

## 48 Hours 501

### Chapter 501 Do You Have A Theory?

"Have you investigated the maid who cleaned the room?" Holmes took out his pipe and filled it with tobacco.

"I have. Even though the maid has been working in the house for two years, the old housekeeper immediately detained and searched her. Still, there was no oil painting. Moreover, she had not been anywhere else since she entered the house and went to see the housekeeper. So, we can rule her out as the suspect," said Villard. After a brief pause, he continued, "Through the viscount's contacts, I also found two other victims of Mr. M. The descriptions they provided were similar to the viscount's situation, all receiving a letter from Mr. M when their valuables were stolen. One of them was on vacation when the burglary occurred, and the other was a public figure more prominent than the viscount. Their valuables were well-concealed, but by whatever powers, they were stolen somehow. Like a magician, the thief could sneak into whatever secret rooms you have and always has his victims firmly in his clutches."

Holmes lit his pipe and took a drag.

"The most talented thief I've ever met is a dwarf who performed in a circus. He was half the height of a child and a scrawny, stick-thin creature. He could burrow into your home through the chimney and squeeze through narrow crevasses by contorting his body, never leaving behind a single trace of his visit."

"Which is exactly why I've come to you—I haven't the faintest idea how the guy did it," replied Villard respectfully.

"Alright," Holmes smiled. "Since I've already promised to help you, and this case interests me, I won't set it aside, but for now, let's find you a place in London."

The three arrived at an inn on a carriage, and while Villard checked in, Holmes stood in the lobby, smoking his pipe as he watched the tourists come and go.

"Do you think Mr. M is among them?" Zhang Heng asked.

"Who knows?" Holmes blew out a ring of smoke.

He was obviously in a good mood. "We're fortunate today, Zhang Heng, to have come across such an intriguing case. I knew that Villard was going to bring us a surprise—hah! — turns out he didn't disappoint!"

Zhang Heng didn't know if he should laugh or cry.

The more difficult Villard's case was, the happier Holmes became. Such mentality and trend of thoughts of a great detective was what separated him from that of the ordinary mind.

"Do you have any theories as to where the painting might be?" asked Zhang Heng.

Holmes did not answer, asking in return, "What about you? Do you have any ideas?" Zhang Heng had been contemplating the case as they traveled here, trying to piece together all the clues. Thanks to

Villard's comprehensive notes—the red-haired detective carried out a very detailed investigation of the scene, virtually turning the viscount's mansion upside down—Zhang Heng was able to conjure up the scene in his mind. He took a minute to think before answering. "You said to eliminate all the bizarre and unscientific options, and you will be left with the truth. No thief could be this good and not leave a single trace on the soil, then walk past the hound, and not cause a commotion. So I inspected the layout of the house. Other than the old housekeeper guarding the door, the chef was also up very late that night. He was busy in the kitchen, located not too far from the main door, usually locked. That being the case, I believe that the problem lies with the maid."

Holmes looked at Zhang Heng as if he was gazing at an endangered animal before exclaiming, "My mysterious, oriental-traveler-friend. Despite how long we've known each other, you never fail to amaze me! It has been such a privilege to have met you. Though you're still learning, you could actually work independently with those abilities of yours. You better my mediocre counterparts by miles; even Villard, a newcomer full of potential, is no match for you. It won't be long before you become a strong competitor of mine. Perhaps then, this world would cease being so dull and pedestrian."

Coming from Holmes, these words were considered high praise. Although he had to include some self-gratification, in the end, the very fact that the proud detective could say such things demonstrated that he genuinely respected Zhang Heng.

Holmes chuckled. "Haha! When I saw the note earlier, I thought of the homicide of Fort Combe. At that time, the rumor was that the victim had been murdered by ghosts. All the doors and windows had been shut from the inside. To make matters worse, the murder scene was gory, highly suggesting a revenge. The locals believed that only ghosts could have done it, and even a large number of police think that it must have been an act from a vengeful spirit.

"But, as I said, eliminate the distractions out of the equation, and whatever remains will be the correct answer, even if it might seem impossible on the surface. It turned out that the victim was the murderer himself, and he killed himself by extreme means. It was a fascinating case since the victim kept a secret that had been digging at his soul for the longest time. Ridden by guilt for something he had done in the past, it had haunted him all his life. To make things worse, he was terminally ill and was worried that the spirits would seek revenge on his wife and daughter. As a result, he decided that it was the best way to repay the debt. "The circumstances of that are similar to this case. I've studied Villard's note and ruled out the possibility of an outsider entering the home. It leaves us with only one possibility, the thief has to be someone from the house. After all, bribing a maid who earns less than a pound per week was a lot easier than sneaking into a well-guarded mansion. If I were Mr. M, I would have done the same."

Zhang Heng's brows furrowed. "That explains the letter found on the floor. The maid must have planted it there while she was cleaning, then stole the painting. There is one thing that still puzzles me, though. How did she pass the inspection? Could the guards be accomplices?"

"You're very close to the final answer, my eastern friend!"

Holmes' eyes sparkled, excited, and eager. "I believe you only need another half a day to figure it out. Finding the painting is not going to be difficult. The tricky part would be capturing Mr. M and having him admit that he was the thief. He is very talented and has an incredible imagination.

“Based on his behavior, we understand that he is cautious, meticulous, and patient. It won’t be easy to catch that guy. But London is our stomping grounds; it would be unacceptable that we let him escape again!”

## **Chapter 502 The Opera Singer**

“What are you discussing?”

Villard returned, forehead drenched in perspiration. “The restaurants in London and what we should treat you to later,” Holmes answered.

The redhead detective blushed. “Oh, there’s no need for that. I’m not here on holiday. Don’t worry about me; I’ll settle for a simple meal.”

Holmes couldn’t help but smile at the fellow’s reaction. “Villard, my friend, we were actually looking for the missing oil painting.”

“What? You found the oil painting?!” Villard nearly leaped into the air. “That was fast! But how?”

“If you do as I say, stay calm, and pay attention to the details that you might have missed, you will also be able to piece the answer together.”

“Oh, you have such a high opinion of me. It may be child’s play to you, but to the unexceptional man like us, it’s like reaching for the moon,” Villard sincerely admitted.

“It’s not like that. As I said, you have the potential, Villard, but you haven’t fully tapped into it yet. In fact, Zhang Heng here is about to find the answer as well, and he hasn’t been in this business for long.”

“The people in your company are certainly not ordinary-I can only hope to learn from them.”

Unlike Gregson, this red-haired detective was unduly modest, always putting himself down, playing the humble student.

With nothing to combat Villard’s self-vilification, Holmes said, “It was a joke, but since you’re our guest and it’s almost lunch, let’s have a meal together. You can rest later in the afternoon and mull over the case. I’ll need the afternoon to look into something anyway, so we’ll be seeing each other again tonight.”

The three subsequently had lunch at the famous Royal Restaurant in London. After the meal, Holmes left in a hurry as he had declared, leaving Villard to return to the hotel and Zhang Heng to Baker Street alone. As soon as he opened the door, Mrs. Hudson shot him a strange look.

“What is it?”

“You have a guest,” she answered. “A guest?” Zhang Heng looked puzzled. He was all alone here in this 19th century London and had neither friends nor relatives. The only person he was close to was Holmes, and nearly everyone who came to 221B Baker Street was his guests.

Then, suddenly someone came to mind-the gypsy busker he met that afternoon in the East End. Before they parted ways, the busker had asked for his name and address and promised a visit.

