



*An Inquiry into:
“A Scandal in Bohemia”*

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“A Scandal in Bohemia” was first published in *The Strand Magazine* in July 1891. It is part of *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*.

As the table shows, most of our chronologists are in agreement regarding the year in which this case took

place. If indeed the year in which this case took place was 1889, as the majority of our experts think, then at the time Sherlock Holmes was 35 years old and Doctor John H. Watson 37.

Main Characters:

Wilhelm Gottsreich Sigismund von Ormstein, king of Bohemia. Irene Adler, American opera singer, noted adventuress and King Wilhelm’s former mistress. Godfrey Norton, English barrister who weds Irene.

Notable Quotes:

To Sherlock Holmes she is always the woman. I have seldom heard him mention her under any other name. In his eyes she eclipses and predominates the whole of her sex. It was not that he felt any emotion akin to love for Irene Adler. All emotions, and that one particularly, were abhor-

rent to his cold, precise but admirably balanced mind. He was, I take it, the most perfect reasoning and observing machine that the world has seen, but as a lover he would have placed himself in a false position. He never spoke of the softer passions, save with a gibe and a sneer. They were admirable things for the observer—excellent for drawing the veil from men’s motives and actions. But for the trained reasoner to admit such intrusions into his own delicate and finely adjusted temperament was to introduce a distracting factor which might throw a doubt upon all his mental results. Grit in a sensitive instrument, or a crack in one of his own high-power lenses, would not be more disturbing than

<i>A Scandal in Bohemia</i>	
<i>Chronologist</i>	<i>Date of the Adventure</i>
<i>Canon</i>	<i>Tuesday, March 20, 1888</i>
<i>Baring-Gould</i>	<i>Tuesday, May 20, 1887</i>
<i>Bell</i>	<i>Tuesday, March 22, 1888</i>
<i>Blakeney</i>	<i>Wednesday, March 20, 1889</i>
<i>Brend</i>	<i>March 1889</i>
<i>Christ</i>	<i>Wednesday, March 20, 1889</i>
<i>Dakin</i>	<i>March 1889</i>
<i>Folsom</i>	<i>Thursday, March 21, 1889</i>
<i>Hall</i>	<i>March 20, 1888</i>
<i>Keefauver</i>	<i>Tuesday March 20, 1888</i>
<i>Klinger</i>	<i>1889</i>
<i>Zeisler</i>	<i>Friday, March 22, 1889</i>

Please note that Canon chronologists may differ on pivotal dates and comparative periods between cases, thus a simple majority is not necessarily correct. Most Canon scholars settle on a single chronologist’s results for their research framework.

a strong emotion in a nature such as his. And yet there was but one woman to him, and that woman was the late Irene Adler, of dubious and questionable memory.

Holmes, who loathed every form of society with his whole Bohemian soul, remained in our lodgings in Baker Street, buried among his old books, and alternating from week to week between cocaine and ambition, the drowsiness of the drug, and the fierce energy of his own keen nature.

“You see, but do not observe.”

“It is a capital mistake to theorise before one has data. Insensibly one begins to twist facts to suit theories, instead of theories to suit facts.”

“She was a lovely woman, with a face that a man might die for.”

It was not merely that Holmes changed his costume. His expression, his manner, his very soul seemed to vary with every fresh part that he assumed. The stage lost a fine actor, even as science lost an acute reasoner, when he became a specialist in crime.

The Imperfect Machine

On more than one occasion, in some way or another, Watson has stated, as he does in this instance, that to Holmes “All emotions . . . were abhorrent to his cold, precise, but admirably balanced mind.” He then reinforces this by adding that our sleuth was “the most perfect reasoning and observing machine that the world has seen.”



I have long thought that at least during their early years, Watson missed the truth of Holmes’ spirit and personality. Later on, he had occasion to witness that the opposite was true—3GAR immediately comes to mind. The truth is that Holmes’ soul was not permanently frozen in some eternal emotional Antarctic winter.

Undeniably, an emotional Holmes would have turned out to be a completely different sort of creature. Nevertheless, it stands to reason that this would not have necessarily confounded his observational, deductive, and detecting abilities. It would not be farfetched to infer that our sleuth might have been dreadfully hurt—perhaps even traumatized—by some past profound emotional experience. This would go far in explaining his defensive attitude and phobia towards any deep personal involvement, as well as his occasional drug use.

The “Late” Irene Adler

Much has been discussed over Watson’s passing reference to “the *late* Irene Adler.” In formal usage, the meaning would have been clear: not too much after her brush with Holmes the adventurous diva sang her solos backed by the Heavenly Choir. There is nothing certain about this theory, especially considering that no indication is given us as to what might have led to her demise.

