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SF PERUSALS

The Crucifer of Blood

A New Sherlock Holmes Mystery

by Paul Giovanni

Based on Characters created by
Arthur Conan Doyle

A Samuel French Acting Edition



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HELEN HAYES THEATRE

OPERATED BY LESTER OSTERMAN

LESTER OSTERMAN | **RICHARD HORNER** | **TERRY ALLEN KRAMER** | **JOHN WULP**

Present

THE CRUCIFER OF BLOOD

A Play by

PAUL GIOVANNI

starring

PAXTON WHITEHEAD

as Sherlock Holmes

with

GLENN CLOSE **CHRISTOPHER CURRY**
TIMOTHY LANDFIELD **TUCK MILLIGAN**
DWIGHT SCHULTZ **NICOLAS SUROVY**
EDWARD ZANG

ANDREW DAVIS **MARTIN LaPLATNEY**
MELVIN LUM **ROUMEL REAUX**

Scenery Designed by **JOHN WULP** | *Costumes Designed by* **ANN ROTH** | *Lighting Designed by* **ROGER MORGAN**

Scenery Supervised by **LYNN PECKTAL**

Sound Created by **Leonard Will**

Special Effects by **Bran Ferrin**

Makeup Designed by **Joseph Cranzano**

Wigs & Hairstyles by **Paul Huntley**

Directed by

MR. GIOVANNI

Based on the characters created by Conan Doyle

The Producers wish to express their appreciation to Theatre Development Fund for its support of the production.

Originally produced at Buffalo Studio Area Theatre, Neal DuBrock, Producer.

The full material on which this play is based has only recently come to light. It was found among the effects of Dr. John Watson which has passed into the hands of a distant relative, and took the form of a memoir. The first page of that document reads as follows: "The dreadful case of the blood crucifer occurred in London in 1887 and formed one of the most painful and alarming episodes in my long association with Mr. Sherlock Holmes. We were young, and most of our career lay before us. But no event in my subsequent life could ever erase from my mind the pain and horror of the events which it enshrines. If, in future years, some other eye should read this memoir, and some other hand be tempted to present it to the public in narrative form, it will, I hope, become apparent why I myself considered it best to leave unrendered, in the recital of my friend's outstanding cases, the heart of this appalling story.

It had begun, thirty years before, in India, during the Great Mutiny, at the Red Fort of Agra . . ."

Paul Giovanni

CHARACTERS
(in order of appearance)

MAJOR ALISTAIR ROSS
CAPTAIN NEVILLE ST. CLAIRE
JONATHAN SMALL
DURGA DASS (A Hindu)
WALI DAD (An Afgan)
MOHAMMED SINGH (A Mohammedan)
SHERLOCK HOLMES
JOHN WATSON M.D.
IRENE ST. CLAIRE
BIRDY JOHNSON
TONGA
INSPECTOR LESTRADE
FUNG TCHING (A Chinaman)
HOPKINS (A Policeman)
MORDECAI SMITH (A Sailor)

These parts are played by ten men and one woman

SCENES

ONE

(PROLOGUE)

THE RED FORT AT AGRA, INDIA. (June 1857)

TWO

221-B BAKER STREET. (June 1887—exactly 30 years later)

THREE

PONDICHERRY LODGE AT MAIDENHEAD.

Part 1 (The same evening)

Part 2 (Two hours later)

FOUR

THE GATE OF A HUNDRED SORROWS. (An Opium Den—the next night)

FIVE

ON THE RIVER THAMES. (Later the same night)

SIX

221-B BAKER STREET. (Dawn)

There is one intermission between Scene Three and Four.

The Crucifer Of Blood

SCENE 1 (*PROLOGUE*)

Agra, India. The capital of a district of twenty-five million natives, and a few hundred white men. It is 1857, during the British occupation, in the days of the great Indian mutiny.

The stage is black.

A MUEZZIN *howls at the setting sun.*

MUEZZIN. (*Singing.*)
Allah ho akabar!
("I proclaim there is no God but God.")

(*Saffron colored light from behind, silhouettes the seventy-fifth gate of the Fort at Agra, India. The gate is an immense open arch with no doors: the ground is paved with Agra stone. It is a quiet evening, shattered, periodically by the beating of drums, the barking of dogs, and the occasional yell of a jackal.* TWO HINDUS *wearing British military uniforms, sit in the gate, stopping their ears against the* MUEZZIN'S *Muslim prayer. A young* BRITISH PRIVATE *stands by them holding an Enfield rifle. At the moment these* THREE *are shadows; more of them later. We are looking at the* MEN, *the gate, and the fort from the inside. Through the arch of the gate, on the outside and only a few hundred feet away, the Taj Mahal*

glimmers in the half light. It is very hot. TWO BRITISH OFFICERS *enter Stage Right.* CAPTAIN NEVILLE ST. CLAIRE *is handsome, rugged and very much a typical English officer and gentleman.* MAJOR ALISTAIR ROSS *is untypical. Cold, effete, and full of questionable humor, he is an odd mixture of malevolence and charm. Both* MEN *are in their twenties.* ROSS *enters first, reading a large map by the light of a lantern, pursued by* ST. CLAIRE *who is slightly drunk. They wear swords at their waists, and pistols in their belts.*)

ST. CLAIRE. (*Loud.*) Money! Damn you, Ross, I'm talking about money!

ROSS. You lost your temper, St. Claire, at seven this morning, and you haven't got it back yet.

ST. CLAIRE. I need fifty rupees. I need them tonight!

ROSS. Whatever for? You cannot go anywhere.

ST. CLAIRE. Please, Ali. Just fifty. Be a brick!

ROSS. (*Stops and faces him.*) Is there a race in the Fort tonight?

ST. CLAIRE. (*Giggles.*) At midnight.

ROSS. And where are the horses to run?

ST. CLAIRE. At the square in the old quarter.

ROSS. In six weeks I have barely seen all of the *new* quarter. Besides, there's no map of the old quarter. It's a labyrinth.

ST. CLAIRE. Exactly! But my man showed me how to find the *square.* (*Indicating.*) It's down that way, about a mile or more, past the seven corridors.

ROSS. I find it peculiar, to say the least, that these Indians can so easily arrange a horse race in the middle of a revolutionary uprising.

ST. CLAIRE. There's a superb pony called Tally Dallah. A real flyer!

Ross. You're such a child, Nelly.

ST. CLAIRE. But I know I can double my money.

Ross. The only way to double *your* money, dear, is to fold it over once and put it in your pocket.

ST. CLAIRE. But I've seen this pony—

Ross. (*Cutting him off.*) You cannot go off-duty this evening. You and I must watch over twenty-five gates until sunrise.

ST. CLAIRE. Damn this fort! It's as big as England.

Ross. It was once a great palace. Thousands flocked in and out.

