

Sailor's Problem, The

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THE CHARACTERS:
SHERLOCK HOLMES
DR. WATSON
MRS. HUDSON
MR. SEEKER, a sailor
BOATMAN, from India
NATIVES
MORIARTY
MORIARTY'S NIECE

NARRATOR: The characters in this play are completely fictional, but the Prisoner of Akka is real. He lived between 1817 and 1892.

SCENE 1

Victorian Study. Two men seated.

Holmes stands and looks out of the window.

HOLMES: Ah Watson. What do you make of him? [Points at man in street below. Watson joins him.]

WATSON: Well... Middle aged man, sailor. Nothing else springs to mind.

HOLMES: Bravo Watson! He is a sailor on leave, a widower with two young children. You see, the tattoo on his hand immediately denotes a sailor. He's on leave because his boots have not been cleaned recently and he carries shopping and presents, for a married man would not do his own shopping. The presents are for young people.

WATSON: Look Holmes. He's coming this way.

Doorbell rings. Footsteps on stairs and Mrs Hudson shows the gentleman in.

MRS. HUDSON: Mr. Seeker to see you sir.

MR SEEKER: Mr Sherlock Holmes?

MR HOLMES: Yes, how can I be of assistance? [Sits down and lights pipe.]

MR SEEKER: I have heard that you are the single most accomplished detective in all of London. My problem is a simple one. You see, I have travelled the world and have witnessed so much poverty, fighting, greed, and hatred. What we need is peace and unity, not wars and starvation. My request is that you go out into the world to find the solution.

HOLMES: From my experience, I have never once chanced upon such a most singular case...[pausing to think]...Thank you Mr. Seeker but I have other matters to attend to.

WATSON: Mr Holmes is a very busy man but he will see to your needs as soon as possible. [Holds door open for Mr Seeker and sees him out.]

HOLMES: Come Watson pack your trunk, we shall be leaving from Waterloo at ten o'clock tomorrow morning.

SCENE TWO

A boat is situated centre stage. The various destinations visited alternate from left stage to right stage.

From side of boat. Holmes is holding a telescope and watching natives arguing.

WATSON: What do you see, Holmes?

HOLMES: Natives.

WATSON: What is your interest in them?

HOLMES: They are arguing over some matter. Boatman, can you translate?

BOATMAN: Yes, sir, yes, I would be most happy to do so. They are arguing.

HOLMES: That is plain enough. What I need to know is what they are arguing about.

BOATMAN: Well they are arguing about many things...but they are arguing in two different languages so that they cannot understand each other. One is saying "let us work together to get our crops in before the rainy season" but the other thinks he is attacking their God and is saying that his God is better than theirs which is very strange, I think, because both their Gods teach the same thing.

HOLMES: So tell me boatman, what do these Gods teach?

BOATMAN: The same thing really. And that is that we must love one another. They are wasting a lot of time.

HOLMES: [Writing in his notebook] Interesting, interesting, don't you find, Watson?

WATSON: Yes, I suppose.

HOLMES: Let us continue on our way. Carry on boatman.

Lights down, stage left and up stage right.

SCENE THREE

A study. One man is seated and counting his money. A young lady enters.

HOLMES: [From boat] My God, Watson, do you see that man there? He is unmistakably Moriarty.

LADY: Good morning uncle. I have been visiting the mission again.

MORIARTY: What have you been down there for?

LADY: I have been talking to all the poor people. How they are treated is really unfair. I wish I were in a position to change that. [Thinking] I know...I should be a politician. I am sure that if women ran the country there would be less poverty and less war. They don't want to see their sons killed!

MORIARTY: [Still counting his money]. You... you want to be in a place of power? That's impossible...You can't even spell politician let alone vote. If you want to be in a place of power, go to the kitchen!

LADY: [To audience]. All I have ever been taught is what clothes to wear and how to cook and sew. Women have not been given the chance. All we want is justice for everyone, not power. Stage left and right is in darkness. The boat is lit up centre stage.

WATSON: Really Holmes, this is a difficult one.

HOLMES: Maybe not as difficult as it seems. Tell me Watson, what would you say is the main difference between the peoples of the East and the West?

WATSON: Well, their skin varies a great deal and their medical practices seem to me to be a whole lot of superstition and hocus-pocus.

HOLMES: And the West?

WATSON: Very scientific and organised.

HOLMES: [Thinking]...I have it!

WATSON: Have what, Holmes?

HOLMES: All in good time, all in good time my boy. I have solved the case. Back to England, boatman.

SCENE FOUR

Holmes' Study

Mrs. Hudson shows Mr. Seeker into the study. Holmes is sitting in his chair playing the violin. Watson is looking out of the window smoking a pipe.

MRS. HUDSON: Mr. Seeker to see you sir.

HOLMES: Ah, Mr. Seeker, I have part of your solution but it is far from simple. While I was on my travels, I observed several scenes which gave some clues. While in the far East I witnessed the peoples arguing and fighting and this is what I deduced. They fought because they misunderstood each other. This would not have happened had they spoken a language in common.

WATSON: So we need a language that everyone can understand without losing one's national identity.

HOLMES: Yes Watson, but I shall continue. One tribe was attacking the others' God. I recalled the boatman who told us that both their Gods say we should treat each other as we would expect to be treated.

WATSON: But that's in the Bible!

HOLMES: Thank you Watson. [To Mr. Seeker] My Biblical knowledge is a trifle rusty but I remembered that this is the foundation of most other faiths. Because of this I concluded that the teachings of all these faiths must have come from the same source.

WATSON: Well done Holmes! From this you are saying that all religions also come from the same God and that we must therefore all be connected ... rather like a large family.

HOLMES: Yes Watson, you are correct, but there are a few more factors yet to come.

WATSON: And these are?

HOLMES: If you remember, we chanced by one of Moriarty's many houses in which his niece wanted to be a politician. I observed that Moriarty's niece was displaying boundless compassion and a total lack of greed. I also realised that women are the primary teachers for the next generation. Upon consideration I deduced that not only do women need to be educated but also that the world's problems can only be resolved when there are more women in key positions.

WATSON: Do you realise what you are saying, Holmes? You are suggesting that women could eventually get the vote?

HOLMES: Not only the vote, dear Watson, but they will need to be treated equally to men. Indeed all people deserve the opportunity for a good education and this brings me to my next point. This education would help diminish the gap of extremes of poverty and wealth and through the independent investigation of truth should lead to the reduction in prejudice which is also necessary if we are to solve Mr. Seeker's problem. In fact you, my dear Watson, saved me a great deal of time when you mentioned the scientific and superstitious elements of the East and West, for religion without science is merely superstition and science without religion could be very dangerous. You can see, then, how they should be in balance.

WATSON: [Puzzled]. So what you are saying is that women should be able to vote and should strive to work alongside men, that everyone should have a good education and that we should try to share our wealth more justly. We should investigate the truth for ourselves, which, of course, you need no help in Holmes, and we should work at eliminating prejudice. It seems to me that the differences between East and West, men and women, and the rich and the poor are not as great as I first thought. What we are talking about is unity!!

HOLMES: Yes, Watson, yes. Now Mr. Seeker, this should help to answer your question but on my travels I heard of one in the prison city of Akka who holds the key. I would highly recommend that you visit him as he has much to teach.

MR. SEEKER: Thank you Mr. Holmes, I am greatly indebted to you for your help in this matter. [Leaves]

HOLMES: You may use my note-book for reference as you record this adventure. [Picks up violin and plays theme tune].

— Sailor's Problem, The (Used by permission of the curator)