

Sherlock Holmes and Vamberry the Wine Merchant
Music for an Imaginary Silent Film
by **Andreas Willscher**

The story of Vamberry the wine merchant is one of the “untold” cases of Sherlock Holmes. Arthur Conan Doyle refers to it only in passing, so we must imagine the story for ourselves.

Scene 1: The living room at 221B Baker Street, London

Sherlock Holmes and Dr. John Watson are relaxing after their latest case. Watson is gently rummaging through old documents while Holmes occupies himself by playing the violin. A client enters. He wants them to track down the wine merchant Vamberry who has seemingly disappeared. Vamberry cheated him by selling adulterated wine, and the client has been looking for him everywhere. At first Holmes is reluctant to take the case, but the client persuades him and Watson with an impromptu wine tasting.

[music]

Scene 2

The criminal Vamberry is preparing to leave the cellar of his winery. He has just sold a large quantity of adulterated wine once again. With a smile on his face, he writes up the fraudulent transactions in his ledger and then heads off for his secret hideout.

[music]

Scene 3

In his hideout, Vamberry dances a little waltz-musette of joy. He gazes with satisfaction at the gold pieces he received from his cheated customer.

[music]

Scene 4

Sherlock Holmes begins to contemplate the case. The client has left behind a bottle of Vamberry’s fraudulent wine, and Holmes looks keenly at the label. He sees that Vamberry used the head of a cat as his emblem. Holmes does not even need to smoke a full pipe before he realizes the whereabouts of Vamberry. There is a double meaning: for “cathead” is the nautical name of the large wooden beam that supports a sailing ship’s anchor. Vamberry’s hideout must be a sailboat, which explains why it couldn’t be found when searching on land. Mrs. Hudson serves tea and cake, which Watson happily devours. Inspector Lestrade is notified via telegram and leaps into action.

[music]

Scene 5

The police storm the dock and surround Vamberry's boat. He tries to push away and raise the sails to escape, but the police arrest him before he can get them hoisted. He is taken away to jail.

[music]

Scene 6: A reception hosted by the Association of British Wine Merchants

Lestrade receives a case of wine, and Holmes receives the "badge of honor" of the association. However, Lestrade prefers to drink beer; he thinks wine tastes like elderberry juice. He thus suggests a swap. Holmes gratefully agrees, because the wine is a rare Château Margaux from 1771.

[music]