ST. CLAIRE. Let me slip off for an hour, later. You can gate-keep for the both of us.

Ross. My dear fellow, there's a war on.

ST. CLAIRE. Blast! I know that.

Ross. Half our sepia army has run off with the weapons we gave them, and now they are coming back to kill us with those very same weapons.

ST. CLAIRE. Those rebels won't come near this fort. Not with Wazir Kahn on the hill.

Ross. I don't trust Wazir Kahn. He might bolt at any time and join the rebels.

ST. CLAIRE. (*Outraged.*) But he's *our* Maharajah!

Ross. The Maharajah belongs to no one.

ST. CLAIRE. But he does. He belongs to the 37th Battalion. We made him an honorary member and gave him a uniform.

Ross. Nelly, you are adorable!

ST. CLAIRE. He loves us. (*A gunshot sounds in the distance. They are still for a moment.*) Ali, lend me fifty.

Ross. Why don't you turn yogi and carry a begging bowl?

ST. CLAIRE. (*Coaxing.*) You can well afford it.

Ross. (*Takes money out of his pocket.*) I can afford

it. I have more than you, although I'm not rich and probably never shall be. (*He offers the money, then, changing his mind, walks away.*) But, if you lend money, as the Indians say, you make a secret enemy.

ST. CLAIRE. (*Angrily.*) If you refuse it, you make an open one.

ROSS. (*He stops and looks at* ST. CLAIRE.) Oh, yes?

ST. CLAIRE. (*Sweetly.*) Ali.

ROSS. No.

ST. CLAIRE. Please?

ROSS. Stop whimpering!

ST. CLAIRE. (*Roaring.*) Bugger you, Ross!

ROSS. (*Cool.*) Bugger me? For fifty rupees? Is that value for money? (*They stare at each other.*)

ST. CLAIRE. (*Slowly.*) You're an odd sort of chap, Ross. I don't know why I do for you.

ROSS. And you, my dear Nelly, have many good points besides your good looks. Your only fault being that you are weak, the least little bit in the world weak. And you carry enough conceit to stock a Viceroy's council.

ST. CLAIRE. (*Threatening.*) There are other ways of making money! I am going to sell my commission and settle here.

ROSS. But you hate India.

ST. CLAIRE. Well, what am I to do? I can't live in England on a hundred a year.

ROSS. Well you can't stay here. India has an uncanny way of bringing out extremes in people. We must find you a wife in England. A sweet, pink and white maiden on the government house list, with a great deal of money and some influential connections. Possibly Alice Napier.

ST. CLAIRE. Alice Napier?

ROSS. That would be a match!

ST. CLAIRE. (*Eagerly.*) Will you help me, Ali?

ROSS. (*He offers his hand.*) I will. We must make certain she is clever.

ST. CLAIRE. I don't want her to be clever; why should she be clever?

ROSS. Take my word for it, Neville, the silliest woman can manage a clever man; but it needs a very clever woman to manage a fool. (*He turns Upstage and walks toward the gate.* ST. CLAIRE, *sulking, follows him.*) Good evening, Private. (*They have reached the gate. The* PRIVATE *snaps to attention. The* THREE MEN *waiting at the gate are:* PRIVATE JONATHAN SMALL, *a young, clever, working-class soldier.* DURGA DASS, *a small, fawning, low-caste Hindu, and, an Afgan,* WALI DAD, *who is mute. He appears to have only half of his tongue, and his eyes roll incessantly, producing an effect which is not uncomic.*)

SMALL. (*A command.*) Fall in! (*The* INDIANS *scramble to their feet and attempt to stand at attention.*)

ROSS. Everything in order? Private—

SMALL. Small, Sir, Jonathan Small. Good evening, Major. It's my first night on the gates, Sir. I feel a bit beef-witted about it all, if you know what I mean.

ROSS. Certainly, Private, let me explain. The fort has a hundred gates, we have just over a hundred white men, so it was decided, by whoever decides these things, that one British soldier and two natives should be posted at each gate. There is a central guardhouse, and if we have serious trouble, Captain St. Claire and I will report to it. We are the night watch for these twenty-five western gates. If you need help, fire your rifle and we will come. If anyone tries to come through the gate, shoot to kill.

ST. CLAIRE. (*Looking coldly at the* TWO INDIANS.)

Yes. Those black devils are very good at creeping in and murdering sleeping men, women, and children.

SMALL. (*Uncomfortable.*) I understand, Sir.

ROSS. I will inspect your men, Private.

ST. CLAIRE. For inspection, right dress! (*The* INDIANS *spread out.* ROSS *goes to* DURGA DASS *and smiles warmly.*)

ROSS. Good evening.

DURGA DASS. Greetings, illustrious buckle on the great belt of Queen Victoria!

ROSS. I am Major Alistair Ross and this is Captain Neville St. Claire.

DURGA DASS. (*Salams to* ST. CLAIRE.) Hullo, Inspiration of the Beef-Witted!

SMALL. Fall in, there! (DURGA DASS *stands at attention.*) Talk sense to the officers. Tell them your name.

DURGA DASS. Ah! I am Durga Dass. (*Pointing to the* SECOND INDIAN.) And this is Wali Dad. He is Afgan. Also, he is witless.

WALI DAD. (*Grins and rolls his eyes.*) Wa . . . Wa . . .

ST. CLAIRE. (*Looking at* WALI DAD.) This man is mad!

DURGA DASS. The witless are under the protection of God. They foretell future events.

SMALL. The man's a mute, Sir, but he's all right.

ST. CLAIRE. Fancy!

ROSS. Is he fit for duty?

DURGA DASS. His circumstances are depressed, and he is also down on his luck, poor chap.

ROSS. (*Indicating* DURGA DASS.) Now, this fellow makes me homesick. He speaks in English idioms.

DURGA DASS. (*Falls to his knees.*) Major, they are the very best of idioms. Top hole, by crikey!

SMALL. (*To* DURGA DASS.) Fall in, there. (DURGA DASS *rises.*)

ST. CLAIRE. (*Restless.*) Major, we are behind the schedule.

SMALL. Before you go, Sir, could you tell me which gate this is? In case there's any trouble.

ST. CLAIRE. Don't you have a map, Man?

SMALL. No, Sir. I was marched in column and assigned to the gates. I don't know where I am.

ROSS. As you were! (*The* MEN *relax. He takes the regulation map out of his belt and shows it to* SMALL.) This is the regulation map of the fort. Acquire one as soon as possible. This is the seventy-fifth gate. (*Indicating the map.*) We are here. Do you see?

SMALL. Yes, Sir.

ROSS. You must never speak of Indian things, Small, without looking at a map.

ST. CLAIRE. I think we should replace this Indian. (*Indicates* WALI DAD.) He's not competent.

DURGA DASS. (*Alarmed.*) Ah no. Do not take him away. He is powerful. I can prove it.

