous term for it.

WATSON. How dare you speak to her that way!

OSCAR. The people who love only once in their lives are really the shallow people, Kitty. What they call their loyalty, and their fidelity, I call either the lethargy of custom or their lack of imagination. Faithfulness is to the emotional life what consistency is to the life of the intellect—simply a confession of failures.

(Pause.)

KITTY. What...?

OSCAR. I know, I am so clever that sometimes I don't understand a single word of what I am saying.

KITTY. *(To LILLIE:)* Let's go.

(She motions with the revolver that LILLIE should go to the door. LILLIE does so.)

(WATSON leaps to his feet and bars the door.)

WATSON. You're not going anywhere—not while there's breath in my body!

KITTY. A bullet to the lung will take care of that. Move aside!

HOLMES. Watson—do you trust me?

WATSON. Completely.

HOLMES. Stay where you are.

KITTY. You'll regret that, my friend. *(To WATSON:)* Last chance—**MOVE ASIDE!**

WATSON. I will not!

KITTY. Au revoir, Doctor!

(WATSON prepares to be shot—OSCAR closes his eyes.)

(She pulls the trigger—nothing. She pulls it again, and again.)

HOLMES. Examine your weapon carefully, Kitty. Is it familiar to you? It should be.

KITTY. What?

HOLMES. You took it from Smythe, correct?

KITTY. After he took it from you!

HOLMES. And I borrowed it from the Lyceum Theatre.

KITTY. But...you shot Roddick with this gun!

HOLMES. I shot no one. Smythe saw Roddick and me struggle. A gun went off. Roddick went down. However, the weapon that Smythe took from me, was not the one that discharged—Roddick took that. It was the one you are now holding. A gun you must have seen dozens of times backstage at the Lyceum Theatre.

(KITTY examines the gun carefully.)

WATSON. *(To KITTY:)* You *see* but you do not *observe*.

OSCAR. I was right there and I missed it! Brilliant!

KITTY. Bloody hell!

WATSON. Language!

HOLMES. Remember back at the Gas Works—you said I smelled like “rotten vegetables.”

KITTY. You still do.

HOLMES. That was very observant of you. *(Indicating the “blood” on his clothes:)* Tomato.

KITTY. But Roddick? How in hell did you pay him off?

HOLMES. In advance. Roddick may be a criminal of the lowest order, but several years ago, for the first time in his career, he was going to prison for a crime he did not commit. After reading about his case in the press, I came to his defense. He was acquitted—and, as he has proven—eager to return the favor. He informed me that

the destination of the windowless cab ride was the Gas Works and agreed to take part in a mock scuffle during which we would exchange firearms.

KITTY. Then the whole time Smythe had this gun to your head—

HOLMES. —there was no real threat.

(KITTY slumps to the floor.)

OSCAR. But, Lillie, you couldn't have known that.

WATSON. You were unaware of the ruse, Mrs. Langtry?

LILLIE. I was. Until Smythe held the gun to his head, and Mr. Holmes said, "Don't—you will be in great *danger* if you do." And then, just for an instant, he looked at the gun and I—*observed*—that it was my prop gun from the play, "Danger."

WATSON. But you told him where the necklace was.

LILLIE. No, Dr. Watson—Kitty's right—the necklace has been moved.

WATSON. Ah.

LILLIE. I enjoyed acting with you very much, Mr. Holmes.

HOLMES. Professor Moriarty left us alone with Kitty and Smythe because his instincts told him that you were telling the truth. That is a testament to your talent, Mrs. Langtry.

LILLIE. It seems I've given some of my best performances off stage.

HOLMES. I must admit—I found performing that little scene to be almost...fun.

OSCAR. You'll reconsider playing Algernon, then?

(KITTY suddenly bolts from the room. WATSON and OSCAR start to go after her.)

WATSON. Holmes!!

(Suddenly MORIARTY appears from behind the tea cart. He holds a pistol. [The actor playing MORIARTY may actually hide

in the tea cart if possible, or enter through a trapdoor behind the cart if the stage permits.])

MORIARTY. STOP!

