

BLOOD MOON

Or, The Adventure of the Abducted Sorceress

by

David Poyer

Published by

Blue Moon Plays

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Cast of Characters:

Sherlock Holmes	Consulting detective
Dr. Watson	Holmes's sidekick
Mrs. Hudson	Housekeeper at 221b Baker
Dr. John Dee	Aged alchemist
Vadoma	Romany fortuneteller
De Mone Ulmi	Italian astrologer
The Mongolian	Mute magician
Strumpet	Temptress at Bazaar
Clerk	Yankee typewriter salesman
Printer	German printer
Helena Blavatsky	Prophetess and writer
Count Szecsenyi	Hungarian villain
Madame Vera	Ageless witch
Miss Morstan	Watson's intended

Walk-ons: Bazaar denizens

Same actor can play Hudson and Blavatsky OR Blavatsky and Vadoma

Same actor can play Vera, Young Strumpet, and Morstan

Same actor can play Mongolian and Szecsenyi

Time: 1880s. Setting: Central stage with Victorian parlour; side setups with minimal furniture

The "magical" elements in the play are easily available as commercial magic.

For the snake, see <<https://www.amazon.com/Silk-Cane-Magic-Snake-Tricks/dp/B06WLHRC8N>> among many others.

For the floating crystal ball, see
 <https://madhattermagicshop.com/magicshop/product_info.php?products_id=62258&gclid=Cj0KQCjwkt6aBhDKARIsAAyeLJ3mOtlz8ZaSBAQKI_NPFjoyw-ZHwvTggUZTa27vTuED7vouqpWUUsaAvT_EALw_wcB> amid many others.

For stage disappearances, either use a strobe flash or cast Dee's robe over Holmes as here: <
https://www.ehow.com/how_7715291_make-yourself-disappear-sheet-blanket.html>.

Many other simple means of accomplishing the same illusions are available; a local amateur magician may prove helpful if desired!

ACT ISCENE ONE

The sitting-room at 221b Baker Street. A fire crackles in a fireplace. a coal scuttle and easy chair next to it. The mantel holds a Persian slipper, a packet of WATSON's cigarettes, a magnifying glass, an empty brown-glass bottle, books, keys, a pocket-knife, and several red-taped files. A table with one chair sits before a window stage right. From time to time smoke or fog is visible through the window. On the table is a glass terrarium with a shiny copper cube and a thermometer. HOLMES and WATSON sit across from each other at a breakfast table. HOLMES: is reading a newspaper. WATSON is picking at his food, out of sorts.

HOLMES: A blood moon to-morrow, Watson. Or so the Daily Telegraph has it. We might catch a glimpse if this fog permits.

WATSON: I thought you had no interest in astronomical observations. That you didn't care if the sun revolved around the earth, or vice versa? That if a thing had nothing to do with criminal investigation, it held no meaning for you?

HOLMES: *(shakes out newspaper)* Really, Watson. I was perfectly in earnest that the theoretical motions of the more distant sidereal bodies were no concern of mine. But the moon? Its periods of illumination directly affect the incidence of crime. Especially in areas where the gaslight has not yet reached.

(Pause as HOLMES continues reading, WATSON eats moodily. WATSON sighs.)

During the eclipse, the refraction of the atmosphere will lend the tint of blood to our accompanying satellite.

(WATSON looks off into space. Sighs again. His hand drops to massage his calf. Holmes looks over the newspaper.)

Women have a way of looking past such things, once they have made their decision.

WATSON: *(startled)* What?

HOLMES: You were thinking of Miss Morstan, and wondering whether she could accept a half-crippled Army surgeon five years older than she.

WATSON: Once more you seem to have listened to my thoughts. How did you do it this time?

HOLMES: Quite elementary. You called upon her last night. Your hand sought the place where the Afghan bullet injured you. Your mooncalf sighs and the way you tormented your egg invited the logical conclusion.

WATSON: I see.