ST. CLAIRE. How can you prove it?

DURGA DASS. This mutiny. If you know the name of the leader of the rebels, give it to Wali Dad. He will dispatch a Sending and kill him.

SMALL. Major, I must apologize for this nonsense.

ROSS. But I am intrigued, Private. What do you mean by the word "Sending"?

SMALL. It's meant to be a curse . . .

ROSS. (*Cutting him off.*) As you were.

DURGA DASS. (*Wide-eyed.*) A Sending is a horrible arrangement. It is a curse sent by a charmar or wizard, and may take the form of something as insignificant as a piece of paper, or as deadly as a man without a

face. (*A jackal howls.* DURGA DASS *strikes his breast and mumbles to himself.*)

ST. CLAIRE. A man without a face?

SMALL. A leper, Sir. (*There is a gunshot not too far away, followed by the loud barking of two or three dogs.*)

ST. CLAIRE. Well, that's real. There are enough of those poor devils in this diseased country.

DURGA DASS. Charmars of the skin-hide caste can dispatch a Sending which, whatever form it takes, will lie on the breast of their enemy by night and kill him.

ST. CLAIRE. (*Beginning to get uncomfortable.*) Lie on their breast?

SMALL. It's the symbol of a tombstone, Sir.

ST. CLAIRE. It gives me the Willy's.

DURGA DASS. Wali Dad is a charmer. Let him send a Sending for you. Perhaps it will end the mutiny. The God of Vengeance will assist.

ST. CLAIRE. (*Crosses to* DURGA DASS—*angrily.*) Don't bring God into this. We are Christians and that is our religion. Superstition is religion only to the feeble minded.

DURGA DASS. Certain things are not known to those who eat with forks. It is better to eat with both hands for a while.

ST. CLAIRE. You filthy yellow devil! (ST. CLAIRE *viciously kicks* DURGA DASS *who yells, "Ahi, ahi."* SMALL *is holding* ST. CLAIRE *to keep him from kicking* DURGA DASS *again.*) Private, why are you holding me?

SMALL. I can't have you abusing my men, Sir.

ST. CLAIRE. Men? They're a pack of screaming monkeys, from the Maharajah right down to the untouchables, and speaking of that bastard, he forgot to

empty the shit bucket today. Why don't you see to that?

SMALL. I will see to it that you don't destroy the good association I have with my men, Sir.

ST. CLAIRE. Oh really? Well, I don't associate with yellow niggers.

SMALL. That isn't what the half-castes say. I've heard they bring Indian women to your quarters at all hours. (*The* TWO INDIANS *cower in the gate. With his knee,* ST. CLAIRE *kicks* SMALL *in the groin.* SMALL *bends forward, gasping for breath.* ST. CLAIRE *takes the pistol out of his belt and raises it as if he would smash* SMALL's *head.*)

ROSS. St. Claire! (ST. CLAIRE *immediately releases* SMALL. ROSS *crosses to* ST. CLAIRE *in a cold fury.*) You have been drinking. What else could explain your extraordinary conduct and opinions, which do not reflect, in any way, the feelings of your fellow officers? Now we shall finish our rounds, and then I shall put you on report.

ST. CLAIRE. (*He salutes.*) Yes, Major.

ROSS. (*To all.*) Gentlemen, I apologize for this officer. (ROSS *turns his back on* ST. CLAIRE *and exits, Left.* ST. CLAIRE *follows him, but first turns back and, glaring at* SMALL, *spits.* SMALL, *deeply disturbed, paces back and forth, still gasping for breath.* WALI DAD *moves Down Center and sits, lotus fashion.*)

DURGA DASS. (*To* SMALL.) Sahib, will you not rest? Only the devils and the English walk to and fro without reason. (SMALL *stops pacing and looks at him.*) Be wise. No man can endure watching and great thinking on an empty belly. Sit down, Sahib. (*Smiling,* WALI DAD *gestures for* SMALL *to sit beside him.* SMALL *does, still holding his rifle.* DURGA DASS *takes a sack of food from his belt.*) Eat, Sahib, eat. Meat is good

against sorrow. I also have known. Besides the shadows come and go, they come and go. These be curried eggs— (SMALL *puts his rifle down, for the first time, in order to take the food. At almost the same moment,* DURGA DASS *darts by him taking the rifle, and* WALI DAD *holds* SMALL'S *neck securely in the crook of his arm.* DURGA DASS *points the rifle at* SMALL. WALI DAD *takes a large curved dagger from his belt and presses it against* SMALL'S *temple.*)

WALI DAD. Sssss. Be still.

SMALL. (*Frozen.*) So you can talk.

WALI DAD. So I can. And you can listen, or you can die.

SMALL. Have you joined the rebels? Is this the beginning of an attack? If it is I will call out and the officers will come.

WALI DAD. They will not come unless the rifle is fired. But do not concern yourself, the fort is safe enough.

SMALL. Then get to the point, Man. I don't like having a knife at my head. What do you want? I have no money. I have a Waterbury watch; you can have that. (WALI DAD *releases* SMALL, *who falls to the ground.*)

WALI DAD. (*Standing over him.*) I have over a million pounds in jewels. You can have that.

SMALL. Jewels?

WALI DAD. (*Urgently.*) Listen to me. Wazir Kahn, the mascot-Maharajah, has joined the rebels, but the English do not know. Now, the Maharajah is a wise man. He would be friends both with the lion and the tiger—with the rebels and with the British Raj. However, he trusts no one. He has made such plans that, come what might, he shall keep his fortune. (*Slowly.*) All the most precious stones and the choicest pearls

that he owns, he has put into a wooden box, and sends it by a trusted servant, who shall bring it, here, this night, to the Fort of Agra. This trusted servant now waits not two hundred yards from where you lie, Sahib Small. (*He gestures to the outside of the gate.*) Out there!

SMALL. This is fantasy.

WALI DAD. No, it is kismet. The kismet that happens only once in a hundred years.

SMALL. But how do you know it is true?

WALI DAD. I have a friend who also serves the Maharajah. He explained that I was posted on the gates, and it was thus arranged, for a few rupees, that the servant, Mohammed Singh, should bring the box here, to my gates, and I should let him into the fort.

SMALL. A box . . .

WALI DAD. Full of treasure!

SMALL. Why bring it here?

WALI DAD. To hide it in the Old Quarter.

SMALL. There is no map of the Old Quarter. It's a labyrinth.

WALI DAD. There is one. Mohammed Singh brings, with the treasure, an ancient scroll from the days of the Mogul Empire. With a chosen hiding place, an unfindable place, a place seen only by centipedes and scorpions these many years. We were told to kill you and instead I offer to make you a partner. In your company we can move freely about the fort, and no one will be curious about the box.

SMALL. (*With dread.*) And what happens to the trusted servant?

