

Synopsis: (*The Strange Case of*) *The Miser at Christmas* by George Taylor
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I'll wager a pound to a pickle, Watson, that when we discover what happened then, we'll know what made our Mr. Scrooge the man he is today.

It is Christmas Eve 1882. The world's greatest detective finds himself without a case at what is normally his busiest season. The holiday mood invariably turns people to crime, yet everyone seems to be following the law. "It's not a good omen," he complains, "not good at all."

But his luck is about to change. A miserly, sour-dispositioned businessman named Scrooge calls at 221B Baker Street with a problem. A series of disturbing, ghost-filled dreams has caused him to question his life's course. His life passes before his eyes in these dreams – a clear signal, he believes, that he is in mortal danger. He's certain the last dream, which is to take place this night, will literally be his last dream on earth. He is fearful of sleep. Can the detective help?

The detective, whose name is Sherlock Holmes, sees this as his most challenging case: He is to find nothing less than "the snows of yesteryear." And naturally, he enlists help from his colleague and chronicler, Dr. John Watson.

The dreams related by the miser provide important clues, but there are meaningful gaps in the narrative – things he refuses to speak of: His unkind father who banished the youthful Scrooge to a dreary boarding school at Christmas; his sister, once beloved but now seemingly forgotten, who bore a child and died young; his reasons for disdaining his nephew, only child of that sister; and especially the event that transformed him from an industrious yet pleasant young apprentice, into a miser in the making and ended his engagement to a lovely young woman.

The memories are in there, Holmes tells Watson, "All we have to do is go in and get them." The means to do that lies in a new and controversial medical development called "nervous sleep" – or as it is more commonly known, hypnotism.

With Watson as hypnotist and Holmes in one of his famous disguises as the Spirit of Finding Things Out, they direct Scrooge in a very different kind of dream to discover the secrets that made him what he became. Freed from the tyranny of the secrets, he becomes a generous and almost happy member of the community.

The Strange Case of the Miser at Christmas is not another stage adaptation of *A Christmas Carol*. It is an original reinvention that finds its own truths in hints and gaps Dickens left in his narrative. It carries on many of the beloved traditions of classic versions – the dreams, the ghosts, the carols, the Cratchits. But it spins those traditions into a fresh work of theatre that provokes thought both about the season and about our role as human beings.

We experience (most of) the familiar dreams, but not exactly as Dickens relates them. For one thing, Holmes and Watson are there to ask questions and even to participate when pressed. In the end, Scrooge finds his way to redemption, but not along the path Dickens set. And Holmes, the brilliant, prickly genius without an empathetic bone in his body, learns something too, about the human spirit, about the importance of memory, and about the meaning of Christmas.