

*Scene II*

When the lights go up, Holmes and Watson are discussing the situation.

WATSON: What do you make of it, Holmes? I'm sure it's the strangest case you've ever been involved in.

HOLMES: It does present a few points of interest Watson—from a psychological point-of-view.

WATSON: I simply refuse to believe that either of those—those, er, ladies had anything to do with it.

HOLMES: Your chivalry does you credit, Watson—but if neither of them was actually involved, we seem to be without a suspect, or any usable clues.

WATSON: What a shame that two such majestic members of the fair sex should be ruined.

HOLMES: I doubt they regard themselves as ruined—

WATSON: It is especially terrible that such a delicate creature as Mademoiselle de Pougy should find herself in need of rescue—

HOLMES: Why, I believe you've taken a fancy to her, old man—

WATSON: Nonsense, nonsense. I was merely expressing a moral interest in her. She needs someone to protect her. I'm convinced she has a good heart and could be reformed—

HOLMES: I daresay that is the most utter sentimental drivel I have ever heard from you, Watson, and frankly I've heard a lot.

WATSON: Hmmph.

HOLMES: Soon you'll want to marry her—just to protect her, mind you—

WATSON: Now see here, Holmes—

HOLMES: I'm sure she'll bring a large dowry—

WATSON: Don't be so sarcastic. My impulses are pure in this matter. I'm interested in Liane from a purely—paternal—point-of-view.

HOLMES: Well, I shall best look for someone else to share rooms—I can see where this is leading.

WATSON: Hmmph. If you come to that, I think Caroline has a month's mind to you.

HOLMES: Are you mad? You know how I feel about women.

WATSON: Nonetheless, Holmes, I believe I observe these things a little better than you, for once. Caroline likes you.

HOLMES: Never!

WATSON: I'm sure she could be very persuasive.

HOLMES: I'll go to America first.

*(There is a jaunty knock at the door.)*

WATSON *(going to the door)*: I wonder who that can be?

HOLMES: Well, open and we'll find out.

*(Watson opens the door and admits a flashily-dressed young man.)*

WATSON: Sir?

MAN: Ain'tchew Doctor Watson?

WATSON: I am.

MAN *(pointing with his cane)*: Ain't he Sherlock Holmes?

WATSON: Yes, of course.

MAN: Glad to meetcha both.

HOLMES: The Duke of Graustark, I presume?

DUKE: Right-o. Howdja know that?

HOLMES: I've been expecting you for some time.

DUKE: Smart, aintcha?

HOLMES: Other than the fact that you've had three drinks, spent the afternoon with a woman, and have been listening at the door for ten minutes, I know nothing about you.

DUKE: You really are a corker, just like everybody says. That's good, I like interesting people.

HOLMES: I presume you've come because you think you are in danger?

DUKE: Oh no. Danger doesn't bother me. I like it, don'cha know?

WATSON (*stupefied*): Like it!

DUKE (*nonchalantly*): It relieves boredom. Boredom you see, is a kind of hereditary disease with the royal family of Graustark. Some royal families suffer from hemophilia or other interesting ailments, but we suffer from boredom.

HOLMES: Then it doesn't trouble you that someone may try to kill you because of your interest in Mademoiselle Caroline Otero?

DUKE: Not at all, don'cha know.

HOLMES: It has been suggested that Caroline is killing her lovers to attract you. What do you say to that?

DUKE: If Caroline is doing that just for me—it's kinda cute, don'cha know?

WATSON (*aside to Holmes*): I think they suffer from more than boredom in Graustark, and that is my professional opinion. This twit is feeble-minded.

HOLMES: It has also been suggested that Mademoiselle Liane de Pougy has been killing Caroline's lovers just to scare you off.

DUKE: Well, that would be charming of Liane, too. All this just for me. Why, I might flatter myself in to thinking that I am rather a good catch.

WATSON: Could you seriously contemplate making a murderess your mistress?

DUKE: Well, I suppose it is a little unusual for conventional taste.

WATSON: Could you contemplate introducing such a woman to your mother?

DUKE: Oh—why they'd get along famously now you mention it.

WATSON: Surely, you jest.

DUKE: Fact. They could trade war stories.

WATSON: What on Earth do you mean?

HOLMES: The Duke means, dear Watson, that his mother is a very famous murderess.

WATSON: Really? The Queen Mother?

DUKE: Yes. Mama has a bad temper. Anytime she doesn't like somebody—well that's it.

WATSON: What do you mean?

DUKE: Mama poisons them.

WATSON: Good Heavens!

DUKE: Mama is a dear, really, but she's got a bad temper. She can't help it. Every member of the royal family has had a bad temper for the last four centuries.

WATSON: But, as Queen, why doesn't she just have people arrested?

DUKE: But that would be a misuse of royal power. Oh, no. I assure you, Mother has a very keen sense of propriety and justice. It would be wrong for the monarch to misuse her power by condemning her subject to death.

HOLMES: One has to agree to that.

DUKE: So how much more appropriate for mother to behave like a common subject and simply commit murder like anyone else would in the same situation.

HOLMES: Ah, the common touch.

DUKE: Exactly. That is why she has always been popular with the people. That and her sense of justice.

HOLMES: You do not seem to be troubled by the obvious danger to yourself or to Graustark.