WALI DAD. Mohammed Singh? If he is taken by the officer Sahibs, he will be hung or shot, and the treasure will be turned over to the English government.

SMALL. I cannot kill for money.

WALI DAD. Durga Dass will cut his throat. There is enough wealth to make us all great chiefs. Think of that. No one can know about the matter, for here we are cut off from all men. What could be better for the purpose? Say then, Sahib, are you with us?

SMALL. I am with you, heart and soul! (*They stand,* WALI DAD *holding* SMALL'S *rifle. They join hands.*)

WALI DAD. (*To* DURGA DASS.) Go out now, and bring Mohammed Singh to the gate. (DURGA DASS *runs through the gate. We can hear the patter of his feet against the stone. Dogs begin to bark.* WALI DAD *hands* SMALL *his rifle.*) You see that I trust you, Sahib. Your word, like ours, is not to be broken. We must trust each other for this is a great thing we do. Now, let us prepare. (*They conceal themselves on either side of the gate. The dogs stop barking. Almost in reply, a jackal howls. Then silence. Footsteps can be heard on the stone. A* FIGURE *comes through the gate. He is covered and hooded in dark rags and carries a wooden chest. He comes into the fort while* DURGA DASS *stands behind him in the gate. The* FIGURE *puts down the chest and instantly* DURGA DASS *steps forward, puts his arm over the* MAN'S *mouth, and jerking back the head, dagger in hand, expertly cuts the* MAN'S *throat. The cloak and hood fall to the ground as the* MAN *reaches for his throat. He has only half a face, and that is wound with strips of cloth: his body is clothed in a white tunic which seems to be made of rags, now soaked with blood.* DURGA DASS *begins to moan. The* MAN *raises his arms; most of the fingers are gone. He is a leper.*)

SMALL. Christ in heaven!

WALI DAD. This is not Mohammed Singh. (DURGA DASS *picks up a lantern and crosses to the* MAN.) It is a leper!

DURGA DASS. A man without a face. A man without a face. (DURGA DASS *kneels facing the* LEPER. *Directly behind him is the chest of jewels. He stretches out his hands as if to make the image vanish.*) Mayah. Mayah. (*Illusion. The* LEPER *points a hand with one finger at* DURGA DASS *and tries to speak. A terrible rattle comes out of his torn throat and, dying, he falls on* DURGA DASS *who, kneeling, is driven back until he is forced down and pinned to the chest. The* LEPER *is, in fact, lying on his breast.* DURGA DASS, *screaming.*) The Sending! Ahi!! (WALI DAD *grabs* SMALL'S *rifle and fires into the chest of the* LEPER *whose body arcs into the air and falls, face down, on the ground, freeing* DURGA DASS.)

SMALL. The officers will come. (WALI DAD *holds* DURGA DASS. SMALL *covers the* LEPER'S *body with the ragged cloak.*)

WALI DAD. (*To* DURGA DASS.) Do not think! Pray, meditate.

DURGA DASS. (*Screams at* WALI DAD.) Blind ape—bloodworm! Was it for this I left my people and came with you, for the fires of your filthy gold? You said that I should never burn. O Wali Dad, I burn now. I burn. (*Raising his arms.*) Have mercy, God of things as they are.

SMALL. (*Kneels by* DURGA DASS.) Listen to me. This is no curse! The Maharajah tricked you. He sent a leper with the treasure instead of Mohammed Singh because he knew no one would touch a leper.

DURGA DASS. But I have touched the leper. Behold my face—it is the face of a cobra. And my arm—it is the arm of an old woman. I am cursed. I have lost my caste. Polluted! Untouchable!

SMALL. (*Urgently.*) Control yourself.

DURGA DASS. (*Quietly.*) I hear the Genies calling

to each other from holes in the sand. (*He falls on the ground and rocks back and forth, whimpering and moaning.*)

WALI DAD. (*Has been searching the body of the* LEPER.) Here is the scroll.

SMALL. Put it away. Now quickly, take the chest outside the gate. I'll drag him as far away as I can. (*Indicating the* LEPER.) Don't speak when the officers come. (WALI DAD *picks up the chest and makes for the gate, as* SMALL *begins to drag the* LEPER *away.* DURGA DASS *moans quietly.* ST. CLAIRE *and* ROSS *enter, pointing their pistols.*)

ST. CLAIRE. Who fired that shot? Don't move. Any of you.

ROSS. Private Small, you will explain. (*Pointing to the* LEPER.) Who is this man?

SMALL. He tried to come through the gate, Sir. (ST. CLAIRE *goes over to the dead* FIGURE *and looks under the cloak.*)

ST. CLAIRE. God almighty. It's a leper.

ROSS. (*Looking at* WALI DAD, *who is frozen in the gate, holding the chest.*) What is he holding?

SMALL. (*Thinking furiously.*) The Maharajah has joined the rebels, but sent all his jewels to the fort, to hide them here. They are in that chest.

ST. CLAIRE. (*To* ROSS.) Can this be true?

SMALL. It is true, Sir.

ROSS. I've seen that chest at the palace. (*He crosses to the* LEPER *and raises the cloak.*) And how did this man come to have his throat cut?

SMALL. (*Pointing to* DURGA DASS.) These two were going to kill him and keep the treasure.

ROSS. What went wrong?

SMALL. The Maharajah—crafty bugger. He was to

send the treasure with a servant, but he chose a leper instead.

Ross. And what portion did they offer you, for your assistance?

SMALL. (*Stands at attention.*) As you say, Sir. (*With a new idea.*) Now, if you will accompany me, I will take the chest to the guardhouse, give it to the authorities and turn myself in.

Ross. Are you prepared to spend several years on the Andaman Islands? I understand that is going to be a particularly nasty prison.

SMALL. (*Looking at* Ross *steadily.*) I'm prepared for anything.

ST. CLAIRE. (*Who has not taken his eyes off* WALI DAD *and the chest.*) There must be a million in that chest.

SMALL. More.

Ross. (*To* SMALL.) Perhaps there is another way to deal with this situation.

SMALL. (*Looking at the* TWO INDIANS.) The only way that I will consider, is one that includes all five of us.

ST. CLAIRE. (*Crossing to* DURGA DASS.) What's the matter with him? (*To* DURGA DASS.) Come on, Man, we're not going to hurt you. (*He tries to pull* DURGA DASS *up by the hand. There is a dagger in the hand, covered with blood.*)

SMALL. Jesus, he's killed himself.

Ross. (*Fascinated.*) Because he touched the leper.

SMALL. He said there was a curse and now he is dead.

ST. CLAIRE. (ST. CLAIRE *looks at* WALI DAD *who still stands in the gate, holding the treasure.*) Let me have that. (WALI DAD *shakes his head no.*)

Ross. Nelly!

SMALL. (*Crosses to* WALI DAD.) Give me the scroll. (ST. CLAIRE *has crossed to* ROSS. *They whisper to each other.*)

WALI DAD. (*Whispers.*) They will kill us, Sahib.