(Gets up, stretches, crosses to the window and looks out)

HOLMES: as you know, when no investigation is afoot, one must whet one's brain in some manner. it is most interesting, the results i am obtaining. *(gesturing at the glass case)* You have no doubt wondered what I was about.

WATSON: It had not crossed my mind.

HOLMES: An Irishman named Tyndall argues before the Royal Society that the advance and retreat of ice upon the northern reaches of Europe were due to variations of certain gases in the atmosphere.

WATSON: Surely the presence of a trifle more or less of this or that could have little effect on the weather.

HOLMES: I tended to agree but decided to subject the question to investigation. I heated that cube of solid copper to a temperature of three hundred degrees. Let it cool, while drawing a graph of the cooling rate.

I then introduced carbonic acid gas into the box, generated by the reaction of sulphuric acid with a solution of bicarbonate of soda. The gas is a remarkable substance, by the way. When compressed, it turns to liquid. Sprayed into an evacuated vessel, it turns into solid flakes of what looks like ice.

WATSON: And?

HOLMES: The cooling rate of the cube slowed markedly.

WATSON: *(lifts dead mouse from the case)* And this?

HOLMES: He introduced himself into the experiment.

WATSON: And you thus prove -- ?

HOLMES: Nothing, in and of itself. Yet Tyndall asserts that the continued burning of coal by British industry may one day result in a disastrous rise in the mean temperature of these isles, if not that of the globe itself.

(HOLMES sits with chin in hands, contemplating the cube. After a pause he adds,)

HOLMES: But if that were so, Mankind would of course cease such burning long before it

became dangerous.

WATSON: *(Eyeing the swirling fog outside the window)* Do you truly believe that, Holmes?

WATSON: With all my heart, I do. In that distant future, Mankind will no longer be guided by ignorance, greed, and emotion. But by the cold, clear light of reason.

(A tap at the door, stage left. MRS. HUDSON enters, smoothing her apron and looking anxious.)

MRS. HUDSON: Beg your pardon, sirs. A . . . sort of omnium-gatherum downstairs. They look rather . . . disreputable.

HOLMES: My Irregulars? Show Wiggins up please, if it is he.

MRS, HUDSON: No, sir. These gentlefolk I do not recognize. Also, they seem to be foreigners.

(She twitches her skirts back as a strange collection of individuals are ushered in. HOLMES and WATSON stand as the room grows crowded. Each new person bows as they come face to face with HOLMES and WATSON.

The oldest, DEE, wears a long white beard, a pointed cap, and a long robe. He carries a wizard's staff. THE MONGOLIAN is in a kaftan and pointed cap. VADOMA wears petticoats in many colors and a turban with a large gem. DE MONTE ULMI is dressed like an Elizabethan courtier, with slashed doublet, short-sword, and a rather too prominent red satin codpiece.)

HOLMES: I fear we have not places for so many. Shall we hear you out standing?

DEE: If I may sit, sir.

(HOLMES nods. He adjusts a chair for DEE, then stands back, fingering his chin and looking them up and down. WATSON clasps his hands behind him, studying them as well, then glances inquisitively at HOLMES.)

WATSON: So, what do you make of our visitors, Holmes? A troupe of actors, snatched from mid-performance, of the type who play Shakespeare or Jonson in our smaller hamlets. Or perhaps revelers from a costume-party?

HOLMES: *(Brow furrowed. He walks slowly among them, looking them up and down. Even sniffing.)* How may I be of service, my friends?

(The others look to the eldest. DEE arranges himself in his seat, resting a hand upon the knob of

a twisted staff. He blinks slowly out the window.)

DEE: *(Ancient-sounding Welsh accent)* I am clept Doctor John Dee. I beg thee to indulge us, sir, as we might not but throw ourselves upon thy mercy without other introduction.

HOLMES: Feel free to explain yourself, Doctor.