(WATSON and OSCAR freeze.)

OSCAR. Good god, where did you come from?!

MORIARTY. The tea cart.

WATSON. But how in the world did you—?

HOLMES. I suspect Professor Moriarty's talents are not all in his head. May I suppose you are double-jointed, sir?

MORIARTY. You may.

HOLMES. Why the delay in your entrance?

MORIARTY. Kitty. She's in a bit of a financial bind at present. I told if her she could get the 10,000 pounds on her own, she was welcome to it. You know, ladies first. Unfortunately, she failed. Well, down to business. Mrs. Langtry, you lied to me. But I'm nothing if not a forgiving man, therefore, this is what I want—

HOLMES. Isn't that rather beneath you, Professor?

MORIARTY. Forgiveness?

HOLMES. I refer to what's in your hand. Didn't we hear you say to Smythe—and I quote: "it is the unimaginative mind that immediately turns to fire arms."

MORIARTY. What do you suggest?

(HOLMES indicates his collection of swords.)

HOLMES. A duel.

MORIARTY. You're assuming I know something of the art, Mr. Holmes.

HOLMES. I never assume. You gave yourself away. Your quote about the unimaginative mind is from Dominico Angelo—1717 to

1802—founder of the most famous school of fencing in all of London and a well-known master of the art.

(Pause. MORIARTY smiles.)

(Indicating his collection:) Your choice of weapons, sir? *(Pause.)* Unless, of course, you think you're not quite up to the challenge...

(Pause.)

MORIARTY. Épée.

(MORIARTY empties his pistol—puts the ammunition in his pocket and tosses the pistol to OSCAR.)

HOLMES. Excellent.

OSCAR. *(Handing it off:)* Lillie, take this awful thing...

(MORIARTY and HOLMES choose their weapons and the match begins.)

(LILLIE, OSCAR, and WATSON react to the match with gasps and outbursts. It is soon clear that MORIARTY is out of his depth.)

(HOLMES thrusts and appears to make contact—MORIARTY grabs himself, groans and falls back.)

WATSON. *(Rushing to MORIARTY:)* He's injured!

HOLMES. No, Watson!

(MORIARTY snatches a small sword and holds it to WATSON'S throat. He backs up to the door, then pushes WATSON away and rushes from the room.)

(HOLMES runs to WATSON. LILLIE follows.)

My friend, are you hurt?

WATSON. No...no...

LILLIE. Are you sure, Dr. Watson?

WATSON. Yes, I'm—I'm quite sure.

LILLIE. You risked your life for me, sir.

WATSON. Nonsense. The weapon wasn't real.

LILLIE. Yes, but you didn't know that.

OSCAR. Why did he ever agree to a duel?

HOLMES. When vanity rears its head, even the greatest of intellects may be led astray.

WATSON. Shall we go after him?

HOLMES. Lestrade will take it from here.

LILLIE. Lestrade?

HOLMES. Scotland Yard.

LILLIE. You told Scotland Yard of this?

HOLMES. Only the barest facts, I assure you.

LILLIE. *(Pause.)* Nothing's changed—Professor Moriarty still has my letters and photograph.

HOLMES. Mrs. Langtry, where did you really go when you needed to be alone yesterday?

LILLIE. You never stop thinking, do you?

HOLMES. When the pieces of the puzzle do not fit—no.

LILLIE. You must have a theory.

HOLMES. It is a capital mistake to theorize before one has all the data. Insensibly one begins to twist facts to suit theories, instead of theories to suit facts.

LILLIE. You're a remarkable man, you know. Not once have you judged me. You could have taken the necklace and you didn't. And you saved my life tonight. *(Pause.)* I think I shall tell you.

WATSON. Mrs. Langtry, are you sure you're up to this. It's quite late, perhaps it would be better if—

LILLIE. I think the hour suits the story.

OSCAR. Lillie, you needn't tell us anything.

LILLIE. Oscar, there is something even you do not know.

OSCAR. What?! Tell me this instant!

LILLIE. (*To HOLMES:*) I went to see someone — someone who means more to me than life itself. But I was *snatched* before we could meet.