SMALL. No. Give me the scroll. (WALI DAD *hands him the map he took from the* LEPER. SMALL *tucks it in his uniform.*) I have a way, trust me.

ROSS. We have been making plans.

ST. CLAIRE. Yes, if we are going to be successful we must act quickly. Small, run to the guardhouse and report that two Indians have been killed trying to enter the fort.

ROSS. (*To* SMALL.) Now hurry, Man, lest they come to investigate.

SMALL. (*To* WALI DAD.) I will return quickly. (SMALL *dashes Off Right. As soon as he is gone, the* OFFICERS *turn and face* WALI DAD.)

WALI DAD. (*Sets the chest down, Center Stage, and sits behind it.*) It is no good, is it?

ST. CLAIRE. You can speak!

WALI DAD. I speak too well, and in this new India of white voices it is best to be silent and listen.

ROSS. You were very convincing. (ST. CLAIRE *walks up to the gate.*)

WALI DAD. Do not flatter me, Sahib. I cannot play the clever fool as my friend could.

ST. CLAIRE. What's the matter, Man? We are not going to hurt you. (*He is behind* WALI DAD.)

WALI DAD. You mean there is room for me in your plans?

ST. CLAIRE. Of course. (*Slowly he draws his sword.*)

WALI DAD. Strange. The bloom of the peach-orchard is upon all the valley, and here is only dust and a great stink.

ROSS. Now, come along, Man. We're in this together.

WALI DAD. Together? Are the whites of my eyes clouded? Does the blood beat at my wrist?

ROSS. What of your share?

WALI DAD. The treasure is yours. (ST. CLAIRE *raises the sword, about to strike.*)

ROSS. But why?

WALI DAD. Why? Because white-faced, white-toothed pariahs are not to be trusted with brown skin. (*He turns, screaming, draws his dagger, and makes to cut* ST. CLAIRE'S *face.* ST. CLAIRE *backs off.* WALI DAD *darts through the gate.*)

ROSS. (*To* ST. CLAIRE.) Kill him! (ST. CLAIRE *takes out his pistol. We can hear the patter of* WALI DAD'S *feet.* ST. CLAIRE *kneels in the gate and fires. The footsteps stop. Dogs bark.*)

ST. CLAIRE. Done! (*To* ROSS.) What about Small?

ROSS. I must have time to think.

ST. CLAIRE. (*Quietly.*) Why share three ways?

ROSS. We *are* greedy!

ST. CLAIRE. He's an Indian lover.

ROSS. We will never succeed if he is with us. We must get rid of him. (*A jackal howls nearby.*)

ST. CLAIRE. Christ! Ali. Three deaths. What I mean is . . . Well, this curse business. Do you think there's anything in it?

ROSS. I heard of a family, once, who had a curse on its first-born.

ST. CLAIRE. What happened?

ROSS. It turned out to be the plumbing. As soon as new drains were put into the house the curse was lifted, I believe. I never knew the family myself. (*The* TWO MEN *laugh, then, slowly, their eyes are drawn to the chest.*) Shall I open it? Will you look on your future, Nelly?

ST. CLAIRE. I'm afraid.

Ross. Of what?

ST. CLAIRE. It will be empty.

Ross. (*Crossing to it.*) Some people say there is no romance in India. These people are wrong. Our lives hold quite as much romance as is good for us and sometimes more. (*With his sword point, he deftly breaks the lock and opens the lid. They gasp. We cannot see the jewels, not yet, but we can see their reflection: a glow of colored flecks which plays on the faces of the* MEN.)

ST. CLAIRE. (*Transported.*) All the stars of heaven in a box. (SMALL *runs in from the Right. They do not hear him.*) And it's ours, Ali. Yours and mine! (ST. CLAIRE *picks up a large, glittering stone.*)

Ross. Put it down! (ST. CLAIRE *does.* Ross *sees* SMALL. ST. CLAIRE *slams the lid of chest. There is an awkward moment.*)

SMALL. (*Breathlessly.*) It's all done. They will send some men to collect the bodies. We must hurry. (*He looks around.*) Where's Wali Dad?

ST. CLAIRE. He ran away.

SMALL. I thought I heard a shot.

Ross. There was a shot. We couldn't let him carry this tale to his friends.

SMALL. (*Desperate.*) Oh, God forgive me. I promised to look after him. I shouldn't have left him with you.

ST. CLAIRE. You can't trust them.

SMALL. (*Terrified.*) And you? Can I trust you? (*The* THREE MEN *look at each other. Suddenly,* SMALL *grows calm.*) Yes. I think I can. Without me, you can't keep that chest.

Ross. What do you mean?

SMALL. If you kill me, where do you think you're going to hide it?

Ross. Go on.

SMALL. (*Desperate.*) The old Maharajah knew a thing or two. This is his home. He studied this fort. Wouldn't you say that we should follow his plan?

ROSS. Which was?

SMALL. He sent a scroll, a map of the old quarter. On it is marked the one place in this whole rabbit-warren where the treasure will be absolutely safe. And I know where it is.

ST. CLAIRE. Show the scroll to us.

SMALL. Don't be a fool. I put it in a safe place on the way to the guardhouse. Now you need me as much as I need you.

ST. CLAIRE. I think not. We can hide the chest in our rooms.

SMALL. Are you in your rooms all day? Can you trust your Indian servants?

ROSS. He's right, Nelly. They'd find it in a minute.

ST. CLAIRE. He's not right. He can't be! There must be another way.

SMALL. You had better decide quickly! The half-castes will be coming to collect the bodies.

ROSS. What do you propose?

SMALL. I shall hide the chest for you now, according to the scroll. When we return to England, you can transport it with your baggage, and we can divide it equally over there. They never search the officers' trunks, but they'd search mine.

ROSS. True.

SMALL. So we need each other. Do you agree? (*Pause.*) Well? (ROSS *nods, looks at* ST. CLAIRE. *He nods.*) Good! Now I propose a Covenant.

ST. CLAIRE. What for?

SMALL. A gesture of good faith.

ROSS. You mean a paper? A paper saying, "We the undersigned have committed two murders, and caused

a suicide while acquiring a great fortune, but in future, we will try in every way we can, to be kind to each other" . . . You want us to put our names on something like that?

SMALL. I don't want your names. I want your blood.

ST. CLAIRE. What do you mean?

SMALL. I mean a blood oath, Captain. An oath sworn in your own blood, which you break at your peril.

ST. CLAIRE. That's sacrilegious! You're as mad as the Indians.

SMALL. Will you do it? Yes or No? (ROSS *crosses to* DURGA DASS *and takes the dagger from the dead man's hand.*)

ST. CLAIRE. Ali, don't do it!