Zhang Heng thought that the gypsy had only said it in passing, never expecting the fellow to actually come, and the very next day, to boot.

However, when Zhang Heng walked into the drawing-room and saw his guest, he was surprised to see that instead of the gypsy busker, a woman was seated on the sofa-and a gorgeous woman at that. No, to put in a more precise way, she was the ultimate fantasy of every Victorian man, elegant, well-dressed, and all around her, an inherently mysterious persona.

"What is it?" the woman asked as she bit into a biscuit. "Don't you recognize me?"

"You've gone through an immense transformation."

Zhang Heng had to admit that if Holmes' makeup skills were at a level two, this mysterious woman was at a full-blown level three. Her disguise as a man was very natural, to put it mildly, even covering up her neck with a long scarf. It made it impossible to see that she did not have Adam's apple, a dead giveaway.

Of course, it was also mostly because Zhang Heng paid little attention to her at the time. He was simply helping her. Also, unlike Holmes, she was not a familiar face, and numerous factors contributed to his failure in noticing those tiny little details.

"I didn't mean to deceive you, but as you can see, if I went as myself, I wouldn't have been able to go," said the woman.

"Then what is lady such as yourself doing in the East End?"

"I'm the lead singer of an opera troupe, and I am fairly well-known in London, but I guess you probably haven't seen me perform. I went there looking for inspiration for the new piece," the woman answered. "Sorry, I rarely pamper myself with operas." "It's alright. I'm performing at the Queen's Theatre tonight. If you like, you can come watch with your friend."

The woman produced two tickets and placed them on the table.

"I only helped because I happened to there. You really don't have to."

"Then, treat it as making an acquaintance." The woman did not take the tickets back. After finishing the last cookie in her hand, she went to Mrs. Hudson, complimenting, "Good bake." "Well, I'm glad you like it!" Mrs. Hudson trilled in delight.

The opera singer stretched lazily. She had come with the intention of gifting Zhang Heng the tickets, and now that it was done, she stood up from the sofa to leave.

But Zhang Heng called out to her, "I didn't get your name." "Adler," the opera singer turned around and smiled, "Irene Adler."

She reinstalled her bowler's hat and veil, showing herself out. A two-wheeled carriage was already at the ready.

Zhang Heng flinched when he heard the name. Those who read the "Sherlock Holmes" series would find the name Irene Adler all too familiar. Holmes once told Watson that he had only lost to four people. Among them, were three men and a woman, and that woman was the mysterious opera singer, Irene Adler. The confrontation between the pair was recorded in "A Scandal in Bohemia." The female singer

and her new husband fled London one night and Holmes failed to complete the commission, but it turned out to be a perfect ending for both parties. In the end, Holmes asked to have Adler's photo as a souvenir, and since then, had only referred to her as "that woman."

Consequently, certain readers suspected that Holmes might have had a secret affection for the opera singer.

Nonetheless, as Sherlock Holmes's new roommate, Zhang Heng, was more inclined to think that it was pure admiration for a like-minded soul. In fact, Holmes was a stranger to the softer passions, such as love. His attitude toward it was always one of repugnance, believing that such things would damage rationale, its effects of which far worse than the substances he injected himself with. Love was like sand that had fallen into a precision instrument or cracks on a high-powered lens.

Therefore, he had always stayed away from love and the likes of it. Of course, he did still study the psychology of people in love, but it was all in the name of solving cases.

### **Chapter 503 The Oil Painting's Location**

Holmes returned at dusk, storming into the room without saying a word. Completely disregarding the audience's well-being outside, the shrill rubbing of bow and string started blaring out his bedroom. After torturing them with erratic howls, screeches, and wails for a good 15 minutes, he finally put down the instrument in contentment.

He then said to Zhang Heng, who was at his side, "The meeting with Villard has been canceled tonight. I told him that we couldn't acquire much useful information in the afternoon. Hence, the meeting would be pointless."

"Sounds good to me. I actually wanted to tell you that I might not be able to make it tonight."

Zhang Heng then took out the two opera tickets.

"A friend gave me these and invited me to her performance."

"Huh? A new opera in the Queen's Theatre?" Holmes' intuition was as sharp as ever.

"Any companions that might be tagging along with you?"

"You know that I just arrived in London not long ago, and I'm still unfamiliar with the place. So, I don't have any acquaintances..." "What a coincidence! I do happen to be going to the Queen's Theatre tonight," chuckled Holmes.

"Other than the violin, do you also like opera as well?"

"I really like opera, but we won't be there for that tonight," Holmes said, "We want to capture that Mr. M. Once we capture him, we will know who his target is. His playground has always been in France. Now that he's come all the way here to London, he must have a big job to do."

"So, you've narrowed down the list?"

"Well, I went to visit a few friends this afternoon and compiled a substantial list of his potential targets. He hasn't moved his finger yet, but I would have begun studying my victims if I were to be him. It just so

happens that the first, third, and fifth on my list will all appear in the Queen's Theatre tonight. I know the chief makeup artist of the hall. Initially, I wanted him to help me get a ticket, but since you have an extra ticket with you, it's all perfect!"

As they finished the last bites of dinner, Holmes and Zhang Heng draped on their suits and prepared to head to Queen's Theater. Holmes got rid of his stubbles and cleaned up himself. When coupled with his aquiline nose and sculpted face, he looked bright, as if a renewed vigor clutched his soul. Perhaps he wasn't the most dashing man around here, but he was definitely not ugly either.

He picked a walking stick. It had the carapace of a tortoise for a handle and rosewood for its body.

"My oriental friend, you are now wealthy! You should pick a walking stick that suits your standing."

Zhang Heng might never understand the love affair between European men and their walking sticks. The streets of London saw every gentleman bearing their very own walking stick. And most of them had more than just one. When they walked their corgi's in the morning, they would bring along their wooden sticks, and in the evenings, those would be replaced by a silver cane. Men waving their golden sticks around at some fancy banquet was a common sight for the more affluent and moneyed.

There were also custom walking sticks used only on occasions like business meetings and operas in theatres. When Balzac was depressed and in huge debt, he still didn't hesitate to splurge 700 francs to buy a luxurious walking stick with agate embedded on it. Such manner of over consumerism surpassed most modern shopaholics, the Victorian equivalent to selling one's kidney for that latest iPhone.

However, Zhang Heng's principle has always been to adhere to the culture of the place he set foot in.

The 19th century was probably the golden age of the walking stick. Famous jewelry brands quickly jumped on the bandwagon, all wanting a piece of the large profit. Tiffany and Cartier launched their own walking sticks, though Zhang Heng wasn't that interested in those brands. Other than their extortionate and extravagant price tag, what Zhang Heng had in mind differed from most ordinary people. Such an ostentatious price was one of the reasons why he wanted to stay away. He insisted on his own specifications too, where other than providing him an appropriate identity, he also wanted the cane to double as a defensive weapon when necessary.

Having that in mind, he paid more attention to the stick's weight and sturdiness, and if it was qualified to be used as a weapon. Its appearance wasn't his priority. Thus, he planned a visit to the flea market the next day.

When the two arrived at the Queen's Theatre, there was still half an hour before the performance began. Irene Adler selected Zhang Heng, and his companion was superb; their seats were located right in the middle of the second row. Coincidentally, the three persons Holmes talked about were in the second row as well.

Zhang Heng learned that one of them was the current prime minister of Great Britain, the Marquis of Salisbury. Before the show started, he strolled into the box with a cigar in mouth, accompanied by a few individuals.