OSCAR. Yes, and...

LILLIE. The photograph. There are three people in it. Myself, Bertie and — a baby.

OSCAR. Oh, dear lord!

LILLIE. A little girl, born in 1881 without the benefit of —

WATSON. You needn't say it.

HOLMES. So, the "innocent heart" that would be broken was not Bertie's wife, but —

LILLIE. My daughter's. Professor Moriarty did not threaten to go to the press with the letters and the photograph. He threatened to go to my child and reveal to her our true relationship — that I am not her doting aunt — that I am, in fact, her mother.

OSCAR. Wait — '81? — weren't you seeing that congenital idiot, Prince Louis of Battenberg?

LILLIE. Bertie and I reconciled for — one evening. When I discovered I was...

WATSON. No need.

LILLIE. ...he sent me to Paris to have the child. He visited me there. In fact, that's where the picture was taken. She's only 12 years old. I couldn't let her find out this way. I thought, just maybe, there was a chance that I might keep the necklace and the secret. It's difficult to explain. You must think me a hard person to risk her learning the truth — but that necklace — it's not just a necklace — it means — it meant that —

HOLMES. That the Prince of Wales considered you his queen.

LILLIE. Yes. (*To WATSON:*) A little more than a “youthful indiscretion,” I’m afraid.

WATSON. Nonsense. Some indiscretions are simply *more* youthful than others, that’s all.

LILLIE. I think I should like to bottle you, Dr. Watson.

WATSON. (*Love stunned:*) All right.

(There is a distinctive knock at the door.)

OSCAR. Good god, now what?!

HOLMES. (*Calling out:*) One moment, please! (*Turning to the group:*) I need to ask you all a favor – I have an appointment with someone just now – would you mind retiring briefly to the next room?

OSCAR. Must we? I’d like to stay.

HOLMES. I’m sorry, Oscar – this is private.

OSCAR. I know, that’s why I’d like to stay.

WATSON. You’re sure you won’t need me, Holmes?

HOLMES. No, Watson – I am certain there is no threat.

WATSON. Very well.

(WATSON opens the door to another room.)

Mrs. Langtry, after you.

LILLIE. Thank you... (*Seeing that OSCAR is lagging behind:*) ...Oscar.

OSCAR. Coming. (*To HOLMES:*) We’ll be just in here should you, you know –

HOLMES. Thank you, Oscar.

(They are gone – but the door has been left ever so slightly ajar.)

You may come in!

(ABDUL KARIM *enters.*)

KARIM. Good evening, Mr. Holmes. Or I should say, good morning.

HOLMES. Good morning, Mr. Karim.

KARIM. I bring greetings from Her Majesty the Queen and the Prince of Wales.

HOLMES. Her Majesty has been apprised of the situation?

KARIM. Yes.

HOLMES. I see.

KARIM. I have returned to hear of the success of your mission and to collect what belongs to the Crown. Her Majesty was pleased to hear that you had offered to assist the Royal Family with this unfortunate affair. She knows that you are considered a man of great discretion as well as keen intellect. Further, she wishes to reward you for your —

HOLMES. You might as well stop right there, Mr. Karim.

KARIM. Why?

HOLMES. I do not have the necklace.

KARIM. ...*Yet.* Is it a matter of hours or days?

HOLMES. It is a matter of my having failed.

KARIM. You could not locate it?

HOLMES. It's not that. In fact, I had it in my hands at one point.

KARIM. You had it in your —!? You mean, you let it get away from you?

HOLMES. That is precisely what I mean.

KARIM. Is there no hope?

HOLMES. None, I'm afraid.

KARIM. After your assurance! You gave your word!

HOLMES. I know.

KARIM. This is scandalous! You misled the Crown, sir!

HOLMES. I did and I am sorry.

KARIM. The *great Sherlock Holmes* — we shall see that you are brought to answer for this, and I can tell you it won't be anything less than a fatal blow to your reputation. We will make certain of that. In fact, I would suggest that you relocate, sir. Somewhere where this sort of gross dereliction is not frowned upon — the Continent perhaps. Or America. Good-bye, Mr. Holmes.

