

THE ADVENTURE OF THE COPPER BEECHES

by **Sir Arthur Conan Doyle**

Adapted by Robert E. Robinson

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CAST OF CHARACTERS

Mr. Jephro Rucastle	Country Gentleman
Miss Lily Stoper	Employment Agent
Miss Violet Hunter	Governess
Mrs. Eustasia Rucastle	Jephro's Wife
Mr. Sherlock Holmes	Consulting Detective
Dr. John H. Watson	Physician

PLACE: LONDON, THEN HAMPSHIRE

TIME: APRIL, 1887

SCENE 1

London. Westerway's Agency for Governesses. Jephro RUCASTLE and Lily STOPER

RUCASTLE: So, Miss Stoper. Do you have any other applicants for me to consider?

STOPER: You have interviewed five of my best governesses, Mr. Rucastle.

RUCASTLE: Yet not one of them was suitable.

STOPER: We may not be able to help you.

RUCASTLE: Surely you can find someone.

STOPER: We shall keep trying, sir.

RUCASTLE: Are there no other applicants in the office at present?

STOPER: Only a Miss Violet Hunter, who is new to us. She came in just this afternoon. I haven't had time to review her file.

RUCASTLE: How long would that take?

STOPER: Perhaps a half hour.

RUCASTLE: Well, then, Miss Stoper, I suggest that you show her in immediately. As you may have noticed, I can make my decisions more quickly than that.

STOPER: Well, that is true enough. [*Going to door*] I shall fetch her at once. [*Opening door*] Miss Hunter?

HUNTER: [*Offstage*] Yes?

STOPER: Would you please step in.

HUNTER: Certainly. [*Entering*] Miss Stoper?

STOPER: Yes. Mr. Rucastle, this is Miss Violet Hunter.

RUCASTLE: [*Bouncing in his chair, beaming broadly. He will continue to smile most benevolently throughout most of the ensuing conversation*] She will do! Exactly whom I have been seeking. [*Rubbing hands together*] I could not ask for anything better. Capital! Capital! You are looking for a situation, Miss?

HUNTER: Yes, sir.

RUCASTLE: As governess?

HUNTER: Yes, sir.

RUCASTLE: And what salary do you ask?

HUNTER: I had four pounds a month in my last place with Colonel Spence Monro.

RUCASTLE: Ah? [*Laughing merrily*] Surely you are jesting.

HUNTER: No, sir. I am not.

RUCASTLE: Sweating -- rank sweating! Four pounds, indeed! How could anyone offer so pitiful a sum to a lady with such attractions and accomplishments?

HUNTER: My accomplishments, sir, may be less than you imagine. A little French, a little German, music and drawing --

RUCASTLE: Tut, tut! This is all beside the question. The point is, do you have the bearing and deportment of a true lady? There it is in a nutshell. If you do not have, you should never be entrusted with the rearing of a child who may someday play a considerable part in the history of the country. If you do have, why then how could any gentleman ask you to condescend to accept anything under three figures. Your salary with me, madam would commence at 100 pounds a year. And, by the way, it is my invariable custom to advance to my young ladies half their salary beforehand, so that they may meet any little expenses of their journey and their wardrobe.

HUNTER: May I ask where you live, sir?

RUCASTLE: Hampshire. Charming rural place. The Copper Beeches, five miles on the far side of Winchester. Lovely country and the dearest old country house.

HUNTER: And my duties?

RUCASTLE: One child -- Edward. A dear little romper, just six years old. Oh, if you could see him killing cockroaches with a slipper. Smack! Smack! Smack! Three gone before you could wink! [*Leans back in chair and laughs in merriment*]

HUNTER: My sole duties, then, would be to take charge of this -- ah -- child?

RUCASTLE: No, no, not the sole, certainly not the sole duties, my dear young lady. You would be asked to obey such little commands as might any lady obey with propriety. You see no difficulty, heh?

HUNTER: I should be happy to make myself useful.

RUCASTLE: Quite so. In dress, now, for example. We are faddy people, you know -- faddy, but kind-hearted. We have our harmless whims. My wife is fond of a particular shade of electric blue dress, and would like you to wear it indoors in the mornings. You need not go to the expense of buying one, as we have one belonging to Alice, my dear daughter by an earlier wife. Alice is now in Philadelphia, and certainly would never object. You would likewise be willing to humor us. Heh?

HUNTER: Of course.

RUCASTLE: Then you might be asked to sit here or perhaps to sit there. You would not find this offensive?

HUNTER: Certainly not.

RUCASTLE: What else? Oh, yes, one minor whim. Possibly to cut your hair quite short before joining us?