DEE: In sooth, sir, we come from a lodging scarce easy to tell of to those who hast not witnessed it. To begin, we be all what thou might calleth magi – scryers – sorc’rers –

HOLMES: Magicians?

DEE: *(frowns)*

If thou preferest. We be visiting thy city for the space of a week.

HOLMES: I see you come from different places, From the variety of textiles and footgear. And you are not all English.

DEE: Thee has't perceiv'd rightly. Aside from mineself, we hail from diff'rent lands.
(Indicates his friends with a trembling finger) Italia – Egypt - Scythia.

(The guests bow or curtsy. After a moment, so do HOLMES and WATSON. MRS. HUDSON stands to the side, shaking her head and frowning.)

MRS. HUDSON: Mm-hm.

HOLMES: And you yourself, sir? Do I hear Wales?

DEE: Many long years ago, aye sir, I be a-born of yon rocky hills. Thou art possessed of a canny ear, s'truth!

(DE MONTE ULMI grimaces and makes a gesture under his cape.)

HOLMES: And you have sought me out in hopes of – ?

DEE: My companions and I only recently arrived from . . . very distant parts. we be a sort of committee, or convocation, appointed to help organize a traveling and temporary exhibition.

HOLMES: What type of exhibition, um, 'Doctor'?

DEE: Our exhibition, or fair, admits only a selected clientele.

(HOLMES nods and reaches for his pipe with a questioning glance. DEE waves assent and draws

a white clay pipe from his robe. HOLMES bends to strike a match for him when the old man magically produces a flame on his own.)

HOLMES: *(reacts, puzzled)* Proceed, if you please.

(DEE glances at the MONGOLIAN and snaps his fingers. With a flourish, the MONGOLIAN presents two empty hands, front and back. With a further twist a snake appears between them, writhing and hissing. WATSON flinches back.)

HOLMES: *(chuckles)* Lower your guard, Watson! You are thinking of the Case of the Speckled Band. This is no swamp-adder, but a harmless smooth-snake. Note the eye-stripe and crownlike markings. The trick is an elementary one. Our friend has a tube or reed concealed under his wrist. No doubt it is spring-loaded, to urge the reptile to emerge.

(The MONGOLIAN hikes his sleeves, displaying bare forearms. But HOLMES only claps in mock applause.)

DEE: Vadoma. Ukážte mužovi, čo dokážete.

(VADOMA reaches under her shawl, drawing forth a crystal ball. Lifting it in both hands, she releases it, drawing her fingers apart. The ball remains suspended, humming as it floats. HOLMES: narrows his eyes, leaning closer. The hum becomes louder. VADOMA hands still spaced apart, advances a pace. With a jerk of her chin, she invites HOLMES to peer within.)

WATSON: *(Looking over HOLMES's shoulder)* Darkness. Running figures . . . a lantern floating though mist. But . . . What is that?

HOLMES: It appears to be a dog.

WATSON: A BEAR, PERHAPS, OR SOME ENORMOUS HOUND. BUT WHAT IS THIS . . . ITS JAWS AND EYES ARE GLOWING --

(HOLMES reaches out to trace the air around the ball, but VADOMA spits and draws back. She snatches the ball from the air and hides it again in her bosom. The hum fades.)

WATSON: My God. Did you see what I glimpsed? There, within the sphere, those figures --

HOLMES: *(rolling eyes)* It is easily explained, Watson. The ball is suspended by a black thread, which blends with the hue of her cloak. The sound emanates from a tuning-fork. The images are drawn upon colored cards, suspended within the ball and magnified by the curve of the

glass.

WATSON: But it *moved*.

HOLMES: A riffling of the cards tricks the eye. The same principle as that of the zoetrope or stroboscopische scheiben. Also, there exists no creature of that size, let alone with glowing jaws.

(He turns to DEE, who sits calmly smoking.)

HOLMES: If your performers can do no better, sir, perhaps you had best seek an easier audience. Is this the purpose of your fair? To demonstrate your . . . magical arts?

