

A toast to Mrs. Hudson
by Steven Doyle
before a meeting of the Sons of the Copper Beeches
at The Racquet Club of Philadelphia on April 21, 2017

I've been asked to stand and offer a toast to the first woman of Baker Street, the landlord of 221B, the mysterious Mrs. Hudson. Now, some of you might wonder why I would use the term "mysterious." After all, don't we have a pretty good idea of what Mrs. Hudson is like?

- Mrs. Hudson is a woman who prefers 221B to be clean and tidy, and often argues with Holmes about this.
- Watson describes her as a very good cook with a specialty for Scottish breakfast.
- We know she has "cronies," and a "stately tread."
- Vincent Starrett identifies her with the elderly housekeeper Martha from "His Last Bow."
- What a portrait this paints, and as I ran through that list of characteristics, we undoubtedly all conjured up the same image: Elderly, even grandmotherly woman, puttering and fussing around Baker Street, admonishing her boys to clean their rooms and be careful when they go out.

Sorry, fellas, I'm not buying it.

Quite honestly, there's not a single physical description of Mrs. Hudson in the entire Canon. Can we infer a different image of the woman, based upon other solid facts found throughout the Canon? I think we can.

We have a woman who is, while not stating it directly, probably a widow or separated, given she is called "Mrs." I think we're on safe ground here. And so, we have a woman of a certain age, but all we can be sure of is she's old enough to have been married, and then, for whatever reason, she is now not married. So, she's no spring chicken, but there's nothing here to imply being elderly.

In fact, when they first meet Mrs. Hudson, she is active enough to find her lodger interesting. She must have even found the aura of danger which occasionally hung over her tenant to be exciting, even attractive. Watson says she "stood in the deepest

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awe of him.” And what of Holmes? According to Watson she repaid a “remarkable gentleness and courtesy” with “fondness.”

She even risked her life for him and summoned aid to save his life when she believed he was dying.

So what is our picture now? Cast your imagination to those early days of Holmes and Watson in 221B. Who was the “Mrs. Hudson” they knew? Older than them, but not very old. Let’s say 40 to Holmes’s 27 or 28 years old. Once married, but now single. A woman interested in her tenant enough to do many of the tasks that would have been beneath her as landlord . . . cooking breakfast, making tea, moving wax busts. No, she *wanted* to find reasons to be around Sherlock Holmes. I don’t know about you, but I’m suddenly seeing, ah, I don’t know . . . say Ann Bancroft from the movie *The Graduate*. To a twenty-something young man, she’s of a “stately” age. But guys, we know better. Her hanging around. Showing interest. “Mrs. Hudson . . . are you trying to seduce me?” Holmes might ask. I think her interest in Holmes is . . . interesting.

Here’s to Mrs. Hudson, the first woman of Baker Street.