

## 48 Hours 491

### Chapter 491 A Small Injury

The Baker Street Irregulars were among Sherlock Holmes's large deck of trump cards.

They were made up of a group of street children employed by Sherlock to run errands and track down information. Due to their age and social status, people paid no attention to them, and they were practically invisible within the city's confines. Even if they were to trail someone undisguised, it rarely raised any suspicions.

"Instead of letting them wander around aimlessly around the streets, it's better to give them something to do. Don't underestimate those urchins—sometimes they are even better than a dozen police officers. They can go everywhere and hear everything," said Holmes as he picked up his violin. "Since we have nothing else to do, any songs that may tickle your fancy?"

"Please, just play whatever you wish."

"Then it'll be Sarasate's Introduction and Tarantella," said Holmes. He placed the violin between his chin and left collarbone and began playing. Zhang Heng guessed that Holmes's violin level had to be between Lv.1 and Lv.2, a little less skillful than professional players, but it sounded terrific all the same to the untrained ear. Listeners enjoyed his playing a lot, especially in the times he put special effort into it.

As Holmes became completely immersed in the sea of music, Zhang Heng took the opportunity to see his chosen case.

In all fairness, it was actually quite interesting.

This was especially true, considering how he learned programming and communication for quite a while in the previous quest. In comparison, these cases were far more captivating, particularly when the collection of newspaper clippings played out like the scenes of an eloquent story, where each uncovered plot would be more bizarre than the last.

Zhang Heng understood why Holmes was so fond of solving crimes. It was like playing a crossword puzzle. It's participants had to utilize their full knowledge and concentration, and finding the answer itself was enough to bring satisfaction and a great sense of accomplishment.

Of course, there were more urgent things Zhang Heng needed attending to. Sherlock was finished and Zhang Heng asked him a question. "Do you know of a way I can earn money?"

"Why? Are you short of money?" Holmes raised his eyebrows. "For someone who pays half-a-season's rent as a deposit to someone he hadn't met before, it's rather strange that you're in need of money."

"That money was given by an elderly friend when I told him that I had found lodging. The truth is, I don't have much left," confessed Zhang Heng. He examined his pockets at the beginning of the quest, and there were about five pounds and seven shillings in it. Even though the rent was paid forward, and meals were provided at home, the money wasn't nearly enough to support the daily expenses of London.

Holmes shrugged. "I would like to hire you so that you can assist me in solving crimes. We worked well together in that textile factory, but I may not be able to pay you any salary. If I did, I wouldn't have needed someone to share the rent with me."

"Solving crimes is something I'm interested in, so you don't have to pay me anything, but it looks like I would need another job, perhaps something that won't take up too much time," said Zhang Heng.

Even though it was still early in the quest, beating Sherlock Holmes at solving crimes wasn't going to be an easy task. That said, Zhang Heng was ready to put in the work. In fact, he did not need much money, just enough to cover his expenses. Earning that much here would be useless as he couldn't bring the money out into the real world anyway.

There were plenty of ways Zhang Heng could make money in this era, but they were all jobs that took up long hours. What more, the more important thing here was to explain to Holmes his source of income.

"Hmm... I do happen to know a way to make money." Holmes touched his chin. "I did it for a while, and although it wasn't for the purpose of making money at the time, it did bring me a considerable income. It meets your requirements perfectly. Also, it won't take up too much of your time. All you need to do is free up an evening, but..."

Holmes paused.

"It won't be easy. You have to show me that you are indeed capable of making this money."

The private detective got up from the sofa and gestured to Zhang Heng. "Come with me, leave your hat and coat, we won't be gone long."

The two walked out of 221B Baker Street and came to an open area with no one around. Holmes stopped, turned to face Zhang Heng, and raised his fist without a warning. Zhang Heng immediately reacted by moving out of the way and avoided being hit.

"Not bad," Holmes praised. "I can tell from your physique that you've probably been trained to fight. Great. I shall not reserve my strength then."

Holmes constantly shifted directions so his opponent couldn't tell when or how he was going to attack.

Zhang Heng, on the other hand, remained in his place, not moving much.

The next minute, Holmes suddenly threw a punch again, but this time, Zhang Heng did not sidestep. Instead, he stretched out a hand to block Holmes' punch, this time, much stronger and faster than the previous one.

"Good defense."

Holmes did not seem surprised but rather excited by his flatmate's resistance. Now, he appeared to be more motivated to win, and became a lot more focused.

In truth, his punch was not all that unusually strong. His moves were quick, clean, and straightforward. In a way, it was very similar to Zhang Heng's style.

Holmes' boxing skills, like his violin playing skills, however, were at the highest level for an amateur. It more than sufficed for the detective industry, but was worlds apart Zhang Heng's decade of training in deadly battlefields. Right now, without a sword in hand, Zhang Heng was somewhat handicapped and he would have to rely on his body posture and movements to avoid most of Holmes' attacks.

"I'm going to start my counter-attack," announced Zhang Heng.

Holmes hesitated. He could already tell that Zhang Heng was a lot stronger than he was, but at the same time, it made him even more curious about how good his opponent really was. Since they had already started, they might as well go on, he thought to himself.

Five minutes later, Holmes returned with Zhang Heng to their apartment with one hand covering his eye.

"Do you need me to get you something for that?" asked Zhang Heng.

"No need. It's just a minor injury," said Holmes. "I was hit harder than this every day when I was a boxer."

The moment Sherlock uttered those words, he quickly realized that it was nothing to be proud of.

"Anyway, I can introduce you to a few underground boxing arenas, but if you really plan to make money from this, you'd better throw a game every now and then. Don't win too effortlessly, otherwise, there won't be any excitement and suspense, and the handler will have a difficult time."

## **Chapter 492 Carpet**

That evening, Wiggins returned to report that the Baker Street Irregulars had followed and observed Pearson for half a day, and that nothing worthy of note had been obtained. He had started work at the chemical plant as usual and didn't act strangely. Holmes wasn't in a hurry, so he asked the kids to continue to keep their eyes peeled on Pearson. As for Sherlock, he wanted to work on his research paper.

On the second morning, Wiggins arrived, furiously knocking on the door and startling Mrs. Hudson, baking bread in the kitchen at that time. The commotion woke Zhang Heng too, and when he stepped out of his room, he saw Sherlock Holmes laughing loudly as handed seven shillings to Wiggins.

"One for each, two for yourself. Go to Inspector Gregson, and tell him that Holmes wants him to come to 221B Baker Street," said Sherlock. As he looked up, he saw Zhang Heng coming down the stairs.

"It's done. The case is finally coming to an end! If Pearson is caught, the main culprit won't be escaping."

"Huh?" asked Zhang Heng with raised eyebrows, "you have all the evidence you need?"

"That's right," replied Holmes, rubbing his hands together. "Let's have breakfast while waiting for Gregson. I'll explain everything later."

About an hour later, Inspector Gregson reluctantly arrived at 221B Baker Street, murmuring in disgruntlement as he entered through the door. "I said the case is over. Why did you ask me here? The police are very busy. I couldn't even get a proper night's sleep."

"Really? What are you up to? New case? Still waiting for the commissioner's commendation?" Holmes laughed.

Gregson blushed and lowered his tone by a notch. "I've contributed to this city after all. The case has been in the newspapers for the past two days. Nothing surprising that it grabbed the commissioner's attention."