ROSS. Be quiet. It's the only way. (*He wipes it first, then plunges it into his wrist, drawing blood. Music plays.*)

SMALL. (*To* ST. CLAIRE.) Thank you, Major Ross. Now you, Captain St. Claire.

ST. CLAIRE. (*Afraid.*) It's perverse . . . It makes me sick . . . It's evil.

ROSS. You will find, if you want to make any money in this world, it is not always wise to be disturbed by what we call evil. And you want money, Nelly. That's all you ever want. Do it!!! (*He hands him the dagger.*)

ST. CLAIRE. I can't I can't. I'm getting the shakes . . .

SMALL. Here. Take this. (*From his pocket he offers a pill.*)

ST. CLAIRE. What is it?

SMALL. Clean Alwa opium. It will steady your nerves . . . Now do it. Captain St. Claire!!! (ST. CLAIRE *takes the opium and, falteringly, cuts his*

wrist. The blood flows. SMALL *seizes the dagger and begins to cut his. Lights fade.*)

ROSS. Now . . . What shall we swear? (*The stage is black.*)

SCENE 2

221-B Baker Street. 1887—30 years later.

The music changes to a solitary violin. The stage is dark and covered with fog. Through the fog, at the Back of the stage, a MAN *plays the violin we hear. Tall and thin, with a hawk-like face, he wears a long silk dressing gown, and walks toward us. This is* SHERLOCK HOLMES, *the world's foremost consulting detective.*

The fog lifts and we see the interior of Baker Street. Two windows Stage Right with a vista of gray London fog. Stage Left a fireplace to which a pile of correspondence is attached with a long dagger. A chaise lounge by the fireplace and further into the room a basket chair. HOLMES *stands alone in the room. Suddenly he flings the instrument into the basket chair, and crosses to the breakfast table, Stage Right. From a box on the table, he takes a syringe and a phial of liquid. He fills the syringe, and rolling back the sleeve of his dressing gown he is about to inject his arm when a* MAN *rushes into the room through the doorway almost Center Stage. The* MAN *carries a pistol which he seems to be pointing directly at* HOLMES.

The TWO MEN *stare at each other, one holding a hypodermic, the other a pistol.*

BOTH MEN *are in their early thirties.*

HOLMES. (*Looking at the pistol.*) Are you going to kill me?

MAN. (*Looking at the syringe.*) You seem quite capable of accomplishing that without my assistance.

HOLMES. You are developing a certain vein of pawky humor, Watson, against which I must learn to guard myself.

WATSON. (*Looking at the pistol.*) Ah! Excuse me! I was officiating at a foot race for medical students in Pimlico. (*He puts the pistol on the mantel.* WATSON *takes some letters from his pocket.*) The post is here.

HOLMES. You know where to put it. (WATSON *removes the dagger from the mantel, adds the letters he carries to the pile, and impales them with the dagger.*)

WATSON. Holmes, I must speak with you. (HOLMES *looks at him.*) I don't know whether it is the claret which I have taken with my lunch, or the exasperation produced by the extreme deliberation of your manner, but I suddenly feel I can hold out no longer.

HOLMES. (*Holding up the needle.*) I see. You wish to try it.

WATSON. (*Indignant.*) Try it indeed! I cannot afford to put that kind of strain upon *my* constitution.

HOLMES. I suppose you are right. I find it, however, so clarifying to the mind, that its secondary, destructive action is a matter of small moment.

WATSON. Is it? But consider. Count the cost and I speak here as a medical man. It is a pathological and morbid process, which involves tissue-change, and may,

at last leave a permanent weakness. Surely the game is hardly worth the candle.

HOLMES. (*Pacing.*) My mind rebels at stagnation, idleness exhausts me completely, which is why I've had to spend most of today in bed. Give me problems, give me work, give me the most abstruse cryptogram or the most intricate analysis, and I am in my own proper atmosphere. But I abhor the dull routine of existence. I am *frustrated,* Watson.

WATSON. (*Indicating the syringe.*) That is not the solution.

HOLMES. Nonsense. Frustrate a Frenchman, he will drink himself to death; an Irishman, he will die of combustion; a Dane, he will shoot himself; an American, he will shoot you, establish a million dollar trust for your relatives. Then he will die of an ulcer. A seven-per-cent solution of cocaine is *my* solution.

WATSON. And it is my contention that far from clarifying the brain, these stimulants cloud it, and cause it to function at a small percentage of its full reasoning power.

HOLMES. (*About to inject himself.*) Rubbish!

WATSON. Would you think me impertinent if I were to put my theory to a test?

HOLMES. On the contrary. I should be delighted to look into any problem requiring clear sightedness which you might submit to me. (*Holding up the syringe.*) And in the first delicious onslaught of this extraordinary property. (*He rolls back his left shirt cuff and injects his wrist.* WATSON *looks away with distaste, as* HOLMES *falls back on the chaise with a long sigh of satisfaction.*)

WATSON. I have heard you say that it is difficult for a man to have any object with him in daily use, without leaving the impress of his individuality upon

it. Now, I have here a watch which has recently come into my possession. Would you let me have an opinion as to the character or habits of the late owner? (HOLMES *takes the watch, looks hard at the dial, opens the back, takes a magnifying glass from his pocket and* peers *through it, then snaps the watch shut and hands it back. Through the following dialogue, he fights hard to maintain continuity of speech and idea, momentarily lapsing into short cocaine-trances.*)

HOLMES. There are hardly any data. The watch has been recently cleaned, which robs me of my most suggestive facts.

WATSON. (*Smugly.*) You are right. It was cleaned before being sent to me. I must point out, however, that you have put forward a most lame and impotent excuse to cover your failure.

HOLMES. Though unsatisfactory, my research has not been entirely without success. It is a fifty Guinea watch, hence, it was owned by a gentleman. He was, alas, possessed of untidy habits. He was left with good prospects, but he threw away his chances, lived for some time in poverty with occasional short intervals of prosperity, and finally taking to drink, he died. The watch has, in fact, been in the hands of your elder brother.

WA' .. (*Angrily.*) This is unworthy of you, Holmes. You have made inquiries into the history of my unhappy brother, and you now pretend to deduce this knowledge in some fanciful way. You cannot expect me to believe that you have read all this from his old watch.

HOLMES. (*With sincerity.*) My dear friend, pray accept my apologies. Viewing the matter as an abstract problem, I had forgotten how personal and painful a thing it might be to you. I assure you, however, that

I never even knew that you had a brother until you handed me the watch.

WATSON. Then how in the name of all that is wonderful did you get these facts? They are absolutely correct in every particular. This is not guess-work.