(HOLMES shoots WATSON an amused glance. But DEE smiles grimly. He holds out his left hand, which up to now he has concealed within his robe. The fingers are a dead black, with a large ruby ring set in gold. DEE glances out the window. Then, struggling up with the staff, he staggers in a circle around an obviously amused HOLMES, who stands with folded arms. Stepping back a pace, DEE lifts both hands.)

DEE: *(rapidly muttered, almost gabbled, with mystic gesticulations)* O enwebiad spiritus sin, os yw'r cwstoditis a'r cwstoditis Madam Veram et Bazaar, yn gadael ac yn dosbarthu. Sine vix, incolumis et velociter, incredulum hunc Constantinope deferte.

(HOLMES stands smiling. Then he disappears.)

WATSON: Where did he go? What the deuce just happened?

(He searches frantically around the room. DEE leans on his cane, looking into the distance as if counting out a given time. Now and again he mutters a few words of dog Latin. VADOMA drops squatting to the rug, tucking a pinch of snuff into her cheek. DE MONTE ULMI fiddles with his sword. THE MONGOLIAN perches on the windowsill, fanning himself as if he finds the room overheated.

The mantel-clock bongs three times. HOLMES reappears, as suddenly and silently as he vanished. He stands for a moment as if transfixed, then staggers to a chair. He collapses into it and stares bewildered.)

HOLMES: I seem to have returned wherein I went.

WATSON: For God's sake, Holmes! Whatever happened?

HOLMES: *(Rubbing face)* As to that, I am uncertain. I recall what I think happened . . . but the

difficulty is, that would be quite impossible. (*stares imploringly at WATSON*) Was I not physically here the whole time? Was I actually . . . elsewhere?

WATSON: You were not in this room for some time, that much I can attest.

HOLMES: I . . . The room grew dim. A group of . . . phantasms . . . seemed to appear above me. They were succeeded by four horses. Urged by a voice I could not identify, I seized the bridle of a stallion. When I mounted, the voice warned me to commit no evil while I was caught up, for if I did, my safety could not be guaranteed.

We vaulted into the air. The earth fell away beneath me. Over many leagues I was transported in a flash. At last, descending, my mount came to a halt.

I stood in the forecourt of the Agia Sophia, in Istanbul. Entering, I was importuned by a bevy of veiled houris. Obeying my voice's warning, I turned from them. I strolled about the edifice. Then my unseen interlocutor instructed me to remount. In a flash, I was rushing through the clouds once more. Then our green isle loomed below.

Then, I cannot say how, but I found myself here once more.

(*Gazes imploringly around*)

Tell me again – surely I was present the entire time? Was this not merely some effect of a powerful drug, a derivative of hasheesh or the zombie cucumber of Hayti?

MRS, HUDSON: You were gone the whole time, Mister Holmes. I niver saw such a thing. First you were gone, then -- you were back.

HOLMES: (*Slumped, looks up at DEE*) I confess, sir, you have bewildered me with this latest legerdemain.

DEE: (*shakes head violently*) The purpose of our fair 'tis neither to puzzle nor mystify. It is to tender those we invite the possibility of changing his 'r her fate.

HOLMES: Indeed.

(*HOLMES is struggling to regain his self possession. He touches a shaky match to the pipe, which, despite his aerial voyage, he is startled to find he still holds.*)

Their fate. Which is predestined, no doubt?

DE MONTE ULMI: (*fingering his sword, trying to follow the conversation*) È nella natura del destino essere predestinati.

VADOMA: Co hovorí?

She is hushed by THE MONGOLIAN.

HOLMES: Very well. . . I cannot explain your last trick, sir. Therefore, when one excludes every other explanation . . . At least, for the present. You say you are magi, sorcerers, wizards, if you will. But why the devil – pardon me – why have you come to me?

