

A Scandal in Bohemia

A Short Story by Arthur Conan Doyle

Adapted by Al Rodin

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PUBLISHED BY

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STORY OF THE PLAY

To save his crown, a distraught King of Bohemia comes incognito to 221B Baker Street to seek the help of Sherlock Holmes. Holmes quickly sees through the man's disguise. The throne is threatened by a photograph of the King and Irene Adler taken five years previously. She is threatening to reveal it, now that the King is planning to marry someone else, the second daughter of the King of Scandinavia.

Holmes makes valiant efforts to retrieve the document, but Irene Adler outwits his every move. On her marriage to Godfrey Norton, a lawyer, she indicates that she will keep the letter to safeguard herself from any steps against her in the future. She also leaves a photograph of herself for the King, which Holmes asks as payment for his services.

Holmes' assistant, Watson, says, "When he speaks of Irene Adler, or when he refers to her photograph, it is always under the honorable title of *the* woman."

About 45 minutes.

Synopsis of Scenes

Scene 1: An evening in March, 1888. The sitting room of Holmes' suite on Baker Street.

Scene 2: The following afternoon.

Scene 3: Two hours later in front of Briony Lodge, on Serpentine Avenue.

Scene 4: Next morning at 8 a.m., on way to and then at Briony Lodge.

(May be performed as a Reader's Theatre play if desired.)

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CAST OF CHARACTERS

(5 m, 1 w)

SHERLOCK HOLMES: Austere, at times haughty, with occasional humor shown by a wry smile. Intolerant of sham and dull wittedness. Not overtly enamored of the opposite sex, but exhibits gentlemanly behavior in their presence. Has so deeply buried his romantic nature that he no longer realizes its existence. Prides himself on his remarkable ability to make conclusions based on observations that are always correct, yet completely mystifying to others until explained.

DOCTOR WATSON: Prosaic and relatively stodgy. Faithful and obedient to Holmes, although perplexed by how he arrives at his conclusions. A ladies' man, but always proper in his relationship with them, and shocked at any impropriety on their part. At Holmes' beck and call, being quite willing to leave his practice (and his wife) whenever asked.

KING OF BOHEMIA: Has the attitudes of superiority and haughtiness of a royal title. A ladies' man in private but with a public veneer of propriety. Used to being obeyed without question. Reacts with controlled panic when his position and image is threatened.

IRENE ADLER: Confident of herself as an attractive woman with superior intellect. A "woman of the world" who is willing to give up all for love, even blackmail that could lead to a royal attachment. Considered as "The Woman" by Sherlock Holmes devotees because she is the only female for whom he has shown even a slight suggestion of romantic inclination.

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|------------------------|-----------|-----------|
| EXTRA 1: Cabman | Laborer 1 | Clergyman |
| EXTRA 2: Norton | Laborer 2 | Servant |

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Scene 1

(AT RISE: The main room of Sherlock Holmes' suite at 221B Baker Street in the evening of March 20, 1888. HOLMES is seated.)

WATSON: *(Enters with top hat on, and reads down stage right.)* I had seen little of Holmes lately. My marriage had drifted us away from each other and my own complete happiness was sufficient to absorb all my attention: while Holmes, who loathed every form of society with his Bohemian soul, remained in our lodgings in Baker Street, buried among his old books, and alternating from week to week between cocaine and ambition, between the drowsiness of the drug and the fierce energy of his own nature. He was still, as ever, deeply attracted by the study of crime and clearing up those mysteries which had been abandoned as hopeless by the official police. From time to time I heard of some vague account of his doings: of his summons to Odessa in the case of the Trepoff murder, of his clearing up of the singular tragedy of the Atkinson brothers at Trincomalee, and finally of the mission which he had accomplished so delicately and successfully for the reigning family of Holland.

(HOLMES enters and paces immediately upstage of the stools.)

WATSON: *(Cont'd.)* One night I was returning from a journey to a patient when my way led me through Baker Street. As I passed the well-remembered door, which must always be associated in my mind with the dark incident of the Study in Scarlet, I was seized with a keen desire to see Holmes again, and to know how he was employing his extraordinary powers.

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WATSON: *(Cont'd.)* As I looked up, *(Does so.)* I saw his tall spare figure against the blind, pacing swiftly. *(Mines pulling the bell rope.)* I rang the bell and was shown up.

(WATSON turns upstage to sit on stool down stage, a few seconds after HOLMES does.)

HOLMES: *(Notices Watson and is pleased.)* Ah Watson, wedlock suits you. I think that you have put on seven and a half pounds since I saw you.

WATSON: *(Peevishly.)* Seven.

HOLMES: Indeed, I should have thought a little more. Just a trifle more, I fancy, Watson. And in practice again, I observe. You did not tell me that you intended to go into harness.

WATSON: Then how did you know.

HOLMES: I see it, I deduce it. How do I know that you have been getting yourself very wet lately, and that you have a most clumsy and careless servant girl?

WATSON: *(Irritated.)* My dear Holmes, this is too much. You would certainly have been burned had you lived a few centuries ago. It is true that I had a country walk on Thursday and came home in a dreadful mess; but as I have changed my clothes, I can't imagine how you deduce it. As to Mary Jane, she is incorrigible, and my wife has given her notice; but there again I fail to see how you work it out.

HOLMES: *(Chuckling and rubbing hands together.)* It is simplicity itself; my eyes tell me that on the inside of your left shoe the leather is scored by six almost parallel cuts. *(WATSON looks at shoe and frowns.)* Obviously they have been caused by some one who has very carelessly scraped round the edges of the sole in order to remove crusted mud from it. Hence you see my double deduction that you had been out in vile weather, and that you had a particularly malignant boot-splitting specimen of London slavey. As to your practice, if a gentleman walks into my rooms smelling of idioform, with a black mark of nitrate of silver upon his right forefinger, *(WATSON looks at it.)*

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HOLMES: *(Cont'd.)* and a bulge on the side of his top hat to show where he has secreted his stethoscope, *(WATSON feels it, pouts and removes hat.)* I must be dull indeed if I do not pronounce him to be an active member of the medical profession.

WATSON: When I hear your reasons, the thing always appears to me to be so ridiculously simple that I could easily do it myself, though at each successive instance of your reasoning I am baffled, until you explain your process. And yet I believe that my eyes are as good as yours.

HOLMES: Quite so. *(With emphasis.)* You see, but you do not observe. The distinction is quite clear. For example, you have frequently seen the steps which lead up from the hall to this room.

WATSON: Hundreds of times.

HOLMES: Then how many are there?

WATSON: *(Irritated.)* How many! I don't know!

HOLMES: Quite so! You have not observed. And yet you have seen. That is just the point. Now I know that there are 17 steps, because I have both seen and observed. By the way, since you are interested in these little problems, and since you are good enough to chronicle one or two of my trifling experiences, you may be interested in this note. *(Hands note to WATSON.)* It is undated and without signature or address.

WATSON: *(Stands and reads from note.)* "There will call upon you at a quarter to eight o'clock a gentleman who desires to consult you upon a matter of the very deepest moment. Your recent services to one of the Royal Houses of Europe have shown that you are one who may safely be trusted with matters which are of an importance which can hardly be exaggerated. This account of you we have from all quarters received. Be in your chamber then at that hour, and do not take it amiss if your visitor wears a mask." *(Sits.)* This is indeed a mystery. What do you think it means?

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