HOLMES. No, I never guess. It is a shocking habit, destructive to the logical faculty. I began by stating that your brother was careless. When you observe the lower part of that watchcase, you notice that it is cut and marked all over from the habit of keeping other hard objects, such as coins and keys, in the same pocket. It is customary for pawnbrokers in England, when they take a watch, to scratch the number of the ticket with a pin point upon the inside of the case. There are no fewer than four such numbers visible to my lens. Inference—that your brother was often at low water, but, he had occasional bursts of prosperity, or he could not have redeemed the pledge. Look at the inner plate, which contains the key-hole. (WATSON *does.*) There are thousands of scratches all 'round the hole, marks where the key has slipped. You will never see a drunkard's watch without them. He winds it at night, and leaves these traces of his unsteady hand. Lastly, you said the watch had come into your possession, meaning you did not buy it. The initials H.W. on the back suggest your family name. If the watch was left to you as a legacy, and since your father has been dead these many years, it can only mean it is a bequest from your late brother. Where is the mystery in all this? (*He falls exhausted onto the chaise.*)

WATSON. I apologize, Holmes. In future, I will have more faith in your marvelous faculty.

HOLMES. I am the slave of my faculty. I cannot live without brainwork. I am a brain, Watson. The rest of me is a mere appendix. (*There is an urgent knocking*

at the door. WATSON *opens it. A* YOUNG WOMAN *of great beauty rushes into the room. This is* IRENE ST. CLAIRE, *daughter of* NEVILLE ST. CLAIRE. *Unlike her father, she is mild-mannered, charming and possessed of an appealing and unshakable directness. At the moment she is deeply distressed.*)

IRENE. I am Irene St. Claire.

HOLMES. And I am Sherlock Holmes. (*Indicating* WATSON.) And this—is Doctor Watson, my friend and-- (IRENE *staggers and almost falls.* WATSON *rushes to her.*)

WATSON. Holmes!!

IRENE. (*Trying to regain her composure.*) Please forgive me, Gentlemen! I have been frightened, almost out of my wits!

HOLMES. Pray, Miss St. Claire, take a moment or two to compose yourself.

IRENE. (*To* WATSON.) The streets are so crowded because of Her Majesty's Jubilee. It took hours to get here. (*To* HOLMES.) I have read of your exploits, Mr. Holmes, but I feared you would not wish to be of service to me.

HOLMES. Because you have no money!

IRENE. How can you possibly know that?

HOLMES. In the indications of female poverty, there can be no disguise. No woman dresses below herself from caprice.

WATSON. (*Angrily to* HOLMES.) You really are an automaton—a calculating machine—there is something positively inhuman in you at times. How can you be so rude?

HOLMES. It is of the first importance not to allow your judgement to be biased by personal qualities.

IRENE. Dr. Watson, you are very kind, but I prefer

absolute candor. To love the truth is to refuse to let oneself be saddened by it.

HOLMES. (*Looking at her with interest.*) Miss St. Claire. I beg that you will lay before us everything that may help us in forming an opinion upon this matter. As to reward, my profession is its own reward, and my expenses are somewhat defrayed for the moment. My last client was a sort of king.

WATSON. Shall I order you a cup of hot coffee, for I observe that you are shivering?

IRENE. It is not cold which makes me shiver.

WATSON. What, then?

IRENE. It is fear, Dr. Watson. It is terror!

HOLMES. I am all attention.

IRENE. (*She reaches into her handbag and takes out a piece of paper.*) This arrived in the post, yesterday morning. (*She holds it up. This is the center piece of what will later be called the crucifer. It is the center section of the regulation map from Scene 1. At the top and bottom an arc is drawn, in the center a cross in what appears to be brown paint.*)

HOLMES. (*Taking it.*) Dated June 1857. Exactly thirty years ago. Curious.

IRENE. The thing is innocent enough. It might be the work of a child. But when my father opened it, he fell unconscious to the floor, badly cutting his head. I put him in his bed, where he remained for the rest of the day. He would not talk about it. That evening, I heard him scream. (*She shivers.*) I ran to his room, and it was there that I had the shock of my life. He was cowering in the corner like a frightened child, muttering over and over again, something about a curse. It was pitiful. And then I saw it.

HOLMES. Please, go on. What did you see?

IRENE. Hanging on the outside of the window. A hideous shadow, like a large cross stretched over the pane. It was too small to be a man, and yet, I am sure that it was substantial. Then it vanished.

HOLMES. What did you do?

IRENE. I sent for the police. They came, searched the house and the yard. The window is on the second floor. Their conclusion, naturally enough, was that we had been the victims of an hallucination.

WATSON. (*Knowingly.*) Typical.

IRENE. Mr. Holmes, I am not an hysteric, and I am not superstitious. I am certain that I saw it.

HOLMES. I believe you absolutely, Miss St. Claire.

IRENE. Thank heaven! The police were kind enough to leave a man to watch the house. This morning, when I looked in his room, my father was gone.

HOLMES. (*Holding the crucifer.*) And you have no idea as to the significance of this paper?

IRENE. None. Oh, it breaks my heart to think of him, alone and terrified, wandering in the fog.

HOLMES. Do you have any idea where he might have gone.

IRENE. I— (*She is embarrassed.*) Yes, I do. Dr. Watson, Mr. Holmes, I hope you will not turn me away.

HOLMES. My dear young woman, why should we do that?

IRENE. My father is an opium addict.

WATSON. (*Looking at* HOLMES.) I am sorry to hear it.

IRENE. That is how the little money we have has been spent.

WATSON. (*Still looking at* HOLMES.) It sounds to me as if your father should be soundly thrashed.

IRENE. (*Sharply.*) Dr. Watson, I love my father. I

tell you his story because you must know the truth if you are to advise me. But if you malign him—I cannot bear it. I will be forced to seek help elsewhere.

HOLMES. I understand, Miss St. Claire. *Your* loyalty is admirable.

IRENE. It is not blind loyalty. Something happened to him, long ago, that permanently affected his heart and mind. It is a singular sort of depression which comes over him.

HOLMES. And it was these moods that drove him to opium?

IRENE. That drove him to addiction. As you surely know, there are places in the east end of London, where one may go to breathe in the poison.

HOLMES. Indeed, Miss St. Claire. Limehouse. But these places are not free of charge. How can a man without money support such a habit?

IRENE. There is a Major Alistair Ross who lives at Maidenhead in a gloomy house called Pondicherry Lodge. Whenever we find ourselves reduced to our last farthing, my father goes to him and returns with five or ten pounds, and when this money runs out, he repeats the process.

HOLMES. (*Has been studying the crucifer.*) Miss St. Claire, would you excuse me for a few moments? I would like to examine this paper in my room. I keep one or two chemicals that might throw some light on its origins.

IRENE. I would be grateful if you did. (HOLMES *goes through the door Left to the bedrooms.* WATSON, *uneasily left with* IRENE, *sits and smiles.*)

WATSON. I hope your mind is more at ease, Miss St. Claire.

IRENE. (*With charm.*) Dr. Watson, I have done nothing but snap at you like a turtle since we met.