Sherlock Holmes was also on the watch list, or more precisely, keeping an eye on the prime minister's company. Thus far, he found nothing worthy of note. As spectators began to pour into the venue, the theater's lights dimmed, the music started, and the curtains slowly drew upward.

Two minutes before the show began, Zhang Heng told Holmes, "I think I finally understand now."

"Well, what is it that you understand?"

"I know where that oil painting is."

"Oh?" Holmes couldn't help but crack a smile when he heard that. "Let's talk about it."

"The disappearance of oil painting is the main point here. The painting's frame is still in the room," Zhang Heng analyzed. "It's been something that has baffled me for a long time. Taking the painting and its frame along with it is rather unmanageable. In other words, my last deduction was indeed problematic. If the housekeeper and maid were conspirators, he could have brought it out first and left it with the maid. However, the maid removed the painting in the end. It shows that the housekeeper had nothing to do with it. She had taken the painting out of the frame to conceal it easily, probably rolled up somewhere. Since she had been searched and nothing was found on her, only one possibility remains-The painting is still in the room!

"Many tend to come up with the wrong idea when it comes to this. They think Mr. M has to hold something in escrow to threaten its owner. In fact, there was no reason for him to do so. There was an easier way to achieve his purpose. As long as the victim thinks he is the thief of the targeted items, his plan had already kicked into motion. The letter we found was a scheme to lead us off the trail to where we are now. Think about this—when the viscount woke up in the morning and found the painting missing, Mr. M's letter was discovered on the ground at almost the same time. The combination of these elements would lead people to think that Mr. M was indeed the culprit."

"Outstanding!" Holmes clapped his hands and praised. "I'm not ruling out how certain criminals deliberately mess up crime scenes, but most of the time, everything they leave behind serves a purpose, especially for such an experienced thief. Like an artist, he will not mind adding a couple of extra strokes to an already perfect painting... Let's move forward. If I ask where the painting is hidden in the room, can you come up with an answer?"

"In that porcelain vase," Zhang Heng replied decisively, "Villard is indeed a very conscientious detective. To collect more information, he rummaged through every corner of the room, except the porcelain vase. It has a tiny mouth, but is spacious within. If someone hid the oil painting and placed it close to the bottom, spotting it from above would be impossible."

## **Chapter 504 Carmen**

"Terrific deduction," Holmes commended. "As I said, you really do have a remarkable talent for this line of work, my oriental friend. There really are no words to describe your brilliance!"

He was about to say more,, but the music had started, so Holmes retreated to his seat. He clasped his hands and straightened his knees, ready to savor the performance.

This new opera was called “Carmen.” The author George Bizet was French. Extremely talented, he sadly died at the young age of 37. This play, which told of a tragic tale of love in Seville, Spain, was completed a year before his passing

The story told about Carmen, a beautiful and unfettered gypsy girl that worked at a cigarette factory. Don Jose, the military squad leader, fell head over heels for her, abandoning his lover, the kind and gentle Micaela by the countryside. He even violated strict military discipline and let Carmen go when she got involved in a fight with a fellow female worker. When Jose was released from prison, he joined the group of smugglers that Carmen belonged to. Alas, the days that followed saw the two young lovers hit a rough patch. Carmen quickly moved on and fell in love with Escamillo, the bullfighter. While the crowd was cheered for Escamillo’s victory over the bull, Carmen perished under Don Jose’s dagger. Love and destruction were the themes of this play. Unlike the previous stories where the main characters were heroes or mythological personalities, the protagonist, Carmen, was a female factory worker and a low-level military officer. It was an incredibly bold attempt, which was why Irene Adler disguised herself as a gypsy busker in the East End to search for inspiration.

Ms. Adler wore a red dress that drew everyone’s eyes to her.

Tonight, she was even more dazzling than ever, with a certain wild disposition. The 3/8-beat aria she sang as she seduced Don Jose was the climax of the first act.

But just as the audience was indulging her performance, Holmes patted Zhang Heng on the shoulder and whispered, “We have to make a move.”

The pair got up from their seats and tiptoed as gingerly as they could to the aisle, crouching low to avoid attention.

“Do you see that waiter in the box on the second floor?” asked Holmes.

“Mmhmm.”

“He delivers fruit platters to each of the boxes. And normally, the same person does it throughout the night. Just ten minutes ago, another guy took his spot.”

“Do you think it could be Mr. M observing his target up close?”

“I don’t think it’s Mr. M himself, but this bloke is obviously connected. If we get our hands on him, at least we’ll be able to find out who Mr. M is targeting now,” Holmes continued.

When they looked up, though, they spotted the waiter staring at them suspiciously.

“He seemed to have... noticed us,” Zhang Heng sighed.

“... Looks like it,” agreed Holmes.

Without warning, the waiter abruptly threw the platter he was carrying and ran to a nearby box.

“Let’s split up. I’m going up!”

“I’ll take the outside then,” said Zhang Heng.

After a quick discourse, Holmes ran up to the second floor and Zhang Heng exited the building.



Sherlock Holmes' sudden appearance at the stairway alerted the guards beside the Prime Minister's box. It was then that he dashed into the box next door.

Holmes pushed the doors open. The table was a mess. Food and wine were all over the floor, and the windows were wide ajar. A man who seemed like a businessman, together with his wife and daughter, huddled together, trembling in fear.

Holmes didn't stop there, placing his left feet on the window sill. He was about to leave when he noticed that the family seemed more aggravated than relieved.

He quickly understood that the person he was after must be still in the box.

But the waiter was also quick to realize that his pursuer had seen through his plan, so he rolled out from under the seat and stabbed Holmes' calf with a knife. Sherlock managed to block the attack with his cane and knocked the dagger off his attacker's hand. The man, however, pushed himself off the ground and grabbed hold of Holmes. As Holmes struggled to free himself, the pair stumbled backward and fell onto the floor.

The situation was utter terror and chaos. The wife of the businessman screamed at the top of her lungs, but it pitched exactly with the peak of the crescendo, the perfect cover for the scuffle in the box.

Sherlock's boxing skills were no use to him in such a cramped space, and on top of that, he hit his head on something during the fall. The waiter sat on top of Holmes and coiled his hands around the detective's neck. Holmes desperately tried to reach for his cane but the waiter merely kicked it out of the way.

Presently, Holmes could only hope that the family watching from the sidelines would somehow help him. The businessman was the first to snap out of his temporary paralysis. He pushed the door open and left with his wife and daughter, leaving his coat behind.

"Great!!! You've been really helpful," Holmes growled through gritted teeth.

Now, his only option was to do try his best and pry away the hands strangling his neck.

Although Holmes looked thin and lean, he was certainly not weak. But tonight, his opponent way overpowered him, and there wasn't much space to move either.

Holmes was struggling to breathe, and his grip gradually weakened.

Just as he started to see his vision getting cloudy, a figure jumped in from the window, kicking the waiter on the ribs, and sending him through the door towards the corridor. Vindicated, Holmes greedily drew in his critical supply of fresh air.

"Am I dead? Why else would you be here?!" he sputtered and choked between words.

"I didn't see him on the streets so I assumed he hadn't left the box. I was worried that you were in danger, so I climbed up," Zhang Heng explained.

"Climbed up?! You mean you climbed up all the way here? But how?! There's no ladder or stairs," Sherlock asked in bewilderment. "Have you worked in a circus before?"

"I guess you can put it that way. If you're fine, I'll be chasing after our guy, then," Zhang Heng replied, not wanting to let slip the opportunity. "Go ahead. I'll lie down for a bit. I'll be there as soon as I can," Holmes panted, his face now as white as a ghost, and his eyeballs bulging.

