

Sherlock Holmes: Murder at the Abbey Grange

Adapted for the stage by

Mark Steven Jensen

From the short story

The Adventure of the Abbey Grange

By Sir Arthur Conan Doyle

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First Production

SHERLOCK HOLMES: MURDER AT THE ABBEY GRANGE was commissioned by Hardcover Theater. Hardcover Theater produced the play during the Minnesota Fringe Festival, August 7-14, 2004. The production was staged at the Minneapolis Theatre Garage.

The production had the following cast:

SHERLOCK HOLMES – Tim McGivern

DOCTOR JAMES WATSON – Steve Lewis

INSPECTOR STANLEY HOPKINS – Joe Leary

SIR EUSTACE BRACKENSTALL – John Lilliberg

LADY MARY BRACKENSTALL – Alayne Hopkins

THERESA WRIGHT – Jan Joseph

CAPTAIN JACK CROKER – Steve Kath

The production was directed by Natalie Diem. The Assistant Director was Kit Gordon. Music/sound was designed by Greg Brosofske. Costumes were designed by Sara Wilcox.

Cast of Characters

SHERLOCK HOLMES – The master sleuth. Age 30's-50's

DOCTOR JAMES WATSON – Sherlock Holmes's roommate and narrator of the adventure. Age 20's-40's.

INSPECTOR STANLEY HOPKINS – A young detective that works at Scotland Yard. 20's.

SIR EUSTACE BRACKENSTALL – The wealthy master of the Abbey Grange. Although he has a positive public image, privately he is an alcoholic that abuses his wife. 40's-50's

LADY MARY BRACKENSTALL – The newly married wife of Sir Eustace. She is originally from Australia. 20's.

THERESA WRIGHT – Lady Brackenstall's devout maid. Also from Australia, she has raised Mary from infancy. 50's-60's.

CAPTAIN JACK CROKER – An Australian steamship captain. 30's.

TIME AND PLACE

London - during the winter of 1897. The play primarily takes place at 221b Baker Street and the sitting room of the Abbey Grange. Other transportation scenes are described that take place on carriages, trains, and ships.

SCENERY NOTE

This play only requires an elegant sofa, a heavy chair, and two lighter period chairs, and a bench.

(AT RISE: Moonlight. WATSON, asleep on a sofa; a medical tome rests on his chest. HOLMES enters with a candle. He shakes him.)

HOLMES

Come Watson, come! The game is afoot!

WATSON

What is it, Holmes?

HOLMES

Not another word. Get your coat and come!

WATSON

(To audience.)

Ten minutes later we left Baker Street and clomped along in a cab, on our way to the Charing Cross train station.

(The Baker Street setting disappears. Horse sounds. Both very cold, HOLMES and WATSON sit in two chairs, shaking slightly in rhythm to the horse.)

The faint winter's dawn was beginning, and we could dimly see the occasional figure of an early workman as he passed, blurred and indistinct, in the opalescent London reek. It was one of those bitterly cold, frosty mornings that so often occurred during the harsh winter of 1897.

(Train sounds. HOLMES and WATSON move to the train rhythm and drink their tea.)

It wasn't until we had taken our places in the Kent train car and were both sufficiently thawed out by the hot tea, that Holmes explained the case.

HOLMES

A note arrived at our door at four a.m., Watson. It is from Inspector Hopkins.

WATSON

That young inspector you think so highly of?

HOLMES

The very same.

(WATSON looks at the telegram. HOPKINS appears.)

HOPKINS

(Worried, urgently.)

My Dear Mr. Holmes. I should be very glad of your immediate assistance in what promises to be a most remarkable case. I will see that everything is kept exactly as I

HOPKINS (CONT.)

found it. But pray do not lose an instant, for I dare not leave his body in such a state for long! Yours faithfully, Stanley Hopkins.

(HOPKINS disappears.)

HOLMES

Stanley Hopkins has called on me seven times before, and each time his summons was entirely justified.

WATSON

You think this a murder then?

HOLMES

A mere suicide would not have caused him to send for me. And Hopkin's writing shows considerable agitation. Notice how his cursive shakes throughout the note.

WATSON

I can barely tell.

HOLMES

You must observe even the smallest details, Watson. Besides the words, what else does this note tell us? Look carefully.

WATSON

Well... there is an E.B. monogram with a coat of arms.

HOLMES

Notice the posh address in Kent.

WATSON

Abbey Grange? By Jove, you don't mean that it is he?

HOLMES

I most certainly do. We are about to enter the estate of Sir Eustace Brackenstall.

WATSON

One of the richest men in all Kent!

HOLMES

And I surmise that Sir Eustace no longer breathes among us.

(The murder scene revealed. A luxurious sofa.
A chair with a knotted rope tied to it. An elegant
rug upon the floor.)