DEE: A cousin of ours hath gone missing. We cannot supplicate to the police, for reasons thou shalt und'rstand shortly. Thus, after sev'ral inquires, we did beseech ourselves of thy services. Thou art reputed a most cunning fellow, well acquainted with the thieves and felons of today's London.

WATSON: Someone is missing. Who?

DEE: She who maketh sure all is arranged for our compliment extern, and our stay. Who is't contacts those whom we wish to entertain, and maketh certain nay invitations wend astray.

DE MONTE ULMI: Vale a dire, la nostra guida e padrona.

HOLMES: Have you any idea who might have taken her?

DEE: Here be the only mark we possess.

(DEE draws a slip of buff paper from his sleeve. Holding it by the corners, HOLMES: holds it to the light, looking not at, but through the material. Then smooths the half-sheet out on the table and fetches his magnifying glass from the mantel. As he bends, examining it minutely, WATSON peers over his shoulder.)

HOLMES: What do you make of it?

WATSON: It appears to have been written using a machine of some sort. The letters are regular and exactly spaced, They are impressed into the weave of a buff paper of good quality. Almost as neatly if they had been set in a line of book-type.

HOLMES: Indeed. Done upon one of the new typing-machines. And?

WATSON: The paper is of a fine make. Perhaps linen. There is a watermark, but I cannot make it out. A small spot of a brownish material is present on the obverse.

HOLMES: Closely observed. As to the message?

WATSON: It demands aluminum and sapphires. More specifically, four solid bars of twenty pounds each, and two hundred carats of perfect star sapphires. Otherwise, it warns, this will be

the final appearance of the Bazaar, as the Great Witch will meet her doom in a fiery midnight spectacle. Her eclipse will astound all London. It ends: Rationalitas de ignorantia triumphare debet. And is signed with the initials S.C.

HOLMES: Reason must vanquish ignorance. An epigraph with which I can hardly disagree.

(He turns to the others)

Indeed, this becomes a stimulating case. Who, precisely, is this so-called Great Witch?

DE MONTE ULMI: Per spiegarlo, dobbiamo portarlo al Bazaar.

DEE: For yond, we shall accompany thee to our lodging of demonstration.

(DEE stands, hoisting himself on his cane. WATSON studies his legs, and bends to rub his own, obviously wondering why a true sorcerer could not furnish himself sturdy legs. HOLMES rises too, and reaches for his overcoat.)

HOLMES: You are coming, Watson?

WATSON: I would not miss it for all the aluminum and sapphires in the world.

SCENE TWO

The curtains of the main stage remain closed. Lights up above a hansom cab to the side. Sound effect: The steady clop-clop of a horse's hooves. HOLMES:, WATSON, and DEE: are in the carriage.

WATSON: *(looking behind them)* Did they find a cab?

HOLMES: They are directly behind us. The one with the blue canvas top.

WATSON: It's growing too dark to see. Perhaps . . . Yes, there it is, beneath that gas-lamp.

HOLMES: I remember, and it was not so long ago, when the lamp-lighters would carry their ladders from standard to standard. thanks to the progress of chemistry, there is no need for them to-day. A rare element in the mantles automatically ignites the combustible vapors.

(Big Ben chimes six times.)

WATSON: They're not doing us much good tonight. Only six, yet the swirling yellow vapors of our famous London fog have settled hard.

DEE: (*coughing*) S'truth, breathing thy air is like unto drinking vinegar. T'was not like this when . . .

HOLMES: Here is Waterloo Bridge . . . Only a few boats on the river. And the tide is out.

DEE: Who are these few forlorn creatures crouched in the alleys, wandering the ways? Their faces are so pale. Do they have no meat, in your city?

HOLMES: There is meat enough, for those who can pay. These others you see, they are our unfortunates.

DEE: And yon yellow haze above the river, which stingeth my eyes?

HOLMES: You mean our famous London fog. Due less to natural causes than to the thousand chimneys of the City. (*he turns to DEE.*) Where precisely are we bound, Doctor?

