

# THE UNMASKING OF SHERLOCK HOLMES

TEN-MINUTE PLAY

**By Roy C. Booth**

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## **THE UNMASKING OF SHERLOCK HOLMES** **By Roy C. Booth**

**BASED ON THE ORIGINAL PASTICHE BY ARTHUR CHAPMAN**

**SYNOPSIS:** Literature's most famous detective encounters literature's first detective.

### **CAST OF CHARACTERS** *(THREE MEN, ONE WOMAN)*

**SHERLOCK HOLMES** ..... The brilliant English detective.

**DR. WATSON** ..... The esteemed assistant.

**MRS. HUDSON** ..... The landlady.

**MONSIEUR C. AUGUSTE DUPIN** ..... The brilliant French detective.

### **TIME**

Sometime during February of 1905.

### **SCENE**

The sitting room of Sherlock Holmes at 221 Baker Street.

### **PROPS PLOT**

#### **MRS. HUDSON:**

Small tray  
Calling card

#### **WATSON:**

Fingerprint cards  
Hypodermic needle

**HOLMES:**

Pipe

Box of matches

Tin of tobacco

**DUPIN:**

Meerschaum pipe

**AUTHOR'S NOTES**

The characters portrayed in this play do not necessarily need to smoke, and may just clench their pipes with their teeth if need be.

*The Unmasking of Sherlock Holmes* has been performed in Bloomington, Brainerd, and Hibbing, Minnesota, Fargo, North Dakota, and in Enugu, Nigeria.

This basis for this play came from the pastiche that originally appeared in the February, 1905 issue of *The Critic and Literary World*, G. P. Putnam's Sons, New York.

**AT RISE:**

*HOLMES and WATSON are seated in discussion. On the table is a hypodermic syringe partially blocked by a Holmesian pipe, a box of matches, and a tin of tobacco. An ink pad and a few cards with sets of fingerprints upon them are scattered all about, also.*

**WATSON:** So, do you truly believe that these . . . *(Grabs a set of cards and the ink pad, and inspects them.)* Finger prints will revolutionize the detection process? Hm! *(Puts the items back.)*

**HOLMES:** Why, I almost positively can guarantee it, my good Watson. The way science and the forensic arts have progressed since my absence, why I have every belief that . . .

*Enter MRS. HUDSON carrying a small tray with a calling card on it.*

**HOLMES:** Yes, Mrs. Hudson?

**MRS. HUDSON:** For you, Mr. Holmes. *(Presents the tray.)*

**HOLMES:** *(Takes the card, but does not look at it.)* Hm. Thank you, Mrs. Hudson.

**MRS. HUDSON:** Anything else, Mr. Holmes?

**HOLMES:** No. That will be all. Thank you.

*MRS. HUDSON exits.*

**WATSON:** Well, who is it? *(Rubs hands together.)* Another case, perhaps? Well?

**HOLMES:** Let's analyze the facts as they have been presented, shall we, my good Watson?

**WATSON:** Jolly good! Tell me, Holmes, what have you already deduced?

**HOLMES:** Well, judging from the way Mrs. Hudson paused outside the door before she entered the room, I deduce that this case is of the utmost importance, perhaps one of dire haste and danger to myself, and possibly to you, too.

**WATSON:** Remarkable!

**HOLMES:** Quite. Notice how she quivered, oh so slightly, when she presented this seemingly innocent scrap of paper to me?

**WATSON:** Um, no, no I did not. She looked quite her usual self to me.

**HOLMES:** Aha! To the untrained eye, perhaps, but not to mine!

**WATSON:** Astounding!

**HOLMES:** And now, this seemingly innocent scrap of paper is now in my possession. (*Fingers it.*) Judging from the feel of the paper fibers from which it was constructed, I deduce that this card was not printed here in London, but . . . (*Dramatically fingers it some more.*) But from across the Channel – in France – in Paris, to be quite precise, somewhere near the theatre district, on the west bank of the Seine, if I must dare say. Yes, he is French, small of build, and . . . (*Sniffs the card.*) Has a penchant for smoking meerschaum pipes, and uses only the highest grades of tobacco. He is right handed and often works with the police.

**WATSON:** Good heavens, Holmes, you never cease to amaze me!

**HOLMES:** Yes, well. (*Smiles a slight smile.*) And now, the true identity of our new admirer. (*HOLMES glances at the card casually.*) Good Lord in heaven! (*Drops the card as he bolts up out of his chair.*)

**WATSON:** I say, what is this all about, eh? (*Bends over and snaps up the card.*)

**HOLMES:** (*In a near panic.*) He's here! He's actually here, Watson, he's actually here!

**WATSON:** Hm. All it says here is "Monsieur C. Auguste Dupin, Paris." Good show, it seems you nailed it right on the head with this one!

**HOLMES:** (*Terrified.*) Damn! After all of these years! Oh, how I have dreaded this day! (*Glances about as if trying to find a spot to hide.*)

**WATSON:** Who is...?

**HOLMES:** Quick, through my bedroom to...

*The door flies open to reveal C. AUGUSTE DUPIN, the famous, and first, great literary detective, the creation of Edgar Allan Poe. He is a young man, slight of build, and unmistakably French of feature.*

**DUPIN:** Pardon my unceremonious entrance, Mr. Holmes . . . *(He draws out a meerschaum pipe, fills it, and then proceeds to smoke it with long, deliberate puffs.)* I was afraid, however, that you would not care to see me, so I came in before you had an opportunity of telling your landlady to send me away.