HUNTER: Cut my hair? Oh dear! I have been told that it is my best feature. Some have even gone so far as to call it artistic. I don't know that to cut it would be possible.

RUCASTLE: [*Shaking head and frowning, but benevolently*] I am afraid that it is quite essential. It is perhaps but a little fancy of my wife's, but a woman's fancies, you know, madam, can be circumnavigated only with great difficulty, if indeed at all. Surely you will cut your hair, won't you?

HUNTER: No, sir, I really think not.

RUCASTLE: Ah, very well. That quite settles the matter. Such a pity, such a pity. In all other respects you would really have done so very nicely. I fear, Miss Stoper, that I had best inspect a few more of your young ladies.

STOPER: I presume you would desire your name to be kept upon our books, Miss Hunter?

HUNTER: If you please, Miss Stoper.

STOPER: Well, really, it would be rather useless, since you refuse the most excellent of offerings in such a fashion. You can hardly expect us to exert ourselves on your behalf. Good-day to you, Miss Hunter.

HUNTER walks to door, and is about to leave when RUCASTLE speaks again.

RUCASTLE: [*Smiling*] I see that I have been remiss on placing so paltry a value on one with such excellent qualifications. Let us say that I give you an additional 20 pounds a year, so as to recompense you for any little inconvenience which our fads may cause you. As regards your hair, I should hope that this might serve to compensate you for that loss.

HUNTER: Well --

RUCASTLE: Ah, the dear lady is reconsidering. Capital! Capital! Everything is settled. I shall meet you with the dog-cart at Winchester. You only have to let me know your train.

CURTAIN

SCENE 2

The Copper Beeches. Room with two doors, one of which is never opened. Jephro RUCASTLE and EUSTASIA Rucastle seated. There is a knock at the door.

EUSTASIA: There she is.

RUCASTLE: Ah, yes. I shall admit her. [*rising, going to door and opening it*] Come in, dear lady, come in.

HUNTER: [*Entering, in blue dress and with shortened hair*] Thank you, sir.

RUCASTLE: And wearing the electric blue dress. [*to EUSTASIA*] Is she not exactly as you wished her to be, my sweet?

EUSTASIA: She could not be more so.

RUCASTLE: And, dear lady, how fares our delightful little Edward?

HUNTER: He is in the nursery, making a string of butterfly wings.

RUCASTLE: Wonderful, wonderful! What an artistic little tyke! The world will know of him someday. And now perhaps you will seat yourself in the chair by the window. Is that not where you would like her to be, Eustasia?

EUSTASIA: Exactly, Jephro.

HUNTER: [*sitting*] Thank you, sir.

RUCASTLE: Splendid! Splendid! Could the dear girl be more perfect, my peach?

EUSTASIA: Very good. But yet -

RUCASTLE: Yes?

EUSTASIA: Her head might be turned a little more away from the window.

RUCASTLE: Ah, yes! So I see. [*Standing alongside HUNTER, places one hand atop her head, and turns it slightly.*] Better, Eustasia?

EUSTASIA: Perfect! Truly perfect.

RUCASTLE: Capital. And now, dear lady, you will thoroughly oblige my dear wife if you can remain in that posture.

HUNTER: If it so pleases her.

EUSTASIA: It does indeed.

RUCASTLE: Magnificent. Well - now that we are settled in - before this dear person arrived, what was I about to say?

EUSTASIA: You were speaking of Daisy, Lord Bottomley's cow.

RUCASTLE: Ah, so. A most remarkable and resourceful beast.

EUSTASIA: You were saying that Daisy does something that no other cow can do?

RUCASTLE: She does indeed. Whenever she hiccups.

EUSTASIA: Does what?

RUCASTLE: Whenever Daisy hiccups, [*Laughing*] she automatically churns her own butter. [*Roaring with laughter*]

EUSTASIA: [*Laughing loudly*] Churns her own butter. Oh, I say! Churns her own butter! Oh, Jephro, you are such a card!

RUCASTLE: [*Turning to HUNTER, who is smiling politely*] Did you not find that amusing, my dear lady?

HUNTER: Of course.

EUSTASIA: She didn't seem to.

RUCASTLE: You must become accustomed to my dear wife. She is so pleased at my humorous little anecdotes, that she is offended if visitors --

EUSTASIA: Servants, Jephro! --

RUCASTLE: Certainly, my artichoke. -- if -- ah -- *others* do not.

HUNTER: I'm sure I shall bear that in mind.

EUSTASIA: I should so suggest.