DEE: It is called the Night Bazaar. It began the year the Great Plague came to Europe. It was held first in St. Mark's Square, in Venice, and hath been convened at intervals since by a Dark Lady.

HOLMES: A Dark Lady? Details, if you please.

DEE: None knoweth whence the Lady cometh, 'r what her antecedents. De Monte Ulmi -- (*points behind them with his staff*) -- hath been with her nearly from those early days; that gent perhaps knoweth a dram more than I, but not much more. The lady is an expert horsewoman, with a deep knowledge of the mystic arts. But more than yond nay one knoweth, save she be our duenna and headmistress.

HOLMES: You say this event has been celebrated since the fourteenth century? Though in different cities?

DEE: Not each year, sir, no. But since then, aye.

HOLMES: I take it you descend from those original celebrants? As, no doubt, this lady numbers the original Lady among her ancestors. You said she arrives in advance of each performance.

DEE: Indeed aye. The lady selects the locale. Gen'rally 'tis a deserted remote location, or a lodging frequented during the day, and masterless by night.

WATSON: You only open by night?

DEE: Precisely so. The lady arrangeth for rental-payment, oft in gold, at other times, in the form

of an invitation.

HOLMES: Tell us more about these invitations.

(He peers out.)

We are leaving the City. I do not recall these houses.

WATSON: Cheaply thrown up by speculators. I believe we are nearing Sydenham. Yes, there is Sydenham Wood. Though severely reduced from how I remember it. Soon we shall have no forests at all in London.

HOLMES: To whom are they issued? And how?

DEE: Some art handed over p'rsonally, from a dark c'rn'r of the street. At other times, whatsoever conveyances offer. Somehow the lady knoweth those at a crux, and presenteth

them a choice. Usually, an offer to obtain the most secret desire of a heart . . . if one be willing to bear the toll thereof.

WATSON: A test of character?

DEE: Oft times, perhaps, sir . . . but truly, 'tis retained firmly in her hands. We did suggest, from time to time, others be involv'd. This the Lady refuseth, except, by occasion, to employ one of us as a messeng'r.

(DEE looks uneasy.)

Ye may well be the first mortals to visit without her invitation. But we couldst not see our way oth'wise.

WATSON: *(aside, to HOLMES)* Mortals?

HOLMES: *(gripping side of rocking carriage)* Cobblestones. We are leaving the City, that is certain. Doctor, Tell me more of this Lady.

DEE: The Lady is eternal. Ageless. She seeth the future. Knoweth the past. And manipulath the present, to accord with her own secret designs.

HOLMES: *(aside to WATSON)* We are gaining a picture. A dominating prima donna, of extraordinary will. She has convinced these simpletons she possesses mystic powers. And like other cult-masters, she exercises her influence for her own benefit. Perhaps too firmly for some of her subordinates.

WATSON: You suspect there may be a conniver within her organization.

HOLMES: It is not impossible. If we should –

(DEE reaches up suddenly and hammers the carriage with his cane. With a whistle from the driver, the hoofbeats slow and stop, and the cab rumbles to a halt. Their eyes are drawn upward.)

WATSON: The Crystal Palace! I was here as a boy, during the Great Exposition. Iron and glass, a wonder of the Empire. And back then, this was Sydenham Forest.

(He turns in a circle, pointing)

There lies London below us, softened by fog and smoke, but glowing with coal-fires and streetlamps. Church steeples, and the Thames. Can you smell it on the wind, Holmes? Sulphur and ash and cooking cabbage and coal-gas and humanity . . . the odors of the teeming masses of the greatest city on earth.

HOLMES: *(dryly)* You are waxing quite poetic tonight, Watson. Is it Miss Morstan's influence?