**HOLMES:** *(Mops his brow, and then mumbles meekly.)* But . . . but . . . I thought y-y-you were dead, Monsieur Dupin.

**DUPIN:** And people thought you were dead, too, Mr. Sherlock Holmes. But you can be brought to life after being hurled from a cliff in the Alps, why can't I come out of a respectable grave just to chat with you? You know my originator, Mr. Edgar Allan Poe, was very fond of bringing people out of their graves.

**HOLMES:** *(Testily.)* Yes, yes, I'll admit that I have read that fellow, Poe. Clever writer in some things. Some of his detective stories about you are not half bad, either. *(Crosses to the table, fumbles about for his pipe, and then clenches it between his teeth.)*

*The two famous detectives square off, as if ready to duel to the death.*

**DUPIN:** *(Sarcastically, sizing up his opponent.)* No, not half bad. Do you remember the story of ***The Purloined Letter***, for instance?

*WATSON shrugs. HOLMES glares at DUPIN.*

**DUPIN:** What a little gem of a story that is! When I get to reading it over I forget all about you and your feeble limitations.

**WATSON:** Hm?

**DUPIN:** There is nothing forced there. Everything is as sure as fate itself – not a false note – not a thing dragged in by the heels. And the solution of it all so simple that it makes most of your artifices seem clumsy in comparison.

**WATSON:** I say!

**HOLMES:** *(Snapping.)* But if Poe had such a good thing in you, Monsieur Dupin, why didn't he make more of you?

**DUPIN:** Ah, that is where Mr. Poe proved himself a real literary artist. When he had a good thing he knew enough not to ruin his reputation by running it into the ground. Suppose, after writing ***The Murders of the Rue Morgue*** around me as the central character, he had written two or three books of short stories in which I figured. Then suppose he had let them dramatize me and further parade me before the public.

**WATSON:** Hm!

**DUPIN:** Likewise suppose, after he had decently killed me off and had announced that he would write no more detective stories, he had yielded to the blandishments of his publishers and had brought out another interminable lot of tales about me?

**WATSON:** Oh.

*HOLMES shoots WATSON a look.*

**WATSON:** Oh, dear.

**DUPIN:** Why, naturally, most of the stuff would have been worse than mediocre, and people would have forgotten all about that masterpiece, ***The Murders of the Rue Morgue***, and also about ***The Purloined Letter***, so covered would those gems be a mass of trash.

**HOLMES:** (*Sighing moodily.*) Oh, I'll admit that my string is overplayed . . .

*HOLMES reaches for the hypodermic syringe on the table that WATSON quickly slides out of his reach.*

**WATSON:** Ut!

**HOLMES:** (*Shoots WATSON another look.*) But maybe Poe would have overplayed you if he could have drawn down a dollar a word for all he could write about you.

**DUPIN:** (*Thoughtfully.*) Poor Edgar – poor misunderstood Edgar! – maybe he would. Few enough dollars he had in his stormy life. But at the same time, no matter what his rewards, I think he was versatile genius enough to have found something new at the right time. At any rate he would not have filched the product of another's brain and palmed it off as his own.

**HOLMES:** (*Sits, flustered.*) But great Scott, man! You don't mean to say that no one else but Poe has a right to utilize the theory of analysis in a detective story, do you?

**WATSON:** Hmph!

**DUPIN:** No, but I see how closely you follow me in all other particulars. I am out of sorts with fortune and so are you.

**WATSON:** What? How?

**DUPIN:** I am always smoking when thinking out my plans of attack, and so are you.

*HOLMES quickly removes the pipe, and places it on the table.*

**DUPIN:** I have an admiring friend to set down everything I say and do, and so do you.

**WATSON:** (*Pleased.*) Hm!

**DUPIN:** I am always dazzling the chief of police with much better theories than he can ever work out, and so are you.

**HOLMES:** (*Mopping his forehead again.*) I know, I know. It looks like a pretty bad case against me. I've always drawn freely upon you. Monsieur Dupin, and the quotation marks haven't always been used as they should have been where credit was due.

**WATSON:** Oh, my.

**HOLMES:** (*Stands.*) But after all I am not the most slavish imitation my author has ever produced. Have you ever read his book, ***The White Company*** and compared it with ***The Cloister and the Hearth***? No? Well do so, if you want to get what might be termed "transplanted atmosphere."

**WATSON:** Ho, ho!

**DUPIN:** (*Resignedly.*) Well, it seems to be a great age for the piratical appropriating of other men's ideas. As for myself, I don't care a rap about your stealing my thunder, Sherlock Holmes.

**WATSON:** Eh?

**DUPIN:** In fact, you're a pretty decent chap, even though you are trying my patience with your continual refusal to retire; and besides you only make me shine the brighter in comparison. I don't even hold that ***Dancing Men*** story against you, in which you made use of a cryptogram that instantly brought up thoughts of ***The Gold-Bug***.

**HOLMES:** (*Triumphantly.*) But you did not figure in ***The Gold-Bug***.  
(*Sits with a smug look on his face, arms crossed.*)

**DUPIN:** No and that merely emphasizes what I have been telling you - that people admire Poe as a literary artist owing to the fact that his did not overwork any of his creations. Bear that in mind, my boy, and remember, when you make your next farewell, that the patience of even the American reading public is not exhaustless, and you cannot always be among the "six best-selling books" of the day.

*HOLMES starts to rise. DUPIN merely puts out his hand to stop him, nods to WATSON, and then exits the way he came. Pause.*

**WATSON:** I say, Holmes, don't you look like a shamefacedly schoolboy who has been caught with stolen apples in his possession.

**HOLMES:** Watson?

**WATSON:** Yes, Holmes?

**HOLMES:** Shut up.

**WATSON:** I say! Hm!

*BLACKOUT.*

**THE END**