

A Scandal in Bohemia

During the next week, we will raise our stirrup-cups in homage to a story which features the only woman ever to “beat” Sherlock Holmes at his own game.

But the cast of characters contains another interesting individual: Wilhelm Gottsreich Sigismond von Ormstein, Grand Duke of Cassel-Felstein, and hereditary King of Bohemia.

This is a classic matchup of the Beauty and the Beast, and we all know whom Holmes favored, for all his vaunted misogyny.



A Scandal in Bohemia features money, power, royal intrigue, and a cast of...well, if not thousands, dozens.

“To The Woman!”

So she is toasted at Sherlockian gatherings everywhere and with good cause.

Irene Norton, née Adler: beautiful; talented; clever; determined; courageous; “with a figure a man might die for;” who first fooled and then foiled the great Sherlock Holmes, who even then was gaining an international reputation as the person to see about delicate interpersonal and international problems.



This time it is no common criminal being pursued by Holmes. This is a person to whom Watson alluded as being “of dubious and questionable memory.”

That remark alone has stirred up more hornets’ nests and window-breaking Furies in Sherlockian circles than the good Doctor could have envisioned.

“Dubious?”

“Questionable?”

“Memory?”

Egad!

But then, perhaps it is only that Sherlockians themselves are rogues and scoundrels themselves, who relish association with someone like Irene Adler Norton.

Wilhelm Gottsreich Sigismond von Ormstein, hereditary King of Bohemia, assured Holmes that the photograph he desired to obtain was “as safe as if it were in the fire.”

But should the King have felt safe?

Was Irene’s assurance — the word of an “adventuress” — “inviolable?”

Might it not have better for Irene to have left the incriminating photograph for Holmes to recover, thereby removing all reason for the King to continue his pursuit?

In her note, Irene told Holmes, “But, you know, I have been trained as an actress myself.”

Given that training, which was certainly adequate to permit Irene to dress herself in male attire and walk the streets incognito, why did she not see through Holmes’ disguise when he first presented to her attention, or at least when she had the opportunity to look more closely at him once he had been brought inside Briony Lodge?

As anyone knows who has worn a costume, the darned thing is certain to come “unglued” at the most inopportune times.

The melée outside her house certainly had the potential to disarrange Holmes' disguise, to the undoing of his scheme.

The Masonic order is mentioned in "The Adventure of the Norwood Builder", "The Red-Headed League", "The Adventure of the Retired Colourman", A Study in Scarlet, and The Valley of Fear.

Is this the same order that Holmes mentions in his allusion to "freemasonry among horsey men?"
Would ostlers and their ilk be similarly secretive about their shared trade or other matters?

"A Scandal in Bohemia" is mentioned in one fashion or another in four other Adventures: "The Adventure of the Blue Carbuncle", "The Adventure of the Copper Beeches", "A Case of Identity", and "His Last Bow".

Only two other Adventures are mentioned more frequently in other stories: *The Sign of Four* (6) and *A Study in Scarlet* (9).

Thus, "A Scandal in Bohemia" is one of the three Adventures most often referred to by either Holmes or Watson.

What element(s) of "A Scandal in Bohemia" so captured the pair's attention?

Surely, it was something more than The Woman, who is mentioned only in three of the four named above.

Was it the manner of solving the case or the monetary reward for that solution, or perhaps something else?