Zhang Heng ran out of the box and saw that instead of leaving, the waiter had proceeded to the prime minister's box, telling something to the guards outside. After hearing what the waiter had to say, both guards charged towards Zhang Heng in a menacing hurry.

## **Chapter 505 Prussian Barbers**

"Don't move and stand against the wall!"

The guard issued a stern warning, drawing a pair of handcuffs from behind.

When the man pretending to be a waiter saw Zhang Heng getting detained, he silently fled via a nearby flight of stairs. Even in such moments of peril, Zhang Heng remained calm and unruffled. He turned and asked Holmes, "What are the consequences of killing the prime minister's guards?"

Sherlock, still gasping for breath, replied, "It depends on the situation. However, I'm pretty sure you can't stay in London after that."

"If that's the case, I'll leave it in your capable hands."

Zhang Heng walked back into the box, opened the window, and leaped out of it in front of Holmes.

The guards soon filled the box, but Zhang Heng was long gone. A stricken Holmes, however, was found lying on the ground dumbfounded.

Zhang Heng had Lv1 rock climbing skills, and with a little assistance from the decorations on the walls outside the theater, he managed to rappel down with ease. The moment his feet touched the ground, the masquerading waiter exited the theater, bolting instantly in the opposite direction when he saw Zhang Heng. Not wasting a single second, Zhang Heng went after the escapee.

The hot pursuit covered half of the street. West District was a very lively spot at night, where the roadsides were lit to the bone with old gas lamps. Compared to the dark, dingy, wet cobblestones of East District, this place was another country. Pedestrians strolled, and carriages rumbled on the streets. The turn of the 19th century saw nightlife blooming along London's main business arteries. A rarity in that era, eateries, theaters, saunas, clubs, and many stores were still open for business after sunset.

The waiter in disguise frantically searched around before finally racing into a barbershop. Zhang Heng followed him in, but only after a few running steps, he stopped in the alert. It was but too late. He heard the click of the door's lock behind him.

Meanwhile, several barbers who were chatting and reading newspapers rose in unison, grabbing the razors on the barber stations.

Zhang Heng did a quick headcount of his enemies. Together with the apprentices, there were seven in total, all armed with the sharpest weapon they could get their hands on. This battle would by no means be easy, and he was all prepared to endure the upcoming challenge. He gestured for them to wait and slipped out of his suit. Like a mantis poised for its kill, he wiggled up his wrists and ankles, taunting the plump barber closest to him with a finger.

As a response, the entire seven began to swarm around Zhang Heng. Having no intention to be had no intention to be tonight's carving, he turned around and ran. The weakest looking kid of the bunch, probably about 14 or 15 years old, acted instantly, thrusting the razor forward, but Zhang Heng managed to dodge it. Not to be outdone, he picked up the kid's collar and threw him over the shoulder at two assailants. At that very instant, his bogey's behind him had arrived.

Zhang Heng dropped low, rolling quickly on the ground to avoid the attack. However, before he could get up, a small knife was drawn at his back. The enemies were ruthless. While Zhang Heng focused on dodging the attacks, he managed to pick up a knife the apprentice had dropped.

Once he avoided the first blow, Zhang Heng subsequently blocked the second, and at the same time, grabbed hold of the knifed barber and tossed him to a mirror on the side. It caused the man a temporary loss of his fighting abilities, but at the cost of getting a deep gash on the left arm. The two barbers that had been rendered paralyzed had now caught up to him too.

There wasn't much choice except for plucking up courage and standing up. One split second was all Zhang Heng needed to grab another knife from the station beside him. He could now use both hands to attack. Armed, he gained the ability to defend himself fully. The caged battleground lasted for about six minutes, and at the end of it all, four barbers, and one apprentice were defeated. The remaining two barbers were in exhaustion, gasping for breath. Zhang Heng wasn't in good shape himself, now having a few slash wounds on his body. Fortunately, it wasn't his face they went for.

Sure, Zhang Heng had an endurance of a bull, but he had already endured a battle earlier at the theater. A sprint of pursuit then followed, consuming more of his stamina. Having spent all his energy, he no longer bothered to deal with the remaining two, leaning against the table, gasping with short, shallow breath.

In these tense moments, someone suddenly knocked on the door, causing the entire room to jump in fright. Zhang Heng saw Holmes standing outside, signaling for someone to open the door for him. The two barbers merely looked at each other, and no one went and opened the door. Holmes shrugged, having no choice but to figure it himself. Holding his cane with two hands, he drove it into the door's glass, shattering it to smithereens. He then reached in with his right hand and unlocked the door from the inside.

Seeing how the situation had escalated, a barber rushed over to Holmes with a knife. However, Holmes still did not retract his hand. He waited for the opponent to get closer before hooking the barber's neck with his cane. Along with the rod, the barber's head was dragged into the door, jamming itself between the door and Holmes with an awful thump.

After that, Holmes opened the door quickly and walked in. He put his cane on the ground. "Sorry, did I interrupt you?" he quizzed the room. "A little bit, I would say. I thought you would have retreated to the safety of the carriage, well on your way to Scotland Yard by now," Zhang Heng replied, wiping the sweat from his forehead.

"Ha! Nice move to let me deal with the police. Lucky for me, the theater's guards know who I am, and the precinct's deputy chief in the other box can testify for me as well," Holmes said. "So, here we are. If you stayed for a little longer, you would have heard my warning. The man who pretended to be a waiter

is a Prussian, and the Prussians in London happen to love them group fights. So, it wasn't a coincidence you were ambushed. Best avoid Prussian places when you are going after your target."

Holmes looked around, seeing the defeated Prussian barbers at his feet.

"However, I have to admit the results surprised me a bit. I know you're a good fighter, but I didn't have the faintest that you were this good.

After saying that, Sherlock swung his cane at lightning speed, striking the only barber who was still standing. The latter was about to escape, but his lower abdomen was smacked so hard that he fell on the ground.

"You are welcome."

"Is your neck better?" Zhang Heng asked.

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"It has seen better days... I don't know. When this fiasco is over, I'll probably visit the clinic for a basic checkup."

Holmes's mood had turned sour after Zhang Heng mentioned his neck injuries. "Is that guy still inside?" he asked Zhang Heng while rubbing the sore spot.

"I don't think so. Otherwise, I would have fought eight men instead of seven."

After that, Holmes walked to the back room. As expected, the window was wide open.

"Well, we are not without gain this time. At least, we got an answer to your second question."

"Huh?"

"Aren't you curious about how Mr. M knew the secret behind the viscount's oil painting?"

Holmes rubbed his chin.

"After this incident, I become more and more convinced that Mr. M is not acting alone. Since he has errand-boys, he would naturally have people helping him gather information. I'm afraid we didn't simply come across a simple criminal this time. It's a criminal organization. They have a clear division of labor. Some are responsible for gathering information, some to the area, and some to bribe those around the target. Mr. M is the head of the snake. All he needs to do is to plan."

Sherlock watched Zhang Heng pick up the dusty, wrinkled suit that had been trampled.

"Where are you going?" he asked.

"Back to the theater to enjoy tonight's interrupted show," Zhang Heng replied as he put on the suit again. "Anyway, the ticket is a gift. It would be rude for me to leave halfway through the show. And, oh..." Zhang Heng stopped at the door.

"You don't have to thank me for saving your life."

"I thought it had slipped your mind. Apparently not," said Holmes.