WATSON. If I may take the liberty of contradicting you, it is quite the contrary, you have opened my eyes.

IRENE. How?

WATSON. I was beginning to believe that all the young women of London were lisping, coy simpletons, with barely enough sense to take care of the yapping little dogs they seem to take with them wherever they go. Your honesty and courage, in the face of hardships that would drive an ordinary young woman mad, fill me with awe. You are extraordinary!

IRENE. (*Angrily.*) I do not wish to be extraordinary. I wish I were a simpleton, without a care in the world. (*She bursts into tears.*) Forgive me! What can you think of me? It just occurred to me that I have no friends. Since our circumstances forced us to move to position. Our neighbors think us too grand, and will not associate with us; while our friends, now think Camberwell, I never see anyone of my own age or us too low, and have dropped us. It is a comedy. And I find myself, seeking help from two perfect strangers. Until this moment, I, at least, had my pride. (*He takes her hand. She looks for a moment as if she will take it away, but she does not.*)

WATSON. And you have it still. The seat of pride is in the heart, and only there.

IRENE. (*Looking at him.*) Do not pity me.

WATSON. But I do, and I shall. We pity in others, only those evils which we have ourselves experienced. I have just lost a brother. The story of your father was like his own.

IRENE. What is your name?

WATSON. John. Will you call me John? And will you think of *me* as your friend?

IRENE. (*Meeting his eyes.*) Your eyes are kind.

WATSON. Is that so rare?

IRENE. I have seen eyes that threaten like loaded pistols. (*They look at each other*—HOLMES *bursts into the room holding the piece of the crucifer.*)

HOLMES. Miss St. Claire, did your father serve in India?

IRENE. Yes, Mr. Holmes. How did you guess that?

HOLMES. You mentioned another military man, a Major Ross. And this paper in Indian papyrus, not available in England. My dear, I do not wish to alarm you, but I think we should leave for Camberwell at once. Perhaps your father has returned, and, if not, we may find a clue to his whereabouts.

IRENE. I did not mention that we live in Camberwell, Mr. Holmes. (*She looks at* WATSON.) Not to you.

HOLMES. They are digging up the area around the Post Office in Camberwell, are they not? The red clay on the soles of your boots is indigenous only to that area of London.

IRENE. Mr. Holmes, you take my breath away.

WATSON. It is amazing!

HOLMES. It is elementary. (*Holding up crucifer.*) But this is not.

WATSON. What have you discovered, Holmes?

HOLMES. I cannot say. (*There is a roll of thunder—a storm is gathering.*) It is dangerous to reason from insufficient data. Fetch an umbrella, Watson. (WATSON *goes through the door Center.*) There's a storm brewing. Miss St. Claire, I can understand your terror.

IRENE. What do you mean?

HOLMES. There is a mystery about this which stimulates the imagination. Where there is no imagination there is no horror. The markings on this paper were made with blood.

WATSON. (*Returning with two umbrellas.*) Holmes,

perhaps you could manage to be less outspoken. Are you all right, Miss St. Claire?

IRENE. My family seems to be in the grasp of some inexorable evil, which no foresight and no precaution can guard against. I would almost believe that we are all cursed.

HOLMES. Watson, be kind enough to fetch a cab from the stand, a fourwheeler. (WATSON *exits through the door, Center.*) Miss St. Claire, I want you to tell me exactly what you meant by that. (*They move Down to the edge of the stage. Music plays. Baker Street fades behind them, and the fog moves in. To* IRENE.) Why did you use the word cursed?

IRENE. It began thirty years ago, when my father returned from India. He had no money. He married my mother, Alice Napier, who had a considerable fortune—not less than ten thousand pounds a year. People said this was the reason for the marriage, but I know that he loved her. Almost from the beginning, he gambled heavily, and chased after adventurous business investments. In a few short years our fortune was gone. Another year or two saw the seizure of our estate by creditors. As a child, I remember being fussed over and dressed by servants, and then, almost overnight, moved to a small, dingy house in Camberwell, where my sister and I had to do all the work. Then my sister died, and last year my mother was taken from us. She died in a railway accident near Crewe. Do you believe in the supernatural, Mr. Holmes?

HOLMES. I do not discount it.

WATSON. (*Entering Left.*) I have a cab.

IRENE. I will not try to thank you. (*As they go.*)

HOLMES. But I will thank you, Miss St. Claire, and our lucky fate which has rescued me from the insuf-

ferable fatigues of idleness. (*They are gone. The stage is dark.*)

Scene 3

Part One

Pondicherry Lodge, in Maidenhead.

A great shaft of white light pours through a large, mullioned window of arched, Indian design, which is in the Center of the stage. The light illuminates a sitting room reflecting a taste for Indian objects and decor. A pollard lime tree with spiky branches stands outside the window.

On Stage Left stands an elaborate screen of Indian design, and on the Right, a similarly designed fireplace. Near the window there is a table which contains two candlesticks and a newspaper. The only furniture in the room is a high-backed chair; there is nothing which suggests wealth. A wheel-chair stands empty in the Center of the stage.

It is evening of the same day. The storm has moved to Maidenhead and thunder rolls periodically in long peals.

A young man in livery, pokes his head through the door, Stage Left. This is Birdy Johnson.

Birdy Johnson *enters. He is a young Cockney of surly disposition and limited resources, who is*

manservant to MAJOR ALISTAIR ROSS. *He looks at the empty room and calls out.*

JOHNSON. Major. Major, Sir? (*Stealthily, he crosses to the wheelchair and begins to examine it. A man steps out from behind the screen. It is* ROSS, *now in his fifties, but looking a great deal older. He can barely walk without a cane, his health appears to be ruined, and his cool manner from the first scene has been replaced with an irritable, waspish sarcasm. His fingers are covered with jewels.*)

ROSS. (*Approaching* JOHNSON *with the aid of his cane.*) Caught!

JOHNSON. (*Frightened.*) Sir?

ROSS. What are you about?

JOHNSON. Just tidying up, Sir.

ROSS. You are a fox, Birdy, you are an exceedingly cunning fox, with that demure visage of yours.

JOHNSON. I will not be called a fox, Sir.

ROSS. (*Imitating him.*) "I will not be called a fox, Sir." Really, Birdy, your wit is of the shallowest order. It does not reach even to a saw or a proverb. A sucking babe might challenge you. Well? What are you staring at, Boy?

JOHNSON. I wasn't staring.

ROSS. (*Strikes him with his cane.*) There's a lesson for you!

JOHNSON. I won't endure it. I won't be knocked about in this way, I won't!

ROSS. (*Sitting in his wheelchair.*) And what will you do, run to your mother?

JOHNSON. (*At the mention of his mother he shrinks.*) I'm sorry, Sir.

ROSS. That's better, dear Boy. Your mother will be spared for today. Now why did you come in here?

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