RUCASTLE: Then there was this chap who went in to see his physician. The doctor said, "Did you do as I prescribed on your last visit - did you drink water thirty minutes before going to bed?" [*Beginning to laugh*] To which the patient replied --

EUSTASIA: [*Beginning to laugh*] Yes, Jephro. To which the patient replied?

RUCASTLE: He replied [*laughing loudly*] The patient replied, "I tried to do it, doctor. I really tried. But - hahahahahaahahha! -- after only five minutes I was so full of water that -- hahahahahahahahaha! -- that I just couldn't drink any more.

[*RUCASTLE and EUSTASIA laugh uproariously. HUNTER chuckles.*]

EUSTASIA: [*After a moment*] I don't think the girl has a sense of humor, Jephro.

RUCASTLE: I am sure she does, my sweet. The same patient asked, "Why do you always whistle when you operate, doctor?" -- hahaha! --

EUSTASIA: hahaha! -- and what did the doctor say?

RUCASTLE: The doctor said -- hahahahaha! -- the doctor said "I always whistle when I operate, because -- hahahahaha! -- because -- hahahahaha! -- IT HELPS TAKE MY MIND OFF MY WORK" - hahahahahahahahaha!

[All laugh loudly - RUCASTLE and EUSTASIA spontaneously, HUNTER, after a slight hesitation]

EUSTASIA: *[Wiping her eyes]* Oh, my! oh, my! Ah, Jephro -- she must remember to reposition her head when she has finished laughing.

HUNTER: Dear me. *[Doing so]* Of course.

RUCASTLE: The doctor then said, "I note that your legs are still swollen, but -- hahahahaha! -- "but I'm not worried about that."

EUSTASIA: What -- hahahahaha! -- what did the patient say, Jephro?

RUCASTLE: Hahahahahahaha -- The patient said, "If *your* legs were swollen -- " - hahahahaha! -- "-- I wouldn't worry about *that*, either." Hahahahahahahahaha!"

[All laugh loudly. In the process, HUNTER turns her head toward the window, then back to the room, then double-takes again to the window.]

EUSTASIA: Jephro, the girl has seen something outside.

RUCASTLE: *[No longer laughing - perhaps somewhat menacing]* Ah, dear lady. Did you see something?

HUNTER: Well, yes. A man is standing out there.

EUSTASIA: *[Gasps]* Oh, Jephro! It is he!

RUCASTLE: Ssh! And what is the gentleman doing, sweet lady?

HUNTER: Just standing -- beneath the trees.

RUCASTLE: Ah, now. Do as I say. Turn your head to him -- like this. *[Slowly turns his own head]* Then wave him away. Like this. *[Motions as if to shoo someone off]*

HUNTER: I don't understand -

RUCASTLE: You ... will ... turn ... your ... head ... and ... you ... will ... wave ... him ... away!

HUNTER: *[Doing so]* Yes, sir.

RUCASTLE: And did he see you?

HUNTER: I believe so. Yes, he is leaving -- walking into the woods. Now he is gone.

RUCASTLE: [*Suddenly very grim*] Should he return after the sun has set, he will encounter a quite unpleasant surprise. It is in the hours of darkness that our dog -- a gigantic Russian Mastiff -- presides over the premises. Carlo, for that is the monster's name, would make quick work of any such trespasser. But [*again smiling broadly*] Miss Hunter, that should finish our little session for today. You may go back to dear little Edward. But be in this same place, at this same time, tomorrow.

HUNTER: [*Rising and walking to door*] Yes, sir.

CURTAIN

SCENE 3

Four days later. Same place. RUCASTLE seated, EUSTASIA standing at window.

RUCASTLE: Well, is he there today?

EUSTASIA: I don't see him. Perhaps we have finally discouraged him.

RUCASTLE: I surely hope so. This will be our fifth session of amusing our little governess. [*Knock at door*] Ah, but that will be her now.

EUSTASIA: [*Crossing to door and opening it*] Please come in, Miss Hunter.

HUNTER: [*Entering as in previous scene, but carrying a bag*] Thank you, Mrs. Rucastle. [*She crosses to chair by window and seats herself*]

RUCASTLE: Ah, the dear lady has fallen into our faddy little routine.

EUSTASIA: Isn't she a brick? But, Jephro, you were saying something about the vicar.

RUCASTLE: Ah yes, my dove, the vicar. But first, dear lady, what is our darling little Edward up to today?

HUNTER: He captured a frog while we were taking our morning stroll. He has taken it with him to the nursery.

EUSTASIA: Whatever could a little boy do with a frog?

HUNTER: He would say only that his papa would understand and that his papa would approve.

RUCASTLE: I certainly do and I certainly do. Bless the adorable little chap! A great scientist someday, beyond a doubt!