"It's not easy to forget that red and bloated tomato of a face when you got strangled," chuckled Zhang Heng. "I'm leaving," he waved. "And I will leave you to deal with this mess. I didn't kill any of them. Their injuries are only external." "Well, the female lead is indeed gorgeous. I hope her fatal attraction on you won't compromise our plan, dear Oriental friend of mine," Holmes smiled, troubled, and with a cocked eyebrow.

## **Chapter 506 Show's Over**

Zhang Heng briefly treated his external injuries before returning to his seat at Queen's Theatre. When he got there, the opera was already coming to an end.

Escamillo and Carmen walked into the crowd at the square outside the bullfighting arena with their heads up high. Carmen remained outside the ring as she watched the valiant Escamillo walking into it. It was around that time that the rowdy-looking Don Jose found her. He begged for reconciliation, but Carmen only remained indifferent. At the same time, loud cheers echoed in the arena.

Escamillo defeated the bull. Carmen was elated, proceeding to take off the ring that Don Jose gave her and threw it on the ground. She wanted to rush into the ring to share the joy with her lover, but in a shocking turn of events, the desperate Don Jose took out the dagger that he prepared to stab Carmen. When the bull had returned, and the arena cleared, only Carmen remained, lying in a pool of her own blood.

"I killed her, Carmen, my dear Carmen!" wailed Don Jose in agony as if the world had come to an end.

At this point, the opera finally ended.

Then all the play's actors walked onto the stage. The lights came on, and the entire theater was filled with thunderous applause. There were no doubts here that the new play 'Carmen' was a runaway success in London.

Zhang Heng stood up as well, applauding and clapping along with the people around him.

After the performance was over, he headed backstage to congratulate Irene Adler.

Throngs of people formed lines to congratulate the beautiful songstress, and even the wife of the prime minister went backstage to give her best wishes personally. Since she had more than her enough of her share of action, Zhang Heng wasn't inclined to squeeze in and join the fight to congratulate her. He simply stood there quietly, and only after the crowd had almost dispersed, did he approach Adler's dressing table that was now like an overgrown greenhouse. There were so many flowers that she had to place them next to her dressing table. As for the other actors, they received all but a few.

"I now know how much Londoners adore you," exclaimed Zhang Heng.

"Really? Pity that you're not from London then. I saw you leave midway," Adler replied with a sly smirk.

"Uh... my friend and I have something urgent to deal with."

"Well, I can see how urgent the matter is." Adler raised his eyebrows and pointed at Zhang Heng's suit.

"You look a little worse for wear, almost catching up to Don Jose's persona if you will."

“Actually, I just visited the barber.”

“I see they haven’t the best service, considering the state you’re in. Mind telling me the name of the establishment? I’ll make sure to avoid it in the future,” Adler chuckled.

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As a person who had read the original works, Zhang Heng would, of course, be wary of Irene Adler. That being said, he had to concede that Irene Adler was indeed a very, very, attractive woman. It was no wonder that the King of Bohemia could never forget her. The king was the one at fault. He abandoned Adler in the quest for more power, and after marrying a Scandinavian princess, it led to the photo incident. Judging by Holmes’s attitude toward the case, he was more inclined to take Adler’s side. Not to mention how he became rather disgusted by what the king had done.

That was why he only asked Adler’s picture as payment once the matter was over. At the same time, he refused to shake the king’s hand. Zhang Heng could probably understand Holmes’s appreciation for Irene Adler—she was indeed a brilliant and intriguing woman. Therefore, Zhang Heng decided to act as neutral as possible when dealing with her, careful not to be too elusive or zealous. Even a strong character like Sherlock Holmes did not always act alone. He had the Baker Street Irregulars and police officers that assisted him with his cases. He had friends from all manner of trades. If Zhang Heng wanted to compete with him, he would need his friends for help.

As one of the only four who had beaten Holmes, Irene Adler could just be an excellent candidate to aid Zhang Heng.

“Although you left the hallway, and I was a little mad at that, the very fact that you came back, in the end, makes me willing to forgive you. I’d like to also thank you for waiting outside to congratulate me. Though, I see you brought no flowers with you,” Adler battered her eyelids.

It was a long night for many. When Zhang Heng returned to 221B Baker Street, Holmes hadn’t gone to bed, fiddling instead with an Amazon blowgun in his room. Earlier, he barely survived the attack, but now it seemed his spirits had returned to him.

It was exactly as he said—the more difficult the problem, the more excited he would become. On the contrary, asking him to live an ordinary life was no different from murder. “Interesting, you did not send her home,” Sherlock observed, looking at Zhang Heng at the door.

“I don’t think we are close enough for that...” replied Zhang Heng, “...and don’t worry, my relationship with her is not what you think it is.”

“Excellent. Otherwise, they would simply gain another ordinary man falling in love, but lose an excellent detective.”

Zhang Heng did not continue the topic. “Did you get anything useful from those barbers?” he asked Sherlock, not wanting to dwell on the Adler topic.

“I’m glad that you still remember our case, but unfortunately, as I guessed, they are not affiliated with Mr. M’s criminal gang. At least, I found out who beat us up in the theater tonight.”

“He beat you, but I beat him up for you. Thank you,” Zhang Heng corrected. “It doesn’t matter. Makes no difference to me. In short, that man is called Carlson. According to him, he works in a gun factory. I believe the two pieces of information they gave me are 80% false. He got to know the group of barbers when they drank together. As I said, Prussians in London stick together in a group. He had gone into the barbershop, frantically telling them that bad guys were in pursuit of him. Hence, the barbers worked together to fight you off.”

“Wait, so, they didn’t know that man very well. That would mean you got nothing useful from them...” Zhang Heng frowned.

“You’re right. But fortunately, I have fought him earlier, and I got something useful when he strangled me.”

“Mm?”

Holmes put down the blowgun in his hand.

“That man has extraordinary skills. They are simple yet practical. When he put me down, I could see that he was in the army before. And he is definitely Prussian. I believe I’ve mentioned it to you before. Other than that, he is also a gambler. I saw the watch on his right hand—it should be quite valuable, but it has some sort of ticket number on it. It is exactly what London pawnshops would usually do. They would use a needle to engrave the number on the back of the watch, much like tagging the item with a pricetag—this was done to avoid confusion. Typically challenging to spot with the naked eye, I managed to touch it when I was struggling. There are at least three numbers, which means that he has pawned this watch three times. He would repurchase it from the pawnbroker each time, indicating that he acquires a large amount of money once in a while. So, the question is, where did that money come from?” “Mr. M?”

“Yes, we will need to head to the casino tomorrow. I have a hunch we are very close to the mastermind behind the whole thing!” said Holmes.

## **Chapter 507 New Discovery**

Regardless of creed and period, gambling had always stood to be one of humanity’s favorite choices for entertainment.

19th century London was no exception. There were probably hundreds, if not thousands, counting pubs, street arm wrestling, and gambling houses, both large and small. The next evening, Holmes, Zhang Heng, and Villard met up at 221b Baker Street.

“Considering the nature of the bloke’s job, he won’t go to popular gambling houses,” said Holmes. “Pubs suit him better, and fighting clubs as well. Last night I had... a, uhh... an amicable conversation with the Prussian barbers, and I was able to find out the name of the tavern they usually gather at. We’ll use that as the basis for our search to improve efficiency.”

“So, we’ll be splitting up?” Zhang Heng asked.

“Sure. We’ve both seen the man. Villard will go with you, and I will go on my own. But since they’ve seen our faces, we should put on a disguise,” Holmes added with a thin beam on his face.