"Indeed, but I think it's still not too late to celebrate after we catch the real murderer," said Holmes.

"The real murderer?!"

Gregson was taken aback.

"Come with me. It won't take up much of your time. By the way, bringing your cuffs with you?"

"I have it with me," replied Gregson impatiently. "I also have my gun with me, and I will not leave this essential piece of equipment behind."

"Probably, won't need it. After all, the suspect is not wicked, and besides, we still have a master here," said Holmes while glancing toward Zhang Heng. Yesterday was still fresh in his mind, and his eyes were still a little swollen.

"Let's go, gentlemen."

Instead of directly heading to the chemical plant, they first entered a pawnshop with a carriage.

"Someone came to pawn a carpet earlier. Where is that carpet now?" Holmes asked the owner.

The pawnbroker instantly became nervous when he heard the question.

"I knew it," he cursed under his breath.

"Eh?"

"I'm not talking about you, gentlemen. I'm talking about the kid who came to pawn the carpet earlier. I was suspicious of him, and to be honest, I've been in this business for a long time. I have crossed paths with all kinds of people. Judging by his attire, he looked like a poor man. How could he have gotten his hands on such a good carpet? He pawned the carpet right when I opened for business. 'Could it have been stolen?' I muttered in my heart."

"Why did you accept it then?" quizzed Gregson.

At that, the pawnbroker simply sneered.

"How much did you give him?" Holmes asked.

"Two... two pounds," the owner sheepishly admitted. "I examined the workmanship and materials, and you'll need to spend at least twenty to thirty pounds for something of that quality." "So it means you reap ten times the profit if you manage to sell it off? Come on, don't feel bad about it. The problem is, it is a piece of evidence, and it is related to a murder. Perhaps we will give it back to you after we use it. Now, take us to the carpet!"

"Fine... Fine."

The pawnbroker brought the three to a warehouse where pawned items were stored. Holmes squatted down, and he could see bloodstains in the middle of the carpet without even using a magnifying glass. Someone had attempted to clean the spot but apparently didn't do an outstanding job.

Gregson tried to console himself.

"This doesn't explain anything," he said in disbelief, seeming to be a little shaken and a little nervous as well. "Well, the pawnbroker mentioned the carpet's probably stolen."

"This is the carpet in John Jones' office," interjected Holmes. "To be honest, I didn't expect the investigation to go so smoothly. I thought he would have used a more secure method to deal with this."

"Why does that name sound so familiar? Wait... are you talking about John's textile factory's current owner?" Gregson finally remembered where the name came from. "He was the one who welcomed us into the factory. Seemed like a nice guy, that bloke." "The textile factory's female employees don't seem to think so. It's not the first time he's harassed one of them," said Holmes. "Although nobody wanted to talk about it, I still discovered that he'd taken over the factory his father about a year ago. Right after that, female employees over there started getting pregnant. Of course, most kept as quiet as they could and left the factory after receiving severance payment." "It is indeed not something one should be proud of."

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Gregson's tone had mellowed considerably. He went on, "Well, I admit that I might have missed something. Mr. John is suspicious, but I still insist that the kid named Paul is my number one suspect here. After all, the bloody clothes under his bed can't be fake."

"Stop getting nervous, and listen to me first."

Holmes smiled.

"It was Molly's turn to clean up the place when the tragedy struck her. She was the last to leave, and at that time, the light in John's office was also still turned on. In other words, they were the only two people still in the factory at that time. John had all the time in the world to commit the crime. The next day Zhang Heng and I visited the textile factory. The guy at the entrance told us that John was not there. That didn't sound right to me, especially after someone was murdered in his factory. He should have been at the factory, trying hard to calm his female employees down. When we were there, I sneaked into John's office and noticed that his carpet had been changed recently. The new carpet was obviously not the right size, probably one that was hastily pulled from home. A faint bloodstain was also on the corner of his majestic desk. Blood seeps into the wood grain, yes, but as you said, it still doesn't explain why Molly's clothes were under Paul's bed."

There was a reason why Gregson was the best man to hold the police inspector post.

He shook his head. "Is John trying to put the blame on Paul? But Paul works at the chemical plant next to his factory. John might not even know him. Secondly, even if he knows that there is such a person called Paul, it is impossible he knew where he lives. The network of alleyways in the slums would confuse John. If a person like him enters the slums, he would have been instantly noticed."

"You are right, which is why I believe that there is another conspirator in this case!" proclaimed Holmes.

## Chapter 493 Sit Down and Rest

Holmes booked a carriage, and the three hurried over to the chemical plant.

“Conspirator?”

Gregson was surprised.

“Didn’t you say that this was a crime of passion? The suspect obviously did not plan. The reason why he killed Molly was that she resisted fiercely. It frustrated the killer. And as you said earlier, there were only two people left in the textile factory.”

“This is the last key that complements my reasoning, and it is also the most important key,” Sherlock deduced with surety in his voice.

“I found the answer later in the chemical plant. Paul lived in a shared house, and his roommate also worked in the chemical factory. These guys leave work half an hour later than the textile factory. Paul had left the chemical factory first, intending to look for Molly as usual. However, Molly wasn’t at the place where they often met. Paul felt that something was not right. So, he went to the textile factory and saw that it was closed. In the end, he returned to the chemical factory.”

“Huh?”

“His roommate, Pearson, was still there at that time, so Paul fetched Pearson to go find Molly with him,” Holmes went on.

“Something interesting is coming next. Paul and Pearson split up to look for Molly. Now, Paul didn’t manage to find her, but his roommate, Pearson, accidentally ran into John, who happened to be dragging Molly’s body to the river to be disposed of. Naturally, when most people come across a situation like this, they would either call the police or if they are good fighters, they would have tried to try to apprehend John first. Unfortunately, Mr. Pearson chose another path.”

“Which path?”

Gregson couldn’t help asking.

“Much like Paul, Pearson came to London when he was very young. This was his fourth job. Previously, he polished shoes on the streets, washed dishes at a restaurant, and helped to look after horses. At night, he would sleep in the stable. Such lads must have experienced the hardships of life at a very young age. Knowing there was no one he could rely on, he had to seize every opportunity before him. On that fateful night, when he saw John by the river, he realized the opportunity he had been waiting for all this while had finally arrived.

“Pearson persuaded John, now in an extreme state of panic and anxiety. He told him he could help with this matter, and although John naturally didn’t trust strangers, but the situation at that time wasn’t in his favor. There were not many options for him to choose from, and as a last resort, he could only choose to believe Pearson.

“After that, Pearson proved that he had lived up to this trust,” said Holmes, as he turned to Gregson again.

“Remember how you told me that you found Molly’s clothes under his bed? I thought it was weird at that time. Since he dumped the body into the river, why did he have to take her clothes off and put them under his bed?”

Gregson was embarrassed. “This... is a problem... Why didn’t I notice it before?!”

“But if Pearson were the one who did it, then everything would make perfect sense. At first, he persuaded John to take the clothes off Molly. He then brought them home and put them under Paul’s bed so the police would question Paul but not Mr. John. As for the carpet in his office, John handed that task to Pearson too. This guy seized every last opportunity in front of him. In a way, his plan was a huge success. I thought we had to wait a long time to slip up, but to my surprise, he ends up making such a low-level mistake.

“He didn’t even think of burning the carpet in the first place. Instead, he pawned it.”

Holmes shook his head.