(LILLIE rushes into the room followed by OSCAR and WATSON.)

LILLIE. Wait, don't go!!

(KARIM turns back.)

KARIM. You — you are the woman.

LILLIE. I have something for you.

(LILLIE lifts a ruffle from her dress and draws the necklace box out of a hidden panel of cloth.)

OSCAR. Oh, Lillie, well done!

(KARIM comes to her.)

LILLIE. First, you must forget everything that Mr. Holmes just told you. You must report to the Queen that Mr. Holmes performed his duty admirably and with great discretion toward all parties. Will you do that?

KARIM. Yes.

LILLIE. I have your word?

KARIM. You do.

LILLIE. Here. Take this to Her Majesty.

KARIM. The Crown thanks you.

LILLIE. Tell the Crown I said...you're welcome.

KARIM. Good morning.

LILLIE. Good morning.

HOLMES. *(Under his breath:)* "So shines a good deed in a naughty world."

(KARIM exits.)

OSCAR. Brilliant choice, Lillie. Forgive your enemies; nothing annoys them so much.

HOLMES. You didn't have to do that.

LILLIE. You were right. I was holding on to it for more reasons than I knew. Do you think Professor Moriarty will go to my daughter?

WATSON. I'll challenge him to another duel if he does!

HOLMES. I cannot say for certain, Mrs. Langtry, I can only tell you that I have never known Moriarty to continue playing the game once he knows he has been bested.

(There is another knock at the door.)

Come in!

OSCAR. This place is busier than the cloakroom at Victoria Station.

HOLMES. *(Pause:)* I said come in!!

OSCAR. What is that smell?

(HOLMES goes to the door, stops suddenly and touches the door with the palm of his hand.)

HOLMES. Watson! Blankets—quickly!!

(WATSON grabs the blankets. HOLMES opens the door—an intense light—a fire has been set. HOLMES and WATSON run out and cover the fire—the light goes out. They return—HOLMES sees a note stuck to the door and removes it.)

Your letters and photograph are now ash, Mrs. Langtry.

OSCAR. He made good on his wager?

LILLIE. Really?

OSCAR. What's that you've got?

HOLMES. (*Reading:*) "Do you imagine, Mr. Holmes, that this is the end?" (*He tucks the note in his pocket.*) You see, Mrs. Langtry, for Moriarty, it was all about the hunt and, in this case, the hope that I would become involved.

OSCAR. What a heart-pounding evening of fiction!

WATSON. Why fiction?

OSCAR. Mr. Holmes...?

HOLMES. "Because the good ended happily, and the bad unhappily and that is what fiction means."

WATSON. ...my goodness, I'm all in.

OSCAR. Look at the time! If I don't get my ten hours, I'm useless. Lillie, shall we...?

(LILLIE goes to HOLMES. WATSON and OSCAR know enough to turn away.)

LILLIE. (*Quietly:*) You've been more loyal to me than any man I've ever known.

HOLMES. Please don't say that.

LILLIE. I think perhaps I have affected you in some small way.

HOLMES. Mrs. Langtry, I have a confession to make.

LILLIE. No you don't. You're not the only one who observes things, you know. You could easily have seen to it that that door was closed.

(They look at each other for a long moment. He takes her hand—draws it to his face—it looks as though he is going to kiss it, but he doesn't.)

HOLMES. So very pale.

(Pause.)

LILLIE. Could you ever...?

HOLMES. ...in another time, perhaps, yes.

LILLIE. How I should like to believe you.

HOLMES. "Lady, by yonder blessed moon I swear
That tips with silver all these fruit-tree tops —"

LILLIE. "O, swear not by the moon, the inconstant moon,
That monthly changes in her circled orb,
Lest that thy love prove likewise variable."

HOLMES. "What shall I swear by?"

LILLIE. "Do not swear at all;
Or, if thou wilt, swear by thy gracious self,
Which is the god of my idolatry,
And I'll believe thee."

HOLMES. *(Pause.)* "Adieu, be happy."