He brought out two wigs and some makeup tools. "Your skin color is a problem. You'll stick out like a sore thumb in London, but most of that could be covered up with clothes and an application of soot on the face. It's nighttime, so unless you take a real close look, you won't be able to tell. Of course, you shouldn't get too close to him."

Holmes immediately got to work. After a while, a batch of fresh soot was ready. Holmes had disguised himself as an old, chain-smoking sailor.

Zhang Heng paid close attention, taking note of the techniques Holmes employed. Of course, it was all relatively elementary disguise, nowhere nearly as good and as fine of handiwork as Sherlock Holmes's earlier coachman impression. Irene Adler's gender-bender, gypsy busker disguise, on the other hand, was on a whole different level.

Pockets filled with change, they left the apartment once all was ready. At the crossroads, Zhang Heng and Holmes each went in a different direction. Zhang Heng and Villard's first stop was a pub called the Pigeon, but after sitting down for a drink, they discovered that the target wasn't present. It appeared the Pigeon's patrons were mostly refined gentlemen, and since there were only a handful of gamblers there, Zhang Heng and Villard left for the fight club next door.

The atmosphere of the place was crowded, stifling and deafening. Two brawny men battled it out in the ring while the others watched in eagerness. Through the mass of body odor and overflowing testosterone, Zhang Heng and Villard painstakingly combed through every corner of the place. By the time they were done, the match was over. One of the fighters lay motionless on the floor, unable to get up.

The spectators erupted into cheers and applause-obviously, these had placed their bets on the winner. In juxtaposition, there were also men with their faces buried in their hands, looking ravaged and destroyed. It was apparent that these were the unlucky ones tonight.

Having been here a few times himself, Zhang Heng understood all too well how those who watched the game couldn't help but wager a part of their money. The lure of easy money could have been the most infectious disease, where one would be infected with an almost instant effect the moment they saw how so much money could be made so easily. It was an infection that would force you to scratch that itch, despite the best abstinence efforts. There was a caveat to that, however, where most of the time, there was a much higher chance of making a loss.

The French detective, against all odds, was completely unaffected by any of this. Zhang Heng finally understood how Villard could garner praise from someone as austere as Holmes. Not only did he know how to bow and scrape, but he would also be absolutely unyielding once given a task, completely focussed on the mission at hand. Each time he spotted someone that remotely fitted the target's description, he would covertly approach Zhang Heng for confirmation. Despite their best efforts, neither of the two spotted the man who escaped from the opera house. Zhang Heng even suspected that he must have fled London after getting spooked by last night's incident.

But Holmes somehow adamantly insisted that he was still in the city.



“Even though he’s not the one who calls the shots, his caliber is difficult to replace. At this point, he won’t abandon the plan just because of a small hiccup,” Holmes reminded them in their earlier discussion.

Subsequently, Zhang Heng and Villard visited two taverns and another fight club. And yet, perhaps it was just bad luck or juju that their expedition was again unfruitful, not to mention it was already getting dark.

“I wonder how Mr. Holmes is doing,” asked Villard in exhaustion, wiping his forehead.

But then, Zhang Heng suddenly stopped walking. Villard followed his partner’s gaze and saw that he was looking at a man that did not fit the target’s description. However, the red-haired detective carefully set his doubts aside and said nothing to deter Zhang Heng. When Villard looked back, Zhang Heng was leaning against the wall all of a sudden, stumbling wildly and emptying the contents of his stomach. Villard played along, patting his friend on the back.

The target in question didn’t seem to suspect anything. He merely glanced over at the two gentlemen, and as if in a mighty hurry, he strode away as quickly as he could.

Zhang Heng waited until the man had left before he terminated the act, getting to his feet.

Villard could finally ask the question he’d been longing to ask. “Who’s that?”

“One of the prime minister’s guards. We met at the opera house last night.”

He was the one who wanted to put Zhang Heng in handcuffs. Because they had seen each others’ faces and Zhang Heng’s rudimentary disguise, Zhang Heng wanted to take no chances. Mulling over how Mr. M had bribed the maid to fake the oil painting theft, Zhang Heng concluded that this was his modus operandi, and it seemed that he planned to use the same approach this time.

“What should we do? Should we go after him?” asked the French detective.

Zhang Heng considered the proposition, shaking his head after that. “It would be great if we can find out who the new target is, but it doesn’t make sense to follow a guard. Do you remember where he came from?”

“Of course,” answered Villard.

“Let’s go see if the man I fought last night is still there.”

Zhang Heng and Villard entered the café that the guard had just walked out of. It was late, and since it was nearly time to close, only a few customers remained. Even the waitresses were yawning and stretching their arms. Zhang Heng looked around, but the Prussian was nowhere to be seen.

Zhang Heng and Villard decided to expand their search scope, but unfortunately, there wasn’t a single trace of the waiter from last night. Deciding that it was time to call it a day, they rejoined Holmes two blocks away.

When the private detective heard Zhang Heng’s account of what took place, he nodded.

“You’re right. The person who was bribed is not part of the group. Bribery aside, since we can’t prove it just yet—if you had apprehended him, it would’ve caused Mr. M and his group to panic. Conversely, now that we know who their next target is, and we have the advantage here. Let’s play this game with them.”

## **Chapter 508 Closing in on the Truth**

Holmes decided not to tell the Prime Minister what happened that night.

Zhang Heng had no objections, but Villard felt differently about it—he thought that it was not very gentleman-like since it meant using the prime minister as bait. But since he wasn’t a British citizen, he felt it wasn’t his place to make any comments. So, in the end, Holmes got what he wanted.

The Baker Street Irregulars were summoned once again. This time, Holmes made an appearance himself. During the day, he would dress up as a cobbler, setting up a booth nearby the prime minister’s residence. At night, he played a drunk on the streets.

Two days later, he managed to make four shillings from repairing shoes, but still, no sign of the elusive Prussian.

Even so, Holmes didn’t get perturbed at all. He only slept three hours a day, yet still seemed to be filled with energy, even in the mood to play the violin when he had the time.

Zhang Heng and Villard, on the other hand, spent their time stomping in the belly of London’s pubs and fighting clubs, hoping to find the perpetrator. To their disappointment, like Holmes, neither of them yielded anything. Then, on the morning of the third day, Zhang Heng received unexpected news that Holmes was arrested.

He rushed to the police station, accompanied by Villard. The private detective was found seated on a bench, chin resting on his hands, and seemingly deep in thought. Zhang Heng completed the bail procedure, and Holmes was subsequently released.

Holmes collected a shoe brush and toolbox from the police officer and walked out of the pound without saying a word. This worried Zhang Heng and Villard.

The moment he got into the carriage, Holmes broke into a fit of laughter. “Hah! It appears that I’ve underestimated our opponent!”

“Huh?”

“It’s all rather embarrassing,” Holmes sighed. “I haven’t been this abashed in such a long time. I went there to spy on them, but instead, I was found out and given a good beating. Someone informed the officer patrolling on that street that a suspicious individual had been seen outside the prime minister’s residence. Thus, I was arrested. I’m well acquainted with the police, but since this involves the prime minister, they weren’t able to release me immediately, except on bail, of course.”

“They saw through your disguise?”

“Rather, it had been all a trap since the beginning,” said Holmes. “It’s safe to say that we’ve been targeted. Probably because we attempted to find the Prussian based on the information we had on the night at the opera. But the enemy clearly did their homework as well, and boy, did they do pretty well. It

appears they now know where we stay and what I do. They have been monitoring us, and what happened today must have been a warning directed to me..."