“The article published in the Echo might not be a bad thing, after all. At least, it paralyzed his nerves. Considering his previous living conditions, it is not incomprehensible for him to make such a mistake. It does save us a lot of trouble. Now, we just need to get the blanket and apprehend Pearson. With that, we have everything we need to prosecute the real murderer. Then, the case will be over.”

The three then got off the carriage in front of the chemical factory. This time, there was no need for Holmes to bribe the guard anymore. Gregson revealed that he was a policeman, and they managed to find Pearson, who was still working in the factory at that hour. However, they ran into a small hitch while trying to apprehend him.

Perhaps it was because the police had arrested their protesting colleagues. Now, all the workers had turned hostile towards them. Pearson recognized Gregson and realized that something wasn’t right. As a result, he had persuaded his fellow workers to surround Gregson and Holmes.

Seeing Pearson disappearing into the crowd, Gregson went after him without much thought. He drew his revolver and was about to shoot into the air when Holmes abruptly caught his arm. Gregson stomped in frustrated fury.

“Why are you stopping me for?! He is getting away!”

“Don’t worry. He can’t run far,” replied Holmes nonchalantly, not showing the slightest bit of anxiety.

Pearson ran out of the factory after he had created a mess. He was deeply frustrated. Paul was his friend, where the two stood up for each other whenever they were broke. Because of that, Pearson did not want to live like that anymore. However, no matter how hard he tried, life always handed him the short end of the stick, kicking him down over and over again.

It wasn’t until the previous night when he met John that Pearson finally made up his mind to stop living like this. He decided that he’d become famous in the metropolis, and for that reason, he didn’t hesitate to turn against Paul and help John instead. At least, he could become a manager there without working his arse off. He could not wait to quit his job at the chemical factory.

And with the thought in his hand, his dreams suddenly seemed possible. Only two days later, however, his dreams were shattered to smithereens. Although he had managed to escape the factory, he was now perplexed, and he did not know where he should go next.

Suddenly, he saw an Asian man standing not far ahead. "Pearson?" the Asian man asked as he looked at him.

"Get lost!"

Pearson was in a rut and wasn't in the mood for a conversation at the moment.

"It seems we have found the right person," the Asian man nodded, "Just sit down and rest for a while."

"I'm frustrated, man. Don't blame me for being impolite if you don't get lost."

Pearson clenched his fists.

The Asian man smiled when he saw it.

"Sure. This makes things easier."

Five minutes later, Holmes and Gregson finally came out of the chemical factory. Gregson's clothes were ripped, and his hat was lost. He was cursing nonstop, and then was when they spotted Zhang Heng standing under a tree with Pearson, now crouching and hugging his stomach.

#### **Chapter 494 Boxing Fight**

Every night, the alley behind owl tavern was abuzz with noise and activity.

Loafers and nearby laborers loved coming here after work. There was no Tiktok or Weibo in this era. Hence there was also no turning into keyboard warriors, and entertainment was sorely limited, especially for these lower-class citizens of the society. They couldn't afford a game of golf or attend fancy dance parties like the wealthy gentlemen and ladies, nor would they understand the sophistication of theatre.

One thing this group of men preferred, however, was a sport like boxing, where flesh met flesh and spattered blood and sweat were everywhere. Now, this was indeed a man's romance. Combine that with some money, and the entire prospect became an exhilarating and adrenaline pumping undertaking for the underprivileged lot.

The truth was, it wasn't just the workers, but even the rich enjoyed this brutal amusement. Among the rowdy crowd were gentlemen dressed in fine suits and hats. They tapped their canes, waving money in the air like they were toilet paper. A group of onlookers had gathered in a circle, leaving a space in the center for tonight's two main protagonists. One was a hulk of a man who worked in a shipyard. The muscles on his arms bulged, and his chest was covered in a carpet of thick hair like a bulletproof vest. They called him Anchor Quinn, inspired by the tattoo on his right arm, and he was a regular among the underground fight club. He scored 13 winnings and six losses in the past three months, and he could have reverted the losses.

Tonight, his opponent was an unfamiliar face. Asians were rare in London, especially those who spoke fluent English. This one claimed to be a famous traveler from a wealthy family, probably equivalent to a



British squire. His hands belonged to one who had never done a day's labor, and his healthy but far from strapping physique had many of the spectators feeling less than optimistic about him.

"What the hell is this? Couldn't they find a better fighter?"

"I bet he won't last ten rounds against Anchor. That poor bastard will most probably end up in the hospital!"

"Ten rounds? I don't think he can even last five! If the guy has any sense at all, he should kneel and beg for mercy before it even starts."

"If memory serves me right, he won't get any money then..."

"Instead of thinking about making money, he should think about protecting his own little life."

The crowd discussed among themselves, the odds between the two competitors, worlds apart.

On the one hand, Zhang Heng's odds had jumped to 7/1, and on the other, Anchor's was only 1.9/1. In other words, if you were to place a pound on Anchor, and he won, you would earn less than two shillings. But even then, the majority placed their bets on Anchor. After all, it was free money.

It was a shame that small-scale street boxing promoters had limited funds. As a result, each individual betting limit was capped at five pounds, also an effective method to keep anyone from bribing a boxer to secretly manipulate the game. Otherwise, winning by quantity was also an excellent way to make money. However, for most of these workers, five pounds was a lot of money. Since it was rare that they encountered such a risk-free opportunity to make money, people had begun borrowing money before the match started.

And what happened next confirmed the people's verdict.

While Anchor had his share of shortcomingsclumsy and threw slow punches-every punch he threw was firm. Under his violent offensive, his poor opponent, the Easterner, could only dodge, and even so, still received several punches on the body.

Until now, he did not even have a chance to attack, completely subdued by Anchor's overwhelming firepower. "Kill him! Anchor! Tear him apart! We don't need sissies in a man's sport!"

"Show him what English men are made of!"

The crowd's fervent cheers seemed to give Anchor an injection of renewed strength. His awkward, clumsy movements became faster and lighter. Zhang Heng received two more punches, and he wasn't looking too good.

The crowd exploded into applause. Holmes, who had been observing from the sidelines, wanted to laugh. So far, Zhang Heng had been on the receiving end of the punches, and it looked like he was never going to win. But only a seasoned observer could see that those punches didn't damage Zhang Heng too badly. Anchor's movements were so slow that before his fist struck, Zhang Heng had already raised an arm to protect himself. So, even though the Asian looked like he was at a disadvantage, he was actually holding up pretty well.

Zhang Heng's breathing had remained unchanged since the beginning of the fight, and his footsteps were methodical. On the other hand, Anchor, who had the supposed upper hand, had begun to pant-a lack of stamina, a common problem among strength-type fighters. Especially when encouraged by the roar of the audience, he struck again with full force at the cost of slowing down after the rush of adrenaline had passed.

It was almost time to fight back, Holmes thought to himself.

Just then, Zhang Heng began to make a move. This time, when Anchor swung a fist at him, Zhang Heng did not block the blow, instead, he moved half a step forward, and with a slight tilt of the head, avoided the fist. A panicked look flashed across Anchor's eyes. As a boxer, he recognized just how bad his situation was. He had thrown so much strength into that punch that it was impossible to retrieve it halfway.

On top of that, his chest was also wide open-a bad time to be so close to his opponent.

