



The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes

Adventure III -- A Scandal in Bohemia

It is the first story in the Adventures of Sherlock Holmes, and it is also the first of what we might call the stories of legend: those Canonical tales that have inspired our imaginations far beyond the events that Watson wrote down. It's those larger-than-life characters who seem to do the trick for us. We already have Holmes and Watson, legends enough for anyone, but just as "The Greek Interpreter" reveals brother Mycroft Holmes, and "The Final Problem" outlines the evil figure of Moriarty, "A Scandal in Bohemia" introduces a character so compelling that she pervades our image of Sherlock Holmes forever after. Irene Adler, of dubious and questionable memory – to us, she is always "the woman!"

A Legend is Born: There's no doubt that Irene Adler fascinates us, but was she, after all, such a very big deal to Sherlock Holmes? Shouldn't we be just a bit skeptical of a woman who apparently enjoyed the company of a bounder like the King of Bohemia? Was Irene anything more to Sherlock Holmes than a valuable lesson in the perils of underestimating an opponent – a living, breathing "Norbury," whose picture he kept in a handy place for those times when he felt that his swelling ego needed an ice-pack?

Is it possible that Irene's aura is little more than the reflected glow from Watson's own happiness with Mary, and his well-meaning wish that Holmes should experience the joys of love? If so, Watson picked an odd love object for his friend: a woman who was newly married to someone else. Or was Watson really the one more seriously smitten with Irene, whom he described as a "beautiful creature" with a "superb figure?" Either way, was Watson trying to transfer his feelings to Holmes? And are most of us just romantic enough to be taken in by it all?



“You don’t mind breaking the law?”: Nobody in this story seems to mind breaking the law, but the really amazing aspect of the whole thing is just how ineffectual these lawbreakers are. Consider the useless bunch that the King of Bohemia originally hired to waylay and search Irene Adler. Who were these people? Were they the King’s own underlings, or were they members of some criminal band? If the latter, were they hired directly by the “Count Von Kramm?” Did the King enjoy forays into “life’s other side?”

Why didn’t the King come to Holmes first? He had heard of Holmes’s “recent” service to one of royal houses of Europe, and there were others from whom the King had received good reports of Holmes. So why not start with the best? Irene Adler had been warned that Holmes would be called in. How did all these people know about Holmes? Unless they had read Watson’s publications, few would have known of his exploits in *STUD* or *SIGN*, since Scotland Yard had grabbed most of the credit in the newspaper accounts. Can we infer that Holmes was actually better known in those days for his handling of delicate personal matters rather than criminal cases?

Still, Holmes didn’t fare much better than the King’s original hirelings, though he had better luck than he deserved. How would Holmes’s elaborate “fire” scheme have worked if the photograph had been hidden in Irene’s bedroom? As it was, he discovered Irene’s hiding place, but he failed to recover the item. I know the question has been asked many times before, but I’m going to ask it again: Why did Holmes wait until morning to return to Irene’s villa? Why not burgle the place overnight, gaining entry through those windows “which a child could open?” Was his delay solely due to his arrogance? Or did he have plans to go back, but was thwarted by some event that Watson either did not know or would not tell?

Rosemary Michaud