DUKE: For myself, danger is something that relieves boredom. I have gone big game hunting in Africa. I have climbed the Himalayas. I have sailed the seven seas, as the saying is. One does what one can, but there are few lasting remedies for the disease in this humdrum century.

HOLMES: But you are a reigning autocrat. If you die, what will become of Graustark? What of the throne?

DUKE: I come from a large family, Mr. Holmes. I could easily be replaced. I have 26 younger brothers, several of whom, I must admit, could rule nearly as well as I do.

WATSON: Twenty-six. Your father must have been a strong man.

DUKE: Actually, I give more credit to Mama. You can understand why she has a bad temper I think. Papa wanted to have 27 but Mama refused.

WATSON: What happened?

DUKE: Father became very passionate about it, and threatened to divorce Mama for a woman who better understood her duty.

WATSON: Indeed? But he did not?

DUKE: No—he died rather suddenly. He should have known better than to make Mama angry.

HOLMES: Very thoughtless of him.

DUKE: Actually, it was Mama's most popular act as Queen.

HOLMES: I must still caution you. I believe you are in grave danger if you continue to associate with either Caroline Otero or Liane de Pougy.

DUKE: I cannot take your advice, Mr. Holmes. I only find women attractive who are dangerous in some way. Lulu the Lion-Tamer would only make love in a cage with her lion.

WATSON: I've heard of that woman. Didn't she kill herself?

DUKE: Yes, poor thing. She was very much in love with me, and couldn't stand it when I took up with the trapeze artiste.

HOLMES: How did she do it?

DUKE: She hung herself, poor thing.

HOLMES: Ah. Then your mother was not—

DUKE: Oh, no, no. Mama totally approved of Lulu.

HOLMES: And does she approve of Liane and Caroline?

DUKE: Certainly. Mother is very broad-minded. She doesn't care for respectable women. She thinks they're such bores.

HOLMES: Then you do not suspect your mother?

DUKE: Oh, no. Not her style at all. Strangling people is too crude. You see, my mother's line of the family descends from the Borgias.

HOLMES: What do you make of it, then?

DUKE: I think we can eliminate the Horizontals as suspects. Neither Caroline, nor Liane is behind this affair.

HOLMES: I am of your opinion, but I am at a loss for once to see where this leads.

DUKE: If I had my bet, I'd say it would be Baron Ollstreder.

HOLMES: Who is Baron Ollstreder?

DUKE: He is presently a lover of Caroline's. An odious, graceless—and shall I say it—boring—example of Prussianism. Very brave, I admit. Perhaps the greatest duellist in Europe, at swords or pistols. But as repulsive physically and morally as a toad.

WATSON: I wonder why Caroline has not mentioned this Baron.

HOLMES: Why do you suspect him?

DUKE: I rather fancy that murdering people is in his line. I have reason to believe that he is connected with German Intelligence and takes orders directly from the Kaiser.

HOLMES: What do you think he's up to? Why should he kill Caroline's lovers?

DUKE (*yawning*): No idea. Germans regard themselves as pretty deep, don'cha know. Actually, they don't know one word about espionage, but they must play their games. All I know is, he has

much more money than he could possibly realize from the miserable little farm he calls a Barony in Prussia.

HOLMES: It seems to me, we must meet this Baron Ollstreder.

DUKE: I shall be happy to introduce you. We're great friends, of course.

HOLMES: When can it be arranged?

DUKE: I'm returning to Paris tonight. I thought it would be a lark to follow the ladies over. I knew Caroline planned to meet you, and I thought I might as well do that, too. You have an interesting profession, Mr. Holmes. Perhaps, I'll take it up. Perhaps, I shall be the world's first consulting Grand Duke. If I tire of being Grand Duke, don'cha know. Ta-ta. I'll let myself out, gents.

*(The Duke exits.)*

WATSON *(after the Duke has gone)*: What a strange man.

HOLMES: We had best get ready to go to Paris by the night train, Watson.

WATSON: What do you make of it, Holmes? A rivalry between two of the greatest wh—scarlet women in the world. A Grand Duke with a mother descended from the Borgias. A German Baron who works as an agent for the Kaiser. Frankly, I can make nothing of it.

HOLMES: I wonder if the Grand Duke himself might be behind this.

WATSON: But for what reason?

HOLMES: Perhaps to relieve boredom.

*(Mrs. Hudson enters.)*

MRS. HUDSON: A telegram for you, Mr. Holmes. *(she gives him the telegram, and is about to leave.)* Who was that strange man who was here just now?

WATSON *(as Holmes reads the telegram)*: That was the Grand Duke of Graustark.

MRS. HUDSON *(delighted)*: A Grand Duke! Well, I never! In my house. Oh, if I'd only known!

*(She goes out.)*

WATSON: Well, Holmes?

HOLMES *(giving the telegram to Watson with a shrug)*: Read it yourself.

WATSON *(reading)*: "Dear Mr. Holmes: I've learned you are coming to Paris at the behest of Caroline Otero. If you are simply planning a lark for a few days in the company of your charming employer, be welcome. But please do not meddle in my affairs, and especially those of the Grand Duke of Graustark. I should be most upset and the consequences might be very unpleasant. Fantômas."

CURTAIN