(Then suddenly — as if a spell had been broken:)

LILLIE. Oscar, come, let's see if there's a cab to be found.

(They go to the door.)

HOLMES. You were very brave tonight, Oscar.

OSCAR. Really? You're not just saying that?

HOLMES. No.

OSCAR. I'm very suspicious of compliments, you know, so I attach great importance to your being —

HOLMES. Earnest.

OSCAR. Y-yes — *(Under his breath:)* — the importance of being... *(He pats himself down for his notepad as he leaves.)*

WATSON. Good night, Mr. Wilde.

OSCAR. (*Perhaps writing.*) Hm? Oh, yes, good night, (*To HOLMES:*) good night... (*He exits.*)

WATSON. Good night, Mrs. Langtry.

LILLIE. Dr. Watson, I think I shall carry you with me always—just here— (*She places her hand over her heart.*) —that is, if you don't mind.

WATSON. (*Riveted:*) I don't mind.

OSCAR. (*Popping his head in:*) Lillie, my love, please! I'm nearly cata-tonic with starvation!

LILLIE. Coming, Oscar!

(There is a final look between HOLMES and LILLIE—and she is gone.)

WATSON. What an evening! And to think that I missed it all!

HOLMES. Medical emergencies come first, Dr. Watson.

WATSON. I suppose so.

HOLMES. And seeing that the patient in dire need was your soon to be mother-in-law...

WATSON. Yes.

HOLMES. What was the cause of her collapse?

WATSON. Indigestion.

HOLMES. Ah.

WATSON. Mrs. Langtry was taken with you, Holmes.

(HOLMES starts to protest.)

No, don't deny it— It was crystal clear. And why not? Unlike the Prince of Wales, you were willing to sacrifice everything for her—namely, your reputation. Sorry about the open door, by the time I saw it she was on her way to you.

HOLMES. I intended that she should hear the conversation, Watson.

WATSON. You did?

HOLMES. And she knew that I intended for her to hear it.

WATSON. I see. You suspected she wouldn't be able to stand —

HOLMES. Exactly.

WATSON. But to hear the Queen's attendant speak to you like that, I—

HOLMES. He was only performing as instructed.

WATSON. No!

HOLMES. Remember when we were leaving Pont Street? I said that I was going to be forced to resort to a piece of trickery which I would find wholly unappetizing.

WATSON. Yes.

HOLMES. Mr. Karim was told to come here and to give me as thorough a dressing-down as he could muster — calling into question my loyalty to the Crown as well as my reputation. I thought he did very well.

WATSON. And, of course, Mrs. Langtry was not aware of this.

HOLMES. No.

WATSON. It had to be done, Holmes.

HOLMES. Yes. Still...

WATSON. Still...

HOLMES. A remarkable woman.

WATSON. I thought so.

HOLMES. If I had known her as I do now — earlier, perhaps...

WATSON. (*Wistfully, for himself:*) Yes.

HOLMES. "For of all sad words of tongue or pen, The saddest are these —"

WATSON. “It might have been” ...Holmes!

HOLMES. Enough. That way madness lies. *(Pause.)* I feel adrift to-night, Watson – as though I had suddenly lost my moorings.

WATSON. I’ll stay with you, Holmes.

HOLMES. No, it’s late – you should be getting home.

WATSON. Nonsense, I’m not the least bit tired.

(A look comes across HOLMES’ face—he springs to his mini laboratory.)

What?

HOLMES. I’ve had a thought...about that serum.

(WATSON rests his head back and closes his eyes.)

WATSON. Ohh...

HOLMES. *(Thinking aloud:)* ...Yes...that might just work...

WATSON. The one that suppresses all signs of... *(Fading.)*

HOLMES. Life, yes – I was thinking – what if –

(WATSON snores loudly. HOLMES might turn down the light or arrange a blanket on WATSON.)

Good night, sweet prince.

WATSON. *(Barely audible:)* Good night, Holmes.

(HOLMES holds a beaker up to the light and swirls its contents – WATSON drifts off as...)

(Lights fade.)

End of Play