(MARY, a big bruise over her eye, sits on the sofa. THERESA, her maid, dabs at the wound with vinegar and water. HOPKINS stares at EUSTACE, who is dead and lies on a floor rug.)

HOPKINS

I see you received my rather hasty note Mr. Holmes. And you here too, Dr. Watson! Could you tend to the lady's wound?

WATSON

Certainly.

HOPKINS

If only I had my time over again, I should not have troubled you, Mr. Holmes. Since the lady has come to herself, she has given so clear an account that there is not much left to do.

MARY

(Australian accent.)

Can you cover him, please? His head...

THERESA

(Australian accent.)

There now, Miss Mary...

HOPKINS

Just a moment longer, good lady. Mr. Holmes may need to study the body.

HOLMES

It is clear enough. Sir Eustace is dead from a blow to the back of his head. A blow from this poker, I would deduce.

(Using a cloth, HOLMES picks up a bent poker and examines it.)

That will be sufficient.

(HOPKINS covers EUSTACE with a sheet.)

HOPKINS

You remember that Sydenham theft a fortnight ago?

HOLMES

What? The three Randalls again?

HOPKINS

Exactly, the father and his two sons. Rather cool to do another so soon and so near, but it is they, beyond all doubt. It is a hanging matter this time.

HOLMES

Are you sure it is the Randalls? They carried off a considerable take at Sydenham. They have little need to rob again.

HOPKINS

Speak to the lady, she will corroborate all. But go gently, she seemed half dead at first.
(Louder.)

Lady Brackenstall, please recount the events of last night for my good friend, Mr. Sherlock Holmes.

MARY

I have told you all that happened, Inspector. Could you not repeat it for me?

HOLMES

I regret aggrieving you so, madam, but I have found that crucial details are often lost in a second hand account.

WATSON

(To audience.)

Lady Brackenstall was no ordinary person. Her quick, observant gaze showed that neither her wits nor her courage had been shaken by the terrible experience.

(To MARY.)

Please Lady Brackenstall. It would be of great help.

(WATSON takes out a notebook.)

MARY

Call me Mary. I am unaccustomed to that English title.

(HOLMES pulls up a chair in front of MARY.)

HOLMES

Tell me what happened here, Mary, in as much detail as you can remember.

MARY

Very well. But now that Mr. Holmes has seen him, can you please remove my husband, Inspector? It is horrible to have him still lying in here.

HOPKINS

Of course. Doctor Watson, if you would?

WATSON

Yes, Inspector.

(WATSON and HOPKINS remove the body. As they pass, MARY buries her face in her hands; her loose gown falls off a shoulder, revealing bruises.)

HOLMES

You have other injuries, madam!

MARY

(Quickly covers herself.)

This is nothing. I... I tripped and hit my arm on that banister.

THERESA

He can hurt you no longer, Miss Mary.

MARY

No. He... cannot, can he?

THERESA

There is no need to lie.

MARY

I suppose it is no secret to anyone. My husband is, was, a notorious drunkard. To be with such a man for an hour is unpleasant, but to be tied to him day and night-

(Breaks down.)

THERESA

(Placing a firm hand on MARY.)

Our brief life here on your English island has been highly unpleasant.

MARY

Because of my rash choice, Theresa. I married a man with tremendous charm and tremendous flaws. Still I would not wish the fate that befell him this past night.

(Standing to tell the account.)

The robbers obviously knew the house well. Most of the servants sleep in the modern wing. So they knew the hour upon which to strike.

THERESA

It was around ten-thirty. At that time, the servants could hear nothing from here.

MARY

This central block of the Abbey is made up of the dwelling rooms, with our bedrooms above this sitting room. My maid Theresa sleeps above my room. There is no one else but the three of us here, and, as Theresa said, no sound could alarm those in the modern wing.

HOLMES

To know all those particulars, they had indeed surveyed the Abbey Grange for some time.

MARY

The servants had all gone to their quarters. Sir Eustace and I were performing our usual nightly habits as well.

(Enter EUSTACE, drunk.)

EUSTACE

Mary, beautiful Mary... Come to my chambers, tonight, hm? It shall be worth your while.
(Drunkenly kisses MARY.)

MARY

Eustace please, I have but... a little left in this chapter.

EUSTACE

Always reading!

(Slapping the book from her hand.)

You will come to my chambers! Or it will go hard for you.
(Grabbing her nightgown.)

MARY

As you wish. Let me see that all is locked tight, and then... I shall come upstairs.

EUSTACE

I'll walk with you.

MARY

It will go faster if I make my rounds alone, Eustace. While you wait, you could enjoy some more rum.

EUSTACE

Very well, but do not tarry. I shall not fall asleep tonight.
(EUSTACE exits.)