But he very quickly, he recomposed himself. So what if his opponent was near? Judging by the earlier sparring, his opponent's performance had been rather lackluster. Anchor, holding true to the idea of 'punch first, then use the opportunity to grab the opponent and put an end to this long overdue game,' he regained confidence.

"It's never a good habit to underestimate your opponent," Holmes tutted, rubbing his chin.

The next thing he saw was Zhang Heng, striking Anchor's face.

The punch was more painful than Anchor expected. A tooth, along with a spray of blood, had been knocked off. His brawny frame helped him weather the force, though, and he managed to stay upright. So, things weren't looking too bad.

It was now his turn.

Anchor's hand curled into a fist. He was about to strike Zhang Heng on the head, confident it would suffice to knock the Asian to the ground.

But before he could swing his arm, he received another punch on the right cheek.

What?! So fast?!

Blinded by the punch, Anchor began to stagger, and all the strength reserved in his body was completely drained off him.

But that wasn't the end of it. Zhang Heng clapped Anchor's ears hard with his palms, and the otoliths in the semicircular canals that controlled the balance of the body were affected. Anchor began swaying like drunk.

He could barely walk straight, let alone fight. His mind was a puddle.

Naturally, Zhang Heng did not miss the opportunity, and ended the long but not-in-the-least-bit dangerous battle with an uppercut.

Anchor's giant body fell to the ground with a sickening thud.

Suddenly, the once unruly cheers and shouts evaporated, and a heavy silence filled the alley. Mouths were left ajar, and waving handkerchiefs hung in mid-air. The people's eyes were gaping wide, as if unable to process the sudden turn of events they had just witnessed.

How could Anchor, who had the very clear advantage, be knocked out just like that?

#### **Chapter 495 The Idle Days**

"That was an exhilarating fight! You followed all the pointers I gave you, won the fight, and fooled all the spectators at the same time. Here's the money you won."

Holmes handed all thirty pounds to his flatmate.

As a participant, Zhang Heng couldn't bet on himself, so he had Holmes place the bet on his behalf. In addition to the two pounds he won, he received a respectable 32 pounds from the fight alone.

"You have no prior reputation, and no one knows how good you are. What more, this is just some lowly anonymous fight, so the fee for your appearance is only this much. It will get better, but it looks like you're too eager to make a name for yourself, haha!"

"Like I said, making money is of secondary importance to me," replied Zhang Heng as he wiped the sweat off his face with a towel.

"Pity. If you continue participating in fights, you might very well become a well-known boxer. You have the skills, the composure, and you come from some ancient, mysterious land from the far east. It would be an excellent gimmick," Holmes remarked. "But I'm glad that you're willing to work with me. I really do need a partner."

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Two weeks had passed since the River Thames case. At that time, Zhang Heng managed to seize Pearson who was trying to escape, and Gregson interrogated him on the spot, thus confirming Holmes' deduction. The inspector had Paul immediately released, but bad news awaited him when he went to John's house with his men to arrest him. They learned that he had gone on vacation and had left the night before—clearly, the movements of a guilty man.

Gregson slapped his thigh in a fury. What worried him most was that John would have escaped to some obscure colony and would never return. He could be a long way from England and it would be nearly impossible to catch him then. But Holmes had suggested that unlike Pearson, John was a man of good standing in London, owning many factories and plots of prime estate.

He wouldn't have abandoned all of these things and escape to the colonies, where life was far less colorful than a big city unless it was his last resort. His escape was more of a temporary nature. Holmes' proposal to Gregson was also straightforward.

"Capture" Paul, and then pay John's house another visit with the excuse of inviting him to attend Paul's trial in court.

Gregson thought about it and did as he was told, and it did not take long for this gambit to bear fruit.

it turned out that John had never left London at all. Instead, he had been hiding in a secret manor on the outskirts, keeping a close eye on the situation, while his old housekeeper would report any news to him. The arrest of the “murderer” instantly made headlines on the Echo and newspapers such as The Times and The Evening News. Headed by Inspector Gregson, Scotland Yard was lauded for their efficiency and valor. Furthermore, unions and activists were also demanding for the personal safety of female workers be improved. With the matter seemingly concluded, John returned to his home a week later, worried that a lengthy absence would raise suspicion.

As soon as he set foot into his house, he was instantly surrounded by the police.

Gregson could finally breathe a sigh of relief. Smugly, he put John in cuffs, and the next day, Echo printed a new article detailing how the astute Inspector Gregson had used the media to deceive the killer, lowering his guard down, before finally nabbed the real perpetrator.

The citizens of London felt as if they were witnessing the unfolding of a sensational detective story. They little expected the case to hold so many unforeseen surprises, where a battle between sheer wit of police and criminal ended with justice triumphing over evil. Who would hate to read a story like that?

Holmes had also been keeping track of the case’s progress, but mostly, of whether his deductions of the criminals were accurate or not. Everything else outside of that didn’t seem to concern him.

Holmes even made a trip to see John personally after his arrest. He returned to 221 Baker Street that day, looking extremely pleased. Zhang Heng thought it was rather amusing. Sherlock Holmes’s obsession with deduction and reasoning had reached a tipping point where most people found difficult to understand. He was addicted to it, like a child preoccupied with toys, unable to withdraw no matter how hard they tried.

“The case itself isn’t complicated. In fact, it was quite simple. If I had been put in charge, I would have been able to tell that John was the killer right off the bat. Even if the evidence was insufficient and I couldn’t make an arrest, I would have my men follow him and keep him from escaping. Thank goodness, it’s finally over,” said Holmes.

It took Zhang Heng two weeks to go through all the cases Sherlock had handed him. They really opened his eyes, especially some of the more compelling crimes committed by the more crafty murderers.

Holmes, however disagreed with the quick scanning

“There’s no need to rush. This is just the beginning. After this, you’ll need to summarize and analyze the similarities and differences between these cases, then remember them. You might encounter similar cases in the future, and you’ll be able to make quick, efficient deductions. As for the knowledge of soil, tobacco, and all that, I’ll be teaching you that as well. But not now... At least not until you’ve completed the first stage; otherwise, you might just bite off more than you can chew.”

Zhang Heng nodded.

With the stipends he earned from the boxing match, money wasn’t going to be worry for the next two months. Of course, as the odds of him winning increased, things wouldn’t be that simple anymore. His appearance fee would increase, of course, but he would have to participate in two or three fights a month to make enough money to cover his expenses.

Sherlock Holmes was consulted on two more cases after the River Thames case, one from a fellow detective, and another commissioned by a client. After listening to detailed accounts, Holmes compiled a list of deductions and solved the cases without even visiting the scene of the crime.

These two cases earned him some money. But after that, there was an idle stint.

With no work available for the entire week, Holmes finally found the time to complete his paper on the effect of the shape of hands on different professions. Then began the screeching and howling of his violin, until he finally succumbed to the boredom and became a sack of potatoes.

When Zhang Heng enjoyed his breakfast, which he rarely had the opportunity, Holmes was still fast asleep. In fact, he spent the entire morning in his room.

Zhang Heng knocked on his flatmate's door and let himself in.

Holmes was slouching on his suede armchair with his head tilted back. There was a syringe on the side table and a couple of needle holes in his arm.

"Do you know that this only serves to kill you?" asked Zhang Heng.