SCENE THREE

As they step down from the carriage those lights dim and the curtains on main stage part, revealing less a mystic bazaar than a half-assembled flea market. Various booths and tables are stocked with antique costumes, armor, and jewelry, medical curiosities, and antiquated weapons and instruments, old books and prints, ragged scrolls and manuscripts. Shabby painted fronts offer alchemical treatments, palmistry, Tarot and tea leaf-reading. VADOMA: and DE MONTE ULMI follow them.

HOLMES: This is unexpected.

(He stands for a moment gazing about, then trails the others in.)

WATSON: Good heavens. . .

(jugglers, charlatans, and contortionists emerge from the shadows. WATSON shields his gaze as a veiled STRUMPET, tattoos writhing down her bare shoulders, beckons him into an alcove.)

Miss Morstan! But . . . What are you doing here, of all places?

HOLMES: That is not Miss Morstan, friend Watson. Look closer.

WATSON: You - you're right. For a moment I -- I don't know why I -- but the light is very poor here.

(Strange crouched creatures prowl within the darkened tents. They pluck at their wares as if arranging them for sale, yet their furtive glances at the newcomers

betray one overwhelming emotion.)

HOLMES: They are terrified,

WATSON: I sensed it as well. But of what? Surely not of us?

HOLMES: Perhaps simply that their guiding hand has been lifted, and they are uncertain whether it will return. Or be supplanted by another . . . it remains to gather data. Without data, it is useless to theorize.

WATSON: So you have often said.

(DEE, VADOMA, and DE MONTE ULMI have hobbled a few paces ahead. They now turn and gesture the others forward.)

Lights up on a caravan or wagon painted in garish and glaring colors. VADOMA ushers them up the steps and through a beaded curtain, into a small cabin. It holds a neatly made bunk with a piecework coverlet in many once-bright colors, a cabinet for clothing, and a desk. On this lies an account book bound in cracked green morocco and a peacock-feather pen stuck into an antique inkpot.)

HOLMES: This would be the Lady's?

VADOMA: *(rapidly, with gestures)* Yah vah kitaab hai jisamen vah apana paisa rakhatee hai.

(She points to a line in the accounts, then flips pages to point out another.)

DEE: We assumed the lib'rty of examining her books. There is a recurring payment, of one thousand golden ducats per annum. It was due just before this latest convocation.

HOLMES: But it was not paid,

DEE: Nay, t'was not. Revenue from our previous appearance had been disappointing.

(HOLMES: examines the accounts, flipping page after page)

HOLMES: They are kept in an antique hand . . . a script I am not familiar with . . . in Greek?

DEE: Madame Vera writes in many scripts.

HOLMES: So the Lady's proper name is Vera.

(He flips another page, frowning)

I confess, it is not clear how your festival's income is derived . . . She also writes in other languages?

DEE: Many of those folk, east'rn tongues. Even that of far Cathay.

HOLMES: I see these accounts have been kept for several centuries. By succeeding generations of recorders. All trained in the same school of penmanship.

(Neither of their hosts responds, merely exchanging glances. HOLMES turns another page.)

HOLMES: *(holding up a half sheet of buff paper)* Aha.

WATSON: An earlier note!

HOLMES: Indeed. And typed, it seems, upon the same machine.

(He holds it to the light, close to his eyes. Then sniffs it. Closes his eyes, and sniffs again.)

WATSON: What does it say

HOLMES: This one is addressed to Signora Vera Fortunato. 'You have failed to render that which is due. This is your final warning. If we do not receive our funds before the reappearance, you will suffer the consequences.' It also is signed, S.C."

(DEE and VADOMA look somber. HOLMES, on the other hand, appears elated. He fans himself with the paper.)

HOLMES: An avenue of investigation appears. Over a period of time, monies have been demanded by this 'S.C.' Since no receipt is registered, we may assume the payments were in the nature of what the criminal element calls 'protection,' 'squeeze,' or the 'shake down,' but which the law terms extortion. Such demands are common where the officers of the law cannot be resorted to, for whatever reason. When she missed a remittance, he first imparted a threat, then kidnapped your directress and demanded payment from you, her adjuncts in this . . . carnival of the occult.

