

season. But he would say, much later, after the case in question had reached its unexpected, shocking conclusion, that despite her beauty, or perhaps because of it, she was a woman destined for a tragic end.

(We hear the sounds of a London street of the period: the pleasant clip-clopping of the horses and the tolling of bells.)

The case began on a cheerful sunlit morning at 221B Baker Street, the address I was sharing once again with Sherlock Holmes. My wife of four years had passed away suddenly in the Spring of that year, and I had moved back into our digs with a heavy heart that had at last begun to heal, in no small part thanks to the presence of my dear friend, Sherlock Holmes. To others he was a hero of great fame, but to me, he was simply my best friend.

(The scene changes to the drawing room of 221B Baker Street.)

(221B is filled with sunlight streaming in through the windows. It is the room we have come to expect from all of the masterful stories and many of the adaptations of the Holmes and Watson canon. There are comfortable chairs, eccentric furnishings, letters stuck to the mantel with a jackknife, and evidence of chemical experiments on the desk. The room evokes the Sherlock Holmes we love to be with.)

WATSON

Scene Two: 221B Baker Street

(HOLMES walks in wearing his dressing gown and greets the housekeeper and the scullery maid as usual.)

HOLMES. Good morning, Mrs. Hudson. Daisy.

(DAISY is the scullery maid in a mob cap, scrubbing the floor for dear life.)

DAISY. G'morning, sir!

MRS. HUDSON. I hope you will have some breakfast this morning, Mr. Holmes. You are wasting away.

HOLMES. Mrs. Hudson, please don't obsess.

MRS. HUDSON. Oh, just look at you. You don't sleep at night. The house is filled with that foul tobacco smoke of yours, and you don't even open your mail anymore. Look at this. It arrived *yesterday*. It might be a client.

HOLMES. Of course it's a client.

MRS. HUDSON. You should open it.

HOLMES. I don't need to open it. I know perfectly well what it says by looking at the envelope.

WATSON. Oh come now, Holmes. That's going a bit far.

HOLMES. It is child's play, Watson.

MRS. HUDSON. For you, perhaps, because you're...well, you know who you are.

HOLMES. Mrs. Hudson. You have seen my methods a hundred times. Employ them yourself. This instant. What do you think?

MRS. HUDSON. Me?

HOLMES. Yes. Do your best. Something tells me you'll do quite well.

(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.