"Don't worry; this is only 7% of the solution. I'm aware of the harms it can bring, but I am not the type of who can just sit and do nothing. I need to be doing something! Even if I am given the most difficult problem or the most difficult case, I would be happy. I detest living an uneventful, mediocre life! The side effects of this drug is nothing by comparison."

Holmes's eyes were shut as he spoke, "Every earthling pursues stability and comfort, getting married, having children, and a stable job. But what's there to look forward to in a life like that? Don't get me wrong. I'm don't look forward to chaos all day long, but if there are no criminals in London, then I will consider relocating! Otherwise, I might just die in this chair sooner or later!"

## **Chapter 496 The East End**

Even though Zhang Heng and Holmes had been getting along quite well, the two had only known each other for a few weeks and hadn't yet developed a deep friendship. After Zhang Heng's attempt at persuading the latter, he said nothing more the next time they saw each other. After all, they were all adults, old enough to be responsible for their own actions.

Zhang Heng heaved a massive sigh before he left the house.

"You rarely come to London, so go out more often when you have time. Don't just see the city; observe each detail, and keep a record of them. It will help with solving any upcoming cases."

"Mm, I asked Mrs. Hudson to bring you lunch," answered Zhang Heng. "Thank you."

As a matter of fact, even without Sherlock Holmes's reminder, visiting London had always been part of Zhang Heng's plan all along. One thing was for sure, though, Sherlock Holmes knew the city like the back of his hand. He could always be found in the upper class's banquets (although he despised their shallow materialism and the ostentatious red tapes), drinking dark beer, and making jovial conversations with cab drivers.

To win the competition and complete the mission, Zhang Heng would need to narrow the gap between them as much as possible.

So, that afternoon, he decided to leave the house. Instead of calling for a carriage, he took to walking the streets.

He first headed to the lively Queen's Market, where the Royal Clarence Vase was on sale for just one shilling. The ornament made of glass, enamel, and gold was explicitly crafted for King George IV and was said to have taken 15 skilled workers three years to complete. Curiosities and trinkets from all over the world could be found there, including cotton-padded clothes from India and tea from China.

After that, Zhang Heng took a boat tour of the Thames River, which at that time, was flanked by factories and houses. Thick, endless streams of black smoke belched out of the chimneys, and ships dropping anchor choked the riverbank, congesting to the point only a narrow passage remained down the middle. At the sterns, topless boatmen smoked tobacco, and the incessant smog Dickens described as "interminable serpents" engulfed the entire city in a grey shadow.

Horse-drawn carriages sped down the roads, women selling flowers weaved through the crowd with baskets in their hands, while the shoeshine boys sat on their heels, diligently working their brushes and hoping to earn a little more tips.

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To the west of Charing Cross was London's main business and entertainment center, also England's largest financial capital. The famous West End theatre complex was located here. Au contraire, Bishop's Gate Street, lying east of River Thames, was a completely different scenery altogether.

In the Middle Ages, it was a vast, rural, and sparsely populated area. However, the rapid expansion of London City saw a population boom. The houses here were plain, squalid, and dilapidated terraces, cramped and dense with narrow, curved alleyways running between them. Originally the residence of sailors, shipbuilders, and a large number of Jews, it had now become the gathering spot for all low-income groups. The population here was densely packed, cramming in about 30,000 people every half a square mile. Each house was occupied by a large number of people, where lighting conditions were awful, and ventilation greatly lacking. The shared latrines were filthy, and along with that came a permanent stench wafting around the air. These unsanitary conditions were the source of many nasty epidemics—Typhoid being the most common one.

In the early 19th century, a cholera outbreak caused about 6,000 deaths. Several other outbreaks of the same disease followed, killing tens of thousands of people, most of which the poor in the east.

Furthermore, London's east end had the highest crime rate and was notorious for being the most dangerous place in the city.

Two million people called the area home, yet there was a heinous absence of basic public facilities, municipal authorities, theater galleries, soldiers... Really, there was nothing at all. It was like the city's forgotten corner, carrying with it no history nor future.

Unless absolutely necessary, west Londoners would never set foot in this place, not to mention how they first needed to contact Scotland Yard. If and when they did pay a visit, they made sure to bring company, and were never alone at all times.

Zhang Heng made sure to change into plainer clothing before coming, but it wasn't long before he was hit with a barrage of strange gawks and awkward stares.

It was mostly because of his Asian face that he stood out like a sore thumb. On top of that, as a modern man from the 21st century, his skin was better than that of nobles of this age though he had never bothered with skincare. Even with the change of clothes, he still looked too different from the poor scraping by in the east end.

Two children passed him by. One was playing with a stick when the other slipped and fell on Zhang Heng  
"Pardon me, sir."

The child studied Zhang Heng's face, then getting up his feet to catch up with his friend. But before he could do that, someone grabbed him by the collar.

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"What are you doing?! Don't you touch me, I'm warning 'ya! Don't you know who my brother is? Not a soul here dares step on his tail," screeched the child.

"Oh, really?" Zhang Heng mocked, grabbing the child by his legs and shaking him hard. Three wallets fell out, along with some bits and pieces of things.

"Got yourself quite a nice yield today, I see." Zhang Heng released the child and then picked up his own wallet.

"Just you wait! You won't be leaving here today!" Humiliated, the child ran off, face as red as beets, and leaving behind his looted goods.

Of course, Zhang Heng was not interested in dealing with them. He dusted his wallet and continued to walk ahead.

He had long heard of the notorious east side, but he had lived among pirates before, so this place did not strike him as any more chaotic than all the places he'd been in. Of course, that was until he came to the Whitechapel. He had to admit that it was far worse than Nassau.

Although the pirates at the lower rungs of Nassau were also dirt poor, at least they still had freedom and hope for the future. Everywhere in the taverns on the island, there was optimistic chatter about ancient and mysterious treasures, the wealthy merchant vessels carrying oil, of monsters in the sea, and the beautiful mermaids that lured sailors to their doom. They didn't even own a small boat, and no pirate gang was willing to accept them, but their faces remained brimming with bewildering confidence, as if they were all Blackbeards of the future. It was also what Zhang Heng adored most about Nassau. They had sheer, impregnable will to survive, and thrive, under the chaos and disorderprecisely what this forgotten district lacked.

The only thing more terrifying than poverty was numbness and despair.

Perhaps that was why people like Pearson wanted to leave this place so desperately. All along the way, all Zhang Heng saw were hungry children, suffering families, drunk villains, and the likes of them. It's apocalyptic, war-torn squatter-like nature was the hell one would only think of each time murders or diseases happened.

Zhang Heng kept walking when he suddenly heard an altercation coming from ahead.

#### **Chapter 497 Gypsy Busker**

Zhang Heng walked up to where the argument happened, where a gypsy busker was standing between a Jewish home and a few brutish men.

"That's just too much! The man in this family has just fallen off a scaffolding not long ago. Just look at the state of his leg! He's been unable to work for the last two months. Can't he pay the rent half a month late? Do you really have to drive them out?" asked the Gypsy busker in disbelief.

Zhang Heng had also noticed that the man had a wooden splint attached to his leg. The family's furniture and luggage had been dragged out of the house and thrown along the road, causing the whole family to be distraught. Their belongings were treated no differently than a pile of garbage, mainly consisting of a tattered wooden bed, old pots and pans, and a sofa with a missing leg. No one knew where they picked up all these things. The dirty wooden pony that the girl clutched dearly in her arms was probably the only toy she had.

