

(She takes the envelope and examines it.)

**MRS. HUDSON.** Well... I-I-I think whoever wrote it is a... servant of some kind. Yes. A servant. And he works for a... nobleman. Or a king. That's it, he works for a king!

(She smells the envelope.)

And I think it's a king from one of those... exotic countries, like Silesia. No. Wrong. It's Bohemia. Yes. And he's coming this morning on urgent business, he'll be in a hurry, and don't be surprised if he's wearing a *black mask*. There. How's that? What do you think?!

**HOLMES.** I think you opened the letter this morning and read it.

**MRS. HUDSON.** Well of course I did, you silly man. How else could I possibly know all that.

(DAISY laughs with delight.)

**WATSON.** Well done, Mrs. Hudson.

**DAISY.** I hear a carriage arriving.

**HOLMES.** (A glance out the window.) And I see a pair of colts worth a hundred and fifty guineas apiece.

(We hear someone knocking at the front door.)

**MRS. HUDSON.** I'm coming, I'm coming! Keep your shirt on! Come along, Daisy. And Mr. Holmes, eat your breakfast.

(DAISY giggles and they exit together.)

**WATSON.** (To us.) This was the moment I cherished most. A sound on the stairs, a knock at the door and the sudden arrival of some new mystery.

(Knock knock!)

**HOLMES.** Enter, please.

(A giant of a man strides into the room. He is dressed richly in fur and silk, and he wears a black mask over his eyes. He surveys HOLMES and WATSON intently.)

**THE MASKED MAN.** (With a harsh Bohemian accent.) You haff had my note?

**HOLMES.** I have indeed. And you are -?

**THE MASKED MAN.** I am Count von Kramm, servant to the King of Bohemia, and you must promise me the utmost secrecy.

(To WATSON.) You. Get out.

**HOLMES.** It is both or nothing.

**THE MASKED MAN.** I do not like it.

**HOLMES.** I don't like most things. Have a quince.

(HOLMES tosses him a quince, which he catches easily.)

**THE MASKED MAN.** I do not want a quince!

**HOLMES.** Please be seated and tell me your problem.

**THE MASKED MAN.** I have come to you about some letters concerning a love affair that my master had with a Miss Irene Adler. The matter is now pressing because the King is about to marry a foreign princess, and if she knew about the King's affair, she would break off the engagement like that!

**HOLMES.** Which would of course have disastrous European results, don't you agree, your Majesty?

**THE MASKED MAN.** (Spluttering.) "Your-your-your Majesty?" How dare you question me!

**HOLMES.** Oh come now, it's obvious that I'm speaking to King Otto of Bohemia, not his servant, his ambassador or the leader of his marching band, despite the size of the hat you're wearing.