EUSTASIA: What of the vicar, Jephro?

RUCASTLE: Of course, the vicar. Well, -- hahahah! -- that estimable chap --

HUNTER: Before you start, sir -

RUCASTLE: Yes, dear lady.

HUNTER: Well, I seem to have come upon something unusual.

RUCASTLE: Yes?

HUNTER: There is an old chest of drawers in my room. When I arrived, I filled the two upper ones with my linen, but the lower one was locked.

EUSTASIA: For good reason.

RUCASTLE: Please go on, dear lady.

HUNTER: Well, I still had much to pack away, and it struck me today that the drawer might have been fastened by a mere oversight, so I took out my bunch of keys and tried to open it.

EUSTASIA: Most presumptuous!

RUCASTLE: Now, now, Eustasia.

HUNTER: The very first key fitted to perfection, and I drew the drawer open. There was only one thing in it, and it was this [*Withdrawing mass of hair from the bag*]

RUCASTLE: Why, it is a tress of hair.

HUNTER: Not just any hair, Mr. Rucastle. It is *my* hair, the very hair which I removed before reporting to my position here. I could not fail to recognize the peculiar tint and thickness. But how came it in the Copper Beeches? In the bottom drawer of a cabinet?

RUCASTLE: [*Frowning*] My wife is perfectly correct. When in someone else's house, Miss Hunter, it is presumptuous indeed to take it upon oneself to unlock whatever the master wishes to be locked.

EUSTASIA: Shouldn't she be getting back up to Edward?

RUCASTLE: [*Walks to window and looks out before replying*] Yes, my dear, I have no doubt that the adorable little chap is in need of companionship. He has by now finished applying his craft on the frog. You are excused, Miss Hunter.

HUNTER: But Mr. Rucastle -

RUCASTLE: You ... are ... excused ... Miss Hunter.

HUNTER: Yes, sir. [*Exits*]

CURTAIN

SCENE 4

Same as previous scene. Later that day. HUNTER standing at closed door.

HUNTER: Strange. This door has always been locked. But now there is a key in the latch. Someone has forgotten to take it with them. I wonder if the door is unlocked. Should I -- ? [*Turns handle, opens door slightly inward, then closes it again*] Well, no, I have no business in there. [*Walks off a few steps, then turns, returns to door, and again places hand on handle*] Still, it can't do any harm. [*Opens door again, peers inside*] A long narrow hall, with a single room, down at the end. But its door is boarded shut. What in the world could it mean?

EUSTASIA: [*Entering through other door*] Miss Hunter, do you have business in that corridor?

HUNTER: Why -- ah -- no, Mrs. Rucastle. I -- ah -- noticed that the key was in the lock, and wanted to make sure that nothing was amiss.

EUSTASIA: Have you opened that door before?

HUNTER: Why, no. It has always been locked.

EUSTASIA: And how do you happen to find that out?

HUNTER: Why -- ah -- I --

RUCASTLE: [*Entering*] Ladies. Do I detect some problem?

EUSTASIA: I just caught this -- ah -- servant -- attempting to enter the corridor.

RUCASTLE: I see. And why was she doing that?

EUSTASIA: To pry into our business, no doubt.

HUNTER: Mr. Rucastle, please let me explain --

RUCASTLE: [*Smiling amiably*] Certainly, my dear lady. Now, just why do you think I lock this door?

HUNTER: I am sure that I do not know.

RUCASTLE: [*Still smiling*] Has it perhaps entered into that pretty head of yours that I might lock this door to keep people out who have no business in?

HUNTER: Yes, sir, I suppose so. But, in strolling around the grounds with little Edward, I had noticed a room in that wing was shuttered --

RUCASTLE: My hobby is -- ah -- photography. What you were noticing was my dark room.

HUNTER: I was naturally curious to know why it was shuttered.

RUCASTLE: Well, then, now you know. And if you ever attempt to place your foot

over that threshold again, [*His smile hardening into a grin of rage*] I'll
throw you to Carlo! [*With the face of a demon*] Do you understand?
I'll hurl you to the Mastiff!

HUNTER: [*Running offstage*] Oh!

CURTAIN

SCENE 5

Next night. Same Place. Enter RUCASTLE and EUSTASIA in outdoor garments.

RUCASTLE: I had hoped that we could have returned home earlier. We stayed too late and our team was too slow in bringing us here.

EUSTASIA: Well, everything should be all right. Edward and the Hunter girl both will have retired by now.

RUCASTLE: Very likely. But let us look in on our charge. [*Withdrawing keys from pocket and walking toward locked door*] I'll just insert my key in the lock [*Doing so*] and --

The door in question suddenly bursts open from other side. HOLMES, WATSON, and HUNTER rush into the room

HOLMES: You villain! How can you so mistreat your daughter?