MARY

It was my custom to walk around for some time, for as I have explained, Sir Eustace was... was not always to be trusted. I went into the kitchen, the butler's pantry, the gunroom, the billiard-room and finally here, the sitting room. As I entered, I felt the wind blow upon my face. The window was open.

HOLMES

This window?

MARY

Yes. I opened the curtain in order to close it and found myself face to face with a broad shouldered, muscular man.

HOLMES

Such as Watson?

MARY

He was older, almost elderly.

HOLMES

Watson, if you would stand here. It will help me visualize the facts of the case.

WATSON

Certainly Holmes.

HOLMES

Continue.

MARY

By the light of my bedroom candle, behind the first man I saw two others, younger, crossing the pane to enter.

HOLMES

Hopkins, you and I shall stand in for these men.

HOPKINS

Of course.

MARY

I stepped back, but the older fellow attacked me in an instant. He caught me first by the wrist...

HOLMES

Watson?

WATSON

Oh! Yes Holmes.

MARY

And then by the throat.

WATSON

That is not very gentlemanly.

HOLMES

Watson, in the interest of criminal science.

WATSON

Yes Holmes.

(He grabs MARY by the throat.)

MARY

I tried to scream, but he struck me a savage blow with his fist over the eye--

WATSON

I absolutely will not do that!

HOLMES

Of course not, Watson! Approximate it somehow... good. What happened after the blow? All the details you can remember, Mary, would be of the utmost help.

MARY

His blow felled me to the ground. When I came to myself, I found that they had torn down that bell rope and had secured me tightly onto the oaken chair here.

HOPKINS

In which direction did the chair face?

HOLMES

Capital question, Inspector, capital!

MARY

As it faces now. My hands were tied to the arms and my waist tied to its back, with a handkerchief round my mouth that prevented me from uttering a sound. The two younger men were stealing the silver from that shelf there.

HOLMES

Our cue, Hopkins.

HOPKINS

This shelf?

MARY

Yes. Meanwhile the elder man was stealing more silver near the fireplace.

HOLMES

They were putting the bounty in sacks, I suppose.

MARY

All three had sacks, and they were grabbing as much as they could. It was at that instant my unfortunate husband entered, his favorite blackthorn cudgel in his hand.

(Enter EUSTACE.)

EUSTACE

Brigands! I'll teach you both!

(HOLMES, HOPKINS, and WATSON reenact the following actions with EUSTACE.)

MARY

He approached the young thieves, but he failed to see the older man by the fireplace. The older man picked up the poker out of the grate, and struck him a horrible blow from behind.

(WATSON "strikes" EUSTACE. He collapses in his previous position.)

MARY (CONT.)

He never moved again. I fainted once more, just for a few minutes. When I opened my eyes, their bags were filled with our silver and they had drawn a bottle of wine.

HOLMES

This wine?

HOPKINS

Notice the three glasses.

HOLMES

Indeed.

MARY

I pretended to be insensible, but I will forever have their faces etched into my mind's eye. As I have said, the oldest was elderly, with a beard. The others young, hairless lads. They might have been a father with two sons.

HOLMES

That description does match the Randalls.

MARY

Finally they withdrew, closing the window behind them. It was quite a quarter of an hour before I got my mouth free.

THERESA

Her screams brought me down to this room. We sent for the local police, who immediately called for the assistance of Scotland Yard.

MARY

That is really all I can tell you, gentlemen, I trust that it will not be necessary for me to go over any part of it again.

HOPKINS

Any more questions, Holmes?

HOLMES

I will not impose further upon your patience and time.

(To THERESA.)

But I would be so glad to hear your experience.

THERESA

Yes, ah, as my mistress has told you, I sleep two floors up from here, so I heard none of the horrible struggle. But I have a good view of the grounds. As I sat reading by my window, I saw three men in the moonlight down by the gate, but I thought nothing of it at the time. It was more than hour after that I heard my mistress scream. Down I ran, and saw her just as she says, and him on the floor with his blood and brains all over the room.

(Looks with disgust at EUSTACE.)

You've questioned her long enough, gentlemen, and now she is coming up to her room, just with her old Theresa, to get the rest she so badly needs. Come along Miss Mary.

(THERESA and MARY are gone.)

HOPKINS

Theresa Wright is her name. Nursed Lady Brackenstall all her life, and came with her to England when they left Australia eighteen months ago.

HOLMES

Only eighteen months? They could not have been married long.

HOPKINS

Barely a year.

HOLMES

Hm. Sir Eustace was apparently not as pleasant in private as he was in public.

HOPKINS

That is an understatement. What the servants have endured here for years was barely worth the pay.

WATSON

Why was not a complaint lodged?

HOPKINS

From what the local police tell me, he nearly came our way once or twice.