"On-time payments, that is the rule here," the hunchback sternly proclaimed.

"We are all reasonable people. You can ask the family. I have given them a week's grace. Do you expect me to do it again? I told you that lots of people are looking for houses here. Someone will eventually rent my house even if they can't afford it. I won't be losing money one way or another."

"But they are living here right now..."

The hunchback impatiently waved off the busker.

"I don't care how long they've been living here! I don't run a charity. If they can't pay me, they should just sleep on the streets!"

"You are cruel beyond words! They have a child here; I implore you!"

"The kid is too young to work in factories or mines. It is why I have lost hope in them. Even if they do everything, they can and loan some money to make up for this month's rent, what next month? At the same time, they will not be able to repay the money they owe. And if owed money owed is not repaid, creditors will come knocking on the door again. It will surely cause a lot of trouble for my future tenants."

The hunchback coldly continued, "A family from Wales is interested in this house. There are two adult men in their families. The husband and the elder son are both very strong. Although the younger son is thin, he could fit into chimneys and clean them. On the other hand, the man's wife would sell flowers during the day and entertain guests at night. It won't be long before they can save enough to buy this house! How would you choose if you were me?"

This time, the gypsy busker was at a loss for words.



The hunchback man glanced at him again, "Why, are you new here? You have to be new here. YOU wouldn't have been so nosy otherwise. Look at their neighbors. Is anyone willing to defend them? Let me give you a piece of advice. If you want to survive here, better mind your own business."

"No, since I see it, I will not leave it alone."

The gypsy busker opened his wallet and took out eight shillings from it.

"Here you go, this is two months' rent. I will help them out this time." After that, she pointed at the man of the family, "He can work again after two months, and naturally, he can continue paying the rent."

It was the hunchback's turn to be startled this time. He seemed to be caught in hesitation, and he stood there for a while with his twitching. After a while, he collected the money from the gypsy.

"Consider yourself lucky this time. Let's go," he scowled at the lame man.

After they left, the Jewish family thanked the gypsy busker with every last breath. They just met, and they were not even friends. It was hard for them to imagine how a stranger would pay the rent for them.

The gypsy busker thought for a while, took out a gold coin worth a pound and a half from his wallet, and put it in the little girl's hand.

"Don't worry, your father's leg will soon be better. And your life will be better too!" he said, winking at her.

"This..."

The man's wife was utterly stunned. She couldn't fathom how the gypsy busker would give them such a massive amount of money.

Before he could say anything to her, the kind gypsy busker had left with the organ on his back. Soon, he disappeared amid the crowd on the street. Zhang Heng witnessed everything that happened, and after giving it some thought, he decided to follow the gypsy busker.

He saw the gypsy weaving briskly in and out amid the crowd, appearing and disappearing from time to time. He stopped in front of the salmon stall to have a quick chat with the boss before squatting in front of a drunk man, flailing his arms akimbo as he cursed the unscrupulous factory owner and greedy woman. That was the last time Zhang Heng saw him.

He lost trace of the gypsy busker after that.

Zhang Heng stood in front of a crossroads and raised his eyebrows. He had to admit that the haphazard layout of the London's east end was indeed an excellent place to slip away unnoticed. Zhang Heng wasn't mad after realizing that he'd lost the busker. He just wanted to remind him that someone was watching him. Now that he was gone, it saved Zhang Heng the trouble. Zhang Heng had turned around to leave when he saw the gypsy busker not far behind him. He was walking to him and had his eyes fixed on Zhang Heng. "Are you following me?"

"I'll speak plainly. I just wish to remind you that someone is targeting you," said Zhang Heng.

“Why should I believe you?”

The gypsy busker shrugged. “This rut is filled of thieves and crooks, and it’s a cesspool for those with the worst of intentions.”

Zhang Heng didn’t bother to explain himself. Instead, he just made a ‘please’ gesture.

The gypsy, however, did not leave immediately and rolled his eyes instead.

“Oh? Any suggestions, then?”

“My advice is... don’t get caught,” replied Zhang Heng. “You’ve revealed that you are rich by solving the family’s difficulties. They have eyes on you now.”

“I knew it! The guy who collected the rent is not a good person.”

“He might not be the one after you. He is very familiar with this area and knows a lot of people. Perhaps you caught the eye of his friend or someone else.”

“This is so troublesome! I only carried one pound with me this time. The rest of the money is for my dinner and carriage fee.”

A group of strangers suddenly emerged from a small alley on the other side of the street. One of them then pointed at him, “Don’t run, you pesky thief! Give me back the wallet you stole!”

The gypsy was exasperated when he heard what they said. This gang of ruffians was good at twisting the truth. They were actually here to rob his wallet. By saying that, it was an indication for others not to intervene in this matter. Seeing that they had surrounded him, he nervously said to Zhang Heng, “Your advice seems to have come a little late. Do you have other suggestions now?”

“Yes,” Zhang Heng said while taking off his coat and handing it to the gypsy, “hold it for me.”

The latter frowned and took the coat that Zhang Heng had bought for ten pence from the used clothes shop.

“Since I see no police around here, I will knock them out one by one.”

Zhang Heng loosened his wrists.

### **Chapter 498 Does Mr. Holmes Live Here?**

There were a total of five men running after them. Outnumbered, Zhang Heng ran to the assailants instead of waiting for them to get to him. The leader of the group and the one at the back were about five or six meters apart.

Since they were all fixated on the gypsy, they were unable to react in time when Zhang Heng came for them.

The person leading the band of pursuers was about to shout, attempting to scare the Asian man, but the easterner made the first move, punching him in the trachea. A sharp pain shot up the man’s neck, and the leader of the group crumpled on the ground, clutching his neck and wheezing as he struggled for breath.

Zhang Heng didn't stop there. With a violent kick, he sent the person behind the leader crashing into a fish stall. The unlucky bastard overturned the cart of salmon and was buried under a pile of smoked fish.

When the other three assailants saw what had happened to their friends, they came to a halt, looking as if they had seen the devil.

These troublemakers were not unfamiliar with fistfights, but they often targeted those weaker than them. They had only stolen crowded places before and had only been involved in a few serious fights. This was completely new to them. Both their accomplices didn't even get the chance to swing a fist before they were pummelled to the ground.

The three men looked at each other in dismay.

Zhang Heng lowered his body as if to make chase, and the three remaining assailants turned around and fled.

"Hah!"

The busker's eyes were as round as marbles. It was quite a hilarious scene—three attackers armed with wooden sticks running helter-skelter from a barehanded man.

Zhang Heng walked past the man, still gasping for dear breath, and retrieved his coat from the busker. He gave it a little pat and draped it back over his shoulders.

"It's all good now. But here's my advice to you, leave this place as soon as you can."

Zhang Heng turned around and left without waiting for a reply. He helped the gypsy only because he happened to be there. The latter had shown kindness to the Jewish, and since he was present at the scene, he did not mind helping out.

As he was walking away, the busker came up to him, asking, "You're really quite an interesting character. How long have you been here in London? What's your name? Where do you live?"

Zhang Heng then openly revealed his name and address.

"Oh, you're not an East Ender. Why are you here, then?" asked the gypsy. "Well, you're not an East Ender either, yet here you are," Zhang Heng retorted. "I... I have my own reasons, of course."

The gypsy busker answered. "Whatever it is, thank you. When I have time, I will visit your place."