"Warning?"

"Yes. It seems they do not wish for me to be involved," lamented Holmes. "But at the same time, it means we're very close to the truth."

"Sorry to interrupt," The French detective scratched his head, "but did I miss something? Haven't these two days been unfruitful? Why are we suddenly close to the truth?"

"I don't know yet, but we must have done something these past few days that made them nervous. I've been trying to determine what it is even before you came," Holmes said.

He reached into his pocket, only to find his pipe was missing. Where did it go? Oh yeah, he had changed his clothes earlier.

Villard quickly took out his own pack of cigarettes from his pocket and offered Holmes a stick using both hands.

"Don't worry. Let me think about it a little bit more," said Holmes, taking in a long drag.

As Holmes mulled over the issue, Zhang Heng recollected the events during the past few days to see if he had missed anything. It wasn't long before the two looked at each other and cried Eureka! almost simultaneously. "What is it???"

Villard was burning with curiosity, wishing so badly that he could just climb into the brains of Zhang Heng and Holmes.

"Are you thinking what I'm thinking?" Holmes asked Zhang Heng.

Zhang Heng looked at Villard.

"You mentioned that all of Mr. M's crimes were committed in France. This indicates he is very likely a Frenchman."

"And Carmen is a French opera..."

"...yes, that's all true." The French detective frowned. "So?"

"Carmen first premiered in Paris before London, and Mr. M happens to be here in London at the same time," replied Zhang Heng. "Could it be just a coincidence?" "Hold on. Are you inferring that Mr. M is connected to the opera troupe?" "That would explain why they were so nervous," said Zhang Heng. "...nervous because we showed up the opera," Holmes continued. "They must have thought that we were close to finding Mr. M."

"I'm going to pay Ms. Adler a visit and see if any of the troupe members are French and had arrived in London recently," Zhang Heng announced.

Half an hour later, Zhang Heng arrived at Irene Adler's place. After Zhang Heng reported his name, the housekeeper welcomed him, telling him to wait in the living room. Upon entering the house, he heard someone playing the piano on the second floor.

"Ms. Adler is practicing. Please wait a moment," said the housekeeper. "Alright."

Zhang Heng sat himself down on a sofa while the housekeeper made him a cup of tea. After about a quarter of an hour, the music stopped, and the opera songstress emerged from the stairs.

"Look who's here! It appears we have an extraordinary guest, Mr. Zhang Heng," Irene quipped. The white dress she was in today made her look like a blooming lily.

Knowing how perspicacious Irene could be, Zhang Heng went straight to the point and related everything to her.

The opera singer looked stunned. "It all makes sense now. You left that night because of this case."

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"I hope you won't take any offense, Ms. Adler."

"Irene. Just call me Irene," answered the singer. "How could I blame a man who works so hard to make London a safer place for all of us?"

"It's strictly a pro bono job," said Zhang Heng. "So, perhaps it would be more appropriate to call it a hobby."

"That makes it even more admirable, doesn't it?" said Irene. Sitting adjacent to Zhang Heng, she poured herself a cup of tea.

"The person you're looking for actually exists. He's the troupe's French consultant. During rehearsals, he only communicates with the team through telegrams, but the London premiere is of great importance, so he came here all the way from France. I must say though, that I don't fancy him very much. He might appear humble on the surface, but I can tell how he's a very proud man, constantly looking down on people—women especially. Of course, he's very good at his job; but unfortunately, he's not the smartest person in the troupe—as he would like to think."

## **Chapter 509 Case Over**

"Yuri, he asked me to have dinner with him before, but I rejected him. He probably thought that I was the same as those women from the French opera troupe that allowed him to do whatever that pleased him," said Irene Adler while putting down the teacup in her hand. "I can give you Yuri's address, and I can even ask him out for you, but what good is it for me?"

"What do you want?" Zhang Heng asked. "Hmm...I haven't figured it out yet." Irene blinked.

"Let me know after you figure out what you want."

"Sounds good to me," replied Irene Adler. "In this case, Yuri is yours."

At the Royal Hotel.

Irene was sitting opposite a French man looking to be about 40 years old. The latter was going on about Paris's artistic atmosphere and how many outstanding artists were born there. Irene Adler was looking at the man with admiration, greatly elating the Frenchman.

"It's a pity that Bizet is no longer there. I can introduce other plays to you, though. I have many contacts from the Paris Music Festival, so if you get tired of staying in London and coming to Paris, please contact me."

"Oh, you think too highly of me! I can only speak a few French words. It would be hard getting used to Paris, let alone singing there."

"It's okay. Language can be learned," Yuri wiped his mouth with a napkin. "You are very talented. Whether your appearance or singing skills, once you have mastered French, and coupled with my resources, you will be the best in Paris. You will also become one of the few female singers who have succeeded in France and England."

Irene burst into a giggle when she heard the words, seemingly yearning for the beautiful reality depicted by Yuri. She then raised her glass in her hand and said, "Please, forgive me for being rude. I didn't know you were this funny and interesting. You are completely different from other men that I have met!"

"At my age, nothing more is left except for a little experience and a bad sense of humor."

Yuri laughed at himself and raised the glass in his hand. He had always been polite, making him hard to fault. When his eyes flashed over Irene's chest, he could feel that an imperceptible heat ignited him.

His experience told him that his remarks should have conquered Adler's heart. He assumed she was now completely mesmerized by the beautiful prospects that he portrayed, meaning that he was about to get what he wanted-maybe even as soon as tonight.

Yuri was pleased when he noticed that Irene had taken the initiative to drink first. Once she became drunk here, he could...

Instead of that, Yuri felt dizzy first. He knew the amount of alcohol he just consumed, and never before had he gotten drunk only after two sips. Yuri immediately realized that there must have been a problem with the wine. His heart sank.

Despite all that, he didn't suspect Irene, believing that some other enemies must have targeted him. It was also a common mistake made by most men:

Underestimating women. Even a powerful character like Sherlock Holmes could have fallen for Irene Adler. This time, the famous Mr. M was no exception. Yes, yearned badly for the attention of the people around him to help him, but he was also a cautious man. Even on a date, his bodyguard would tag along. A few seconds later, his head fell into Irene's arms.

"Oh, Mr. Yuri, you look a little drunk. It's fine. I will send you back," Irene purred gently.

She then called the waiter and asked him to go downstairs to call for a carriage. Holmes, disguised as a coachman, walked into the restaurant behind the waiter and carried Yuri to the carriage with Irene.

The bodyguard at the other table was lost. Uncertain if Yuri was drunk or about to be taken advantage of by that woman, he stayed in his spot. Yuri had already been carried downstairs by that time. The bodyguard hurriedly paid the bill, but the carriage was already gone when he came out of the restaurant.

Suddenly, someone patted him on the shoulder.

Zhang Heng and Villard quickly sandwiched him.

A week had passed since the brewing of the oil painting case. Holmes's tactics of capturing the mastermind behind the criminal organization had been a great success. All members of Mr. M's gang were found and arrested. The viscount retrieved the missing oil paintings from his porcelain vase, and Villard had safely returned to France.

However, Holmes still needed to figure out a way to deal with Mr. M, a mastermind of countless crimes committed. Hence, it made him a criminal. Strangely, for all the crimes he committed, none of his victims dared to speak up or report the crime. In other words, it was difficult to convict him through legal means.