(DEE makes as if to object, but HOLMES: waves him to silence.)

Though now the demand is for a different specie. Not gold, but an even rarer metal. In fact, twice as valuable, per troy ounce.

(He glances at WATSON.)

What thoughts does that trigger, friend Watson? As well as the fact that the note is typewritten?

WATSON: It was typewritten because the writer was known to her?

HOLMES:

Perhaps. Perhaps not. And the request for payment in a different form?

WATSON: That someone new is making the demand?

HOLMES: Again, perhaps. Or simply that the original extortioner recognized, if belatedly, that ducats have not been minted since Napoleon's suppression of the Venetian republic in 1797.

(HOLMES produces the original note, and places the two side by side.)

The paper is identical. The printing, the same. Yet, do you note any difference?

(WATSON bends to scrutinize them. Then seizes a half-sphere of glass from the desk and scans it again, using it like a magnifying glass.)

WATSON: I cannot make out any.

HOLMES: Well, perhaps there is none.

(He straightens, then faces the others.)

I believe we have finished here, my friends. You may with confidence leave further investigation in our hands.

(to WATSON)

We can return to Baker Street, I believe. But I should like you to ready yourself for an errand at dawn. and Mrs. Hudson will need to send out for a pound of shag tobacco, and some strong Lapsang Souchong.

WATSON: Let me speculate. Shall I infer that you wish to be left alone tomorrow, to engage in one of those episodes of solitary ratiocination in which you attempt to trace effects back to their causes by analysis alone?

HOLMES: Combined, of course, with an expert knowledge of chemistry, soils, textiles, and the history of crime.

SCENE FOUR

Lights up on three booths or desks to the right of the stage. Old typewriters stand on two of them, with a CLERK: behind the desk. WATSON enters in top hat and overcoat, collapsing an open umbrella. He stops at the first desk. A woman types busily in background, or typing as a sound effect.

CLERK: *(New England accent)* Welcome ta the London office of tha Remington Typewriter Company, Sir. May I be of service?

WATSON: Good morning. I wonder if you might do me the favor of glancing at this missive, and telling me if it was produced on one of your machines.

CLERK: And kin I ask why?

WATSON: It is a matter for a private investigation. For Mr. Sherlock Holmes.

CLERK: Well, give it here . . . You sayin' this here is a inquiry from Sherlock Holmes? We heard a' him. Sure.

WATSON: I am glad to know it. Was this written on one of your machines?

CLERK: I can tell ya it was not. The type-face is different. An' the register. There's a number o' other writing-machines, though none offers the speed an' convenience of the Remington Perfected. Over ten thousand in use. If you would like a demonstration. . . .?

WATSON: I assure you, I am not in the market. My own penmanship satisfies me.

CLERK: As you wish. Say, you wouldn't be that Watson feller, would ya? I read one a' yer stories in the Strand Magazine. Kinder slow paced fer me, if ya know what I mean. But that Sherlock fella, he sure is smart as the dickens, ain't he? Makes you look a little slow, don't he?

WATSON: I am grateful for your informed opinion.

CLERK: That's all right, there won't be no charge. I kin direct you to the Hammond offices.

(He glances at the note again.)

But I'll tell ya now, this yere is not from a Hammond. Nor a Caligraph. Or any other machine I ever heard tell of.

(WATSON moves to the next desk. That clerk examines note silently, discusses it in mime, then shakes his head and hands it back. Shrugs. WATSON trudges to the third desk, pausing en route to shake out his umbrella. Sighs.)

PRINTER: *(German accent)* Are you all right, Mister? Sure is wet out there, ja?

WATSON: Yes, rather damp. I wonder if you might glance at this missive, and give me your thoughts as to its provenance.

PRINTER: This is from a typewriter, sir. We are a printing-shop.

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