"Mmm." Zhang Heng nodded, not taking the last statement seriously.

The two parted ways at an intersection and returned to their respective homes.

When he returned to his apartment on Baker Street, Mrs. Hudson had just finished preparing a warm dinner consisting of bacon, potatoes, and pumpkin soup.

Much to Zhang Heng's surprise, the detective wasn't in his room playing dead. Mrs. Hudson said that Holmes had received a letter earlier and had left the house since noon.

Zhang Heng could not help but wonder what case Holmes must have come across this time. Just this morning, he was still curled up in his armchair, thinking about ways to end his life. Yet, in the afternoon, he suddenly slipped into work-mode again, completely unaffected.

Mrs. Hudson was setting the table when there was a knock on the door. When Zhang Heng opened it, he found a bearded coachman standing there. In a gruff voice, he asked, "Is this Mr. Holmes's residence?"

"That's right. But he's not home at the moment."

"But my master has something urgent, and he needs a consultation," the coachman insisted, dissatisfied.

"I don't know why he left, but if you're in a hurry, you can wait for him inside..."

Zhang Heng's voice trailed off...

"Holmes?"

The bearded man burst into laughter, and he spoke in his regular voice.

"Not bad. You were able to see through my disguise," Holmes remarked, removing the wig, beard, eyebrows, and a whole bunch of miscellaneous things.

Now, he looked like himself again.

"Your disguise is good. Not only did you look like a coachman, but you also acted like one. You even changed your accent, lowered your tone, and used a different dialect. Even your figure had changed."

"But it couldn't get past you..." Holmes sighed. "How did you know it was me?"

"You've cleaned and removed all the ink stains from your hands, but there are still remnants of chemical reagents. And your shoes are a little new. It doesn't look like something a coach driver would wear."

Zhang Heng stopped as if he thought of something but gave up when he could not recall it.

Holmes looked a little annoyed. "Ha! It seems you've learned a lot this afternoon. I deliberately soiled my hands. Could you tell me? As for the shoes- I was careless-I had a pair of old shoes I kept for situations like this, but it was damaged during one of my experiments some time ago, and I had yet had the time to replace it. In the end, I had to relent and got a pair of unremarkable ones. Fortunately, not everyone in this world has excellent observation skills like you and me." "It looks like your trip went well."

Zhang Heng couldn't remember what he wanted initially to talk about, so he set it aside for the moment.

"It was worthwhile." Holmes sniffed the air. "Has Mrs. Hudson prepared dinner? Then let's talk over dinner."

At the table, Holmes briefly described the job he took in the afternoon to track a prominent Congress member and look into his relationship with a young woman without alerting anyone.

"The congressman is an important member of the Conservative Party and has many allies in the party. But some Conservatives suspect that he has fallen over to the opponent, the Liberal Party. After

preliminary investigations, they ruled out the possibility that the congressman was involved in bribery or was under threat. But recently, he struck up an intimate relationship with a young woman. Worried that this may be a trick up the Liberal Party's sleeve, and since they were unable to find out the relationship between the two without being found out, they've asked me for help."

"So, what have you found?" "How should I put it? It was rather intriguing." Holmes leaned back against the chair."

Under the disguise of a coachman, I went to the young lady's place and found out she had a boyfriend she was very fond of. They were an inseparable pair, so I can ascertain that her relationship with the congressman is not what everyone thinks it is. But, at the same time, I could see that the congressman really likes her. He had gifted her with many expensive clothes and jewellery. Considering their age difference, the answer is obvious."

"Huh?"

"She's the congressman's bastard daughter."

#### **Chapter 499 Gentleman Thief**

"I sneaked into the bedroom later, spending some time finding relevant evidence. I've also heard rumors that the congressman is good at everything, except he is afraid of his wife. It's probably why he only dared to meet his illegitimate daughter secretly."

Holmes used a knife and fork to cut the potato and stuffed it with bacon into his mouth as he talked.

Zhang Heng could see that he was famished. He didn't have a bite of breakfast, and during lunch, he only a few bites from the meal Mrs. Hudson prepared for him. It was most probably the remnants of the drugs, where its effects hadn't completely worn off. To make matters worse, he had been focusing on his work all the while. It was a miracle he lasted until now. If it were not for the earlier incident, Zhang Heng would have almost forgotten about it. In addition to Holmes's extraordinary observation and reasoning ability, he was excellent at disguising as well. It wasn't easy to look through Sherlock Holmes, but mostly after Watson wrote an article about what he did, his popularity had begun to rise to the point he had to put on some makeup in order not to be recognized. He had the uncanny ability to masquerade as some a coachman, an older man, a beggar, an officer, or even a woman... If given a chance, Zhang Heng yearned to learn a little of those makeup skills from him. With lightning speed, Holmes devoured the food before of him like a starving animal. When the food had all been gobbled up, he put the knife and fork aside and let out a contented sigh.

"Tomorrow, I have a friend coming from France. Want to come with me to meet him?" "Well, what does he do?"

"He is a detective like me. His name is François Le Villard. He is a fledgling rookie. As of now, he is not very famous. Last year, I worked a case with him in France, and he's a fascinating young man. Although he can be careless at the time, he actually has great potential. He didn't say anything in the telegram, but I believe he didn't come all the way to London just for a vacation. Let's see why he will be visiting this time."

Sherlock Holmes and Zhang Heng arrived at the pier early the next morning, waiting amid the thick fog for the steamer Seagull to drop anchor.

"It's interesting, isn't it," Holmes stated, holding up his cane. "Before Watt invented the steam engine, no one thought that ships could sail on the water without sails and oars. This magical machine did indeed change a lot of things. Now, factories to ships, or trains, are inseparable from the power of steam. Such is the charm of science. The world changes rapidly every day. Change is the only constant, and no matter what industry you're in, if you don't acknowledge the change, you will soon be eliminated by it. For example, alkaloids this highly toxic substance had only been discovered decades ago, but I have noticed its appearance at a more frequent rate in recent cases I've investigated. Compared to traditional methods of murder, alkaloids can't be easily detected."

"I can't agree more," Zhang Heng said. Sherlock was in the era of the information boom, where all kinds of new and fantastic crimes had been emerging in an endless stream. Both criminal investigators and the criminals themselves continuously learned and improved their craft.

Sherlock Holmes could become the best detective in Great Britain or even Europe. He had never allowed himself to be complacent, though his research and essays played an essential role. In fact, several experimental studies that he'd conducted had yet to demonstrate its safety and morality.

A quarter of an hour later, Villard walked out of the Seagull. He had red hair and a face full of freckles. Seeing Holmes, he was like a little fan that got to meet his idol, feeling excited and slightly abashed at the same time.

"I can finally see you again, Mr. Holmes," Villard exclaimed excitedly as he shook hands.

"I'm glad to meet you too, Villard," replied Holmes, before introducing him to Zhang Heng. After shaking hands with Zhang Heng, Villard continued, "I'm here to follow someone in London this time, and I wanted to visit you while I'm here."

"Who are you tailing?"

Sherlock Holmes wasn't one for the niceties like the ordinary Joe. He skipped the polite words and went straight to the point.

"A thief. He has committed several crimes so far, but few know of his existence."

"Oh, why is that?"

"Because he is different from other thieves. He doesn't target valuable things such as jewelry, relics, or art pieces. Instead, he pays attention to the value behind the items he wants to steal," Villard explained.