When Yuri woke up, he realized that he had fallen into a trap. However, he noticed that Holmes could not do anything with him. In the end, Zhang Heng was the one that managed to force him to unveil information of his accomplices. After Mr. M swore he would never return to London, and Sherlock Holmes allowed him a safe return to France.

Zhang Heng too had gained something after this case. The 'criminal investigation' skill appeared on his character panel, something that could be regarded as a reward for studying this period's cases and participating in an investigation in person. In addition, apprehending Mr. M earned him 15 game points.

That said, the main task he cared about the most was still unfinished. Zhang Heng initially thought that with Irene's help, he would be the first to discover Mr. M's true identity. In fact, it was exactly how this case ended, but the system didn't seem to recognize this result.

Zhang Heng guessed that it was because Holmes was the one that made most of the deductions. And in the end, it was also Holmes's deduction that spooked Mr. M. After that, the two thought of the opera troupe at about the same time. Hence, the system didn't recognize Zhang Heng as the first to find the criminal.

Naturally, Zhang Heng became a little resentful, but he wasn't too upset. At least, he'd now figured out the way to win this game. And he saw the hope of winning. Although this wasn't an easy path to go down, time was still on his side, fortunately. After this case, he came to the realization that Holmes was only human and could make mistakes. His self-correction ability was terrible to the point he managed to see through Mr. M's defenses in the oil painting case.

In the end, Zhang Heng always felt that there was another reason why Holmes chose to release Mr. M. He had asked Holmes about this before, to which Holmes only replied with a smile. After that, he reproduced his violin.

"I'd like to listen to 'Carmen' again. It is indeed a good opera show. Your friend, Miss Adler's performance, is lovely. I'm fond of one of the sessions. Let me play for you right now."

## **Chapter 510 A Little Game**

Before he knew it, Zhang Heng had been in Victorian London for five months now.

He had gradually grown accustomed to the thick smog covering the Thames, the din and chaos of the underground fight clubs, and the Englishman's lack for culinary imagination and creativity.

On the other hand, his skills had progressed expeditiously—his criminal investigation skills reached Lv1 three months ago and the few cosmetic lessons that he picked up later in the quest also earned him a Lv1 last month. On top of that, thanks to frequent interaction with Irene, he learned a lot about 19th-century music, literature, and arts.

‘Art appreciation’ was even added to his list of skills, though it was only at level 0 at the moment.

Ms. Adler was of great assistance to the oil painting case, but she never asked for any favors in return, as if she had completely forgotten about it. She treated Zhang Heng like a mate, but considering her intelligence and cunning, he never believed for a second that the incident had completely slipped her mind.

He only hoped that whatever request she was brewing wouldn’t be anything too troublesome. For now, at least, they were getting along reasonably well. Holmes, on the other hand, was a little trickier.

When they first met, Sherlock Holmes was rather gentlemanly, and although there was the occasional act of delinquency, it was nothing that put anyone in real trouble. However, as time went by, the two became like couples who had outlived their honeymoon and were gradually revealing their true selves to each other.

Holmes would often conduct all sorts of experiments in his bedroom, and other than when he snuck a corpse into the house, he nearly burnt the whole building down—Mrs. Hudson was especially miffed about this. Then there was the sensuous melody of Sherlock’s legendary violin in the wee hours of the morning, a spectacle Zhang Heng was fortunate enough to have heard...

But every time he “got into trouble,” Holmes would apologize earnestly to Zhang Heng shortly after that. Knowing Holmes as Holmes, he would then repeat the same offense the next time.

Fortunately, other than these minor frictions, life on Baker Street was a fairly pleasant one.

Zhang Heng learned more than he ever did before from Holmes—not only his method of deductions, but also all manner of *recherche*, amalgamated into a wealth of practical knowledge. Of course, determining the target’s direction based on shoe impressions on mud was only useful in the 19th-century. Back in the 21st-century, such an approach was ineffective with modern concrete layered cities. Although that was the case, learning all about it was in itself a very interesting experience, even more so when the pair worked on cases together.

The main objective of this game was to solve a case and find the criminal before Holmes did, though, if the plot development matched the one in the book word for word, there would be no beating the player who knew the answer even if a hundred Sherlock Holmes were to be put together. Zhang Heng realized that at the beginning of the quest.

In fact, up until now, none of the cases they had worked on were the same as the ones in the original text. By this time, Holmes and Watson would have completed the “A Study in Scarlet” case. This never happened in this game. Zhang Heng expected this, of course, because it made perfect sense—the game would just be testing players’ familiarity with the novel if it did.

It wasn’t as if there was nothing to worry about, though. If Irene Adler had appeared, then what about Holmes’ other notorious arch enemy? Would he be appearing in this quest as well?

Enter Professor Moriarty, a man Holmes described as the Napoleon of Crime. He was the most powerful criminal mastermind in all of Europe, establishing himself as kingpin of London's criminal empire, where half of all the crimes in the city were related to him. Descriptions of the professor in the novel were few and far between, making him one of Doyle's more mysterious characters.

That said, he wasn't exactly ambiguous either.

In the book, Moriarty was mathematics professor at a small university in England, and was a well-known figure in academia. Surprisingly, after consulting several lecturers from the mathematics department, Zhang Heng discovered that none had ever heard of the name Moriarty. Even the professor's acclaimed academic piece, "The Dynamics of an Asteroid" was nowhere to be found in bookstores.

Of course, these signs alone weren't necessarily an indication that Moriarty wouldn't make an appearance in this game. Henceforth, Zhang Heng would remain vigilant of this criminal mastermind.

He and Holmes both didn't know that another case was creeping upon them.

It was a lazy afternoon, and Zhang Heng and Holmes were lazing on a bench in the park, snacking on sandwiches and playing the game they had been playing a little too much recently.

Zhang Heng rested his chin on his hands as he looked at a lady with a puppy walking past. "Definitely married, at least two husbands, and has a child. Her living conditions aren't as good as they used to be, loves jewelry but is stingy with her maids, and, in fact, has a disdain for animals. She has one only because everyone else does, and she feels pets are simply extra trouble for the maids. She smokes, enjoys the occasional drink, and has recently attended a ball."

"Appendage—the child she gave birth to is gone!" said Holmes.

"Huh?"

"I'm glad you noticed that she had given the candy in her pockets to the children on the street. Generally, a person who has children in the family would carry sweets on them, but if you paid attention to the way she looked at those children, you can see that within the affection, lies a hint of jealousy. To boot, she comes here every week to distribute candies to the neighboring kids. If you have a child of your own and that child is well and alive, trust me, you won't be so caring towards other children."

"You're cheating. You've seen the target before!"

"No, it's experience," replied Holmes in an instant as he shook his head. "I often came to this park, so I have the relevant experience. You must know that all reasoning is based on experience. You can't possibly expect me to abandon them when I make deductions, my oriental friend."

"Alright, next." Holmes pointed to a man not far from where they were seated. "Typist, has a wife, a Freemason, and has been to China. The pipe in his hand is of great importance to him, plays soccer, and was probably in the Navy in his younger days." "I can tell that he's been in the Navy, but the part about soccer—was it because he was observing the children play on the street?"

"Not just that. Earlier on, when the ball rolled over to his side, he gave it a respectable kick. But you didn't see it probably because you were busy gnawing on that sandwich."

"What about the pipe? Why would you say that it's essential to him?"



“Oh, that’s very obvious, my friend.” Holmes smiled. “That pipe only costs six to seven shillings, but the silver hoops it had been repaired with costs more than the pipe itself. Most people would have just bought a new one.”