RUCASTLE: What? What? It is for me to ask the questions. Who are you, and how have you managed to get in?

HUNTER: Mr. Rucastle, this is Mr. Sherlock Holmes.

RUCASTLE: The London detective?

HOLMES: Exactly. And this is my friend and companion, Dr. John Watson.

WATSON: How do you do, sir?

RUCASTLE: And what justification, if any, can you cite for breaking into my house?

HUNTER: I sent for them, Mr. Rucastle. Following my interview with you in London, I frankly had some misgivings about the position I had accepted, so I consulted with Mr. Holmes before I came down here to Hampshire.

RUCASTLE: I see. Just what did the profound pundit advise?

HOLMES: I told Miss Hunter that if ever I had a sister who was considering such a position, I should unhesitatingly implore her not to do so.

RUCASTLE: Obviously, Miss Hunter, you were wise enough to ignore such idiotic advice.

HUNTER: I needed the work, so despite any reservations I might have, I came anyway, but I promised to notify Mr. Holmes should I ever seem to be in any danger. When, perhaps only in a fit of thoughtless rage, you threatened to throw me to that beast, Carlo, I thought it best to summon him.

RUCASTLE: Very good. Now what, if anything, does the celebrated Mr. Sherlock Holmes think that he might have learned?

HOLMES: All that I have learned has been abundantly obvious. Miss Hunter was brought here to impersonate Alice Rucastle, your own daughter by an earlier marriage. The lady in question has not been in Philadelphia as you have maintained, but actually has been kept a prisoner in that boarded chamber which we have just vacated [*Indicating*]. Miss Hunter was recruited solely because she closely resembled Alice in height, figure, and hair color, but not in hair length. The daughter's locks had been severed recently, and it actually was they which Miss Hunter uncovered in her chamber. The man in the road was Alice's fiance -- from whom she has been forcibly separated. Miss Hunter's function was to sit at that window, laughing merrily at Mr. Rucastle's anecdotes and gesturing for the fiance to leave, thereby convincing him that she was not being mistreated and did not wish to see him again.

WATSON: But, Holmes. Why would they have performed such ghastly deeds?

HOLMES: The records in Winchester indicate that if Miss Rucastle were to take a husband, the estate, which was originally in the name of her late mother, would revert to her. Therefore Mr. Rucastle connived to prevent such an occurrence.

WATSON: What sort of monster could so mistreat his own daughter? It is unthinkable! But we found the boarded chamber empty. What has happened to this Alice Rucastle?

HOLMES: Watson, surely the open skylight and the ladder extending from the roof to the ground must have suggested to you that the prisoner had escaped. Taking advantage of the fact that the guard dog would be chained tonight until the Rucastles' return, the suitor rescued his beloved and has eloped with her.

RUCASTLE: [*Shrieking*] Thieves! Spies and thieves! You think you have caught me. Ha! It is I who has caught you! You are in my power! I'll see that you are served well! Very well indeed! [*Rushes out*]

EUSTASIA: He's gone for the dog!

WATSON: I have my revolver!

EUSTASIA: But only the groom, old Toller, can handle that horrible beast.

HUNTER: But he will not. On Mr. Holmes's instructions, I provided Toller with plenty to drink and locked him in the cellar. He is there now.

EUSTASIA: Good Lord! Whatever is going to become of my husband?

From off-stage comes a mighty cacophony of canine barks, growls, snarls, and roars, intermingled with screams, shrieks and gasps from RUCASTLE.

HOLMES: Come, Watson, to his rescue.

WATSON: [*Withdrawing pistol from pocket*] Right with you, Holmes.

They are about to rush out when RUCASTLE staggers in, much blood on his face and upper body, and collapses onto the floor. WATSON rushes to him and begins medical administration.

WATSON: Let me see you, my man. Oh my! Oh my!

HOLMES: Well, Doctor?

WATSON: I can give treatment until the local doctor arrives, but that man must be sent for at once.

EUSTASIA: Dr. Watson. Please be honest with me How is he?

WATSON: Mr. Rucastle no doubt will survive, but he may never be the same man again.

EUSTASIA: Oh, my poor, unfortunate husband! What are we to do?

HOLMES: That will be for Alice Rucastle to decide. Henceforth she will be mistress of the Copper Beeches. You may hope that the level of kindness she bestows upon her father will be no less than that which he has chosen to bestow upon her.

EUSTASIA: [*Throwing herself on RUCASTLE's form, and moaning loudly*]
Ooooooh!

FINAL CURTAIN