"He usually targets reputable people in society. I must say that he is rather bold because he actually went for some European royal families! Once he locks on to his target, he will start to unearth all the dark secrets behind them. It could be a shameful affair, perhaps a murder the target committed years ago... These are all things they wished dearly that they could hide away. Once he steals something that can be used as evidence, the owner will be left miserable, looking at an obscene extortion fee. The worst part is they can't go to the authorities for help."

“Is he a gentleman thief? Or is it more appropriate to call him a blackmailer? What did your client lose?” Holmes asked with interest.

Villard hesitated and said, “If it was someone else, I couldn’t tell you anything due to the agreement I made with my client. However, I believe in you and your friends. All of you are gentlemen of high moral character...”

“That’s enough. Just skip the praising part and talk about the key points.” Holmes waved his hand.

“My client is a Viscount. He likes Canaletto’s oil paintings very much. About nine years ago, a well-known collector’s house had been robbed, and he lost a lot of things, including a Canaletto oil painting. Two years later, someone approached my client and asked him if he wanted to buy something good. My instant client recognized that the person was holding the missing Canaletto painting. He knew that people of his stature should never get his hands on stolen goods, but he lusted so badly for the painting. So, he approached the collector and asked to buy it. However, the collector rejected his offer. Now that he has the chance to take it into his possession, he would definitely not let it go. So, he chose an indirect way to purchase the painting.

“On the surface, he refused to buy it, even asking him not to step into his mansion again. Once the left, he secretly found an unrelated person to buy the painting from him. All these years, he never took the painting out for the exhibition. He left it at his residence and indulged its marvel alone. Somehow, it was discovered by that seller later. And this is why I came to London,” Villard explained it all in one breath.

“However, it is more important for me to visit you first,” he added.

## **Chapter 500 The Stolen Oil Painting**

After spending the whole morning together, Zhang Heng knew that Mr. Villard was indeed, if not, Sherlock’s biggest fan.

His words and the way he looked at Holmes confirmed his thoughts about him.

On the other hand, although Sherlock Holmes said nothing about the flattery, he secretly enjoyed such admiration towards him. No matter how lonely and noble artists were, they truly wished deep inside their hearts and minds that the world would accept their works. Based on how one defined an artist, Holmes couldn’t be considered one, though, his attainments in the criminal investigation did earn him a Victorian artist title.

Of course, Holmes would pay more attention to the case that Villard told about rather than the compliments. Holmes appeared to be extremely interested in this ‘gentleman thief.’

In the carriage, he asked Villard, “How much information do you have about him now?”

When posed with the question, a look of embarrassment flashed across Villard’s face.

“I tried my best to investigate this matter, but unfortunately, I haven’t gotten much information about it. Mainly because it’s not that easy to find the victims. Most people refuse to talk about these embarrassing matters that took place in the past. That thief... How should I put it? In a sense, he is a gentleman; as long as you pay the ransom, he will keep his promise and return whatever he stole. He

will also not harass his target again. Because of that, most of his victims obediently pay the ransom with no further questions.”

“Not bad. So, he is a thief that knows how to manage his reputation,” Holmes commended. “It seems that our friend regards this business as his life’s work. How can we not meet such an interesting person? Shall we?”

Villard was elated, rubbing his palms as he exclaimed, “So, this time, are you planning to make a move? This is wonderful! As long as you are willing to work this case, I’m pretty sure that it will be the end of this gentleman thief. I don’t think he knows you are in London. Otherwise, he wouldn’t have come here.”

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“My friend, you exalt me too much,” Holmes smiled. “Let’s talk about the case first.”

“Don’t worry. I know how inconvenient it is for you to go to France. I have surveyed the scene and collected all the seemingly useful and useless information for your reference.”

As he spoke, Villard took out a small notebook from the suitcase.

Zhang Heng took a look at it. Almost every page was filled with dense notes, and carefully drawn pictures even accompanied them. Even Holmes was impressed.

“Your notes are of the most careful detail, Villard; I firmly believe you have surpassed most of your peers.”

“Hehe! It’s nothing. I believe that hard work can make up for my shortcomings.” Villard scratched his head, overjoyed to be complimented by his heartthrob. Sherlock Holmes did a speed-read on the notebook, then took another half an hour to read it from beginning to end. After that, he handed it to Zhang Heng. “Read it. It’s fascinating.”

Zhang Heng took the notebook and roughly scanned through its contents.

Viscount Canaletto’s oil painting had gone missing half a month ago. Because of the painting’s special nature, he did not put it in the collection room like his other collections, storing it in a small, inconspicuous room. There was also a large and exquisite porcelain vase from China in there as well. Although the vase carried a much higher value, the thief had no interest in it, taking only the painting with him. Clearly, he knows a lot about my client.”

“What do you think?” Holmes asked Zhang Heng. The latter thought for a moment before giving his thought on the matter.

“There are several problems here. First, even if the painting goes missing, no one can prove that the viscount once possessed it.”

“Oh, yes, the viscount has a little quirk. He likes to leave his signature on the back of the oil paintings he collects. Even if he knew it was stolen, he still had to sign his name on it,” Villard confessed helplessly.

“Otherwise, I wouldn’t have to come all the way from Paris to London.”

“The second question: how many people knew that he had purchased the piece?”



"You are asking the right question here," Holmes nodded.

"It is also the most interesting part of this case. You mentioned that the viscount completed the transaction secretly through an intermediary. How did the gentleman thief find out about it after so many years? Since he is dedicated to unraveling the most unbearable secrets of the heart, he should have revealed this secret before anything else." "This is also the part that baffles me the most," Villard said, "I can't figure him out either. Just imagine; even if he learns a person's secret by chance, it's impossible he would discover the darkest secrets of people he never targeted. Perhaps he indulges in dark magic that allows him to see what people are thinking? He might be against someone formidable this time."

"I don't believe in the black magic of witch doctors," Holmes snorted. "Among the myriad cases I have dealt with, everything that seemed mysterious and counterintuitive on the surface would eventually have a reasonable explanation to it; as long as you are patient enough to study the subject, of course. Once all the bad outcomes have been eliminated, you would end up with the truth."

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"You are right! I have learned something new," Villard digressed humbly. He looked like a pupil in class, obediently absorbing his teacher's advice. It humored certainly Holmes a bit.

"Carry on, my Oriental friend," he told Zhang Heng. "Thirdly, it involves the *modus operandi*," Zhang Heng continued. "The viscount went to see the oil painting the night before it was gone. Early the next morning, the maid who cleaned the house found it missing. In other words, the painting must have been stolen at night. However, the viscount's mansion was heavily guarded, not to mention the presence of a few hounds patrolling the grounds. During that night, the hounds did not bark. The note stated that no other visitors came to visit the viscount during that time. Behind the house is a small garden. There was some light rain in the morning, and the soil was loose. There were no footprints, and the front door was facing the housekeeper's room. He didn't hear any unusual noises at night, so how did the gentleman thief enter the viscount's mansion and leave with the oil painting before dawn?"

Villard was also annoyed.

"You are right! That guy is perfect. He came and went without a trace. The maid cleaned up in the morning and found that the frame was still there, and only the painting was missing. The gentleman thief even left a letter with the signature, Mr. M, on the ground. He triumphantly commented on the decoration of the viscount's mansion. He's treated it as if it was his property. How annoying it was!"