It may have been that her death was one of her greatest performances—entirely her fabrication. For all his professed admiration of his former mistress, the King gave every indication of having been a



thirty-year-old spoiled brat; as such, he probably was a revengeful one as well. He might have mightily resented the effrontery of Irene in falling in with and marrying somebody else. A false death would have enabled she and her husband to better disappear. Considering that neither she nor her husband seemed to lack in the economic means with which to do so, this would seem as an ideal solution.

Stepping away from the Great Game for just a moment it must be admitted that Irene Adler was far more than a simple seductress. With the possible exception of Holmes himself, it is difficult to find another character who in the entire history of English—and possibly world—literature has generated such a plethora of articles and books although we only meet her in what turned out to be a singular and ephemeral appearance.

With her creation, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle gave us proof of his literary genius. Irene Adler served multiple purposes. Of all the ladies of the Canon who have been noticed by the Great Detective (mostly as clients) she was the only one who might have made a fit consort for the Great Detective. The lady was not only intelligent, well-educated, and a star of the first magnitude in her own profession (squawking prima donnas did not sing at *La Scala* or trod the stage of the Imperial Opera of Warsaw!), but she also had the necessary courage and strong will to make her own way in a world in which females of her class were mostly background decoration.

Almost effortlessly she put an insufferably arrogant Holmes in his place. In the end, he had no choice but to honor her as a truly superior adversary after having grossly underestimated her. Regardless of our admiration and sympathy for the Great Detective, as readers we cannot but experience mixed feelings over his defeat—a touch of *schadenfreude* over his chagrin.

It is well to remember that Holmes was warned by the king that Irene Adler she had a soul of steel and the mind of the most resolute of men. Also, because the lady was present in the “good old index” it must have been because our sleuth already had some acquaintance with her adventures, otherwise, he would not have taken the trouble to paste on it information about her.

Because everyone knew that Irene Adler was no fool, how could Holmes underestimated her to the point of concluding that she would not have suspected that something was not quite kosher about the amiable clergyman and the plumber’s rocket? Did he think that she would merely shrug off the whole thing, especially after having been waylaid and otherwise inconvenienced by the King’s efforts to retrieve the photograph? Really, Mr. Holmes!

And what about Miss Adler’s life afterwards? Although she was the *prima donna* of a prestigious world-class opera house she retired well before her time—she was only thirty-one at the time. Here one is



left to conjecture as to why she gave up all that while she was at what had to have been the zenith of her powers. My dark speculation is that she may have been the victim of a terminal disease, most likely tuberculosis, which back then was rampant. This would go far to explain why, regardless of her success, she abandoned a profession that requires above-average breath control and lung exertion.

Perhaps this was one of the reasons why she embarked upon an adventuresome life—a dis-

traction after the painful realization that the great effort and strict discipline that she subjected herself to in order to attain her operatic goal had all been for nothing. It is not unlikely the Norton may have loved her from afar for quite some time and was happy to have her as his wife for whatever time she may have had left.

ACD then displayed great wisdom by safely putting her beyond any possibility of another meeting with Holmes. From the beginning he informed us that she was married and possibly dead, leaving a melancholy Sherlock Holmes under the spell of *the* woman. This also made it impossible for any other member of the gentle sex to ever come close to measuring up to such a benchmark.

Although it is very unlikely that Miss Adler’s relationship with the King of Bohemia was her only liaison, by no extent of the imagination should she have been considered a prostitute. Even though in a different period—just before and after her time—she could have very well been referred to as a whore or a courtesan, she was neither. The lady belonged to a unique and short-lived class of Victorian women. In fact, it is very likely that ACD patterned her after Lillie Langtry, one of these exceptional grand dames, whose wakes cut a swath through the high society of their time.

Like Irene, Lillie was the possessor of great beauty and charm. She became an actress and starred in many plays in Great Britain and the United States, eventually managing her own stage production company. She was well-read, up on all the news (and scandals) of the day, a witty conversationalist, and spoke several languages. She had very public relationships with noblemen, including the Prince of Wales, the Earl of Shrewsbury, and Prince Louis of Battenberg.

Wherever she went, she attracted widespread public and media interest. Both ladies and gentlemen would make it a point to happen to be at Hyde Park, where the elite would drive on summer afternoons from five to seven, to watch her when she would ride by in her luxurious carriage following the fashionable route, driving from Hyde Park Corner to Knightsbridge Barracks. She became a trend-setter and her hats, gowns, and demeanor were shamelessly copied by socialites.

A dark reflection of Lillie Langtry was Sarah Bernhardt who, from her mother's side, descended from a line of exceptional courtesans and also had torrid affairs with members of the nobility. The Divine Sarah intrigued the world (especially gentlemen) by her little quirks, such as sleeping in a coffin.

Jane Austen might have been writing about Irene Adler in her reproof: "I hate to hear you talk about all women as if they were fine ladies instead of rational creatures. None of us want to be in calm waters all our lives."

The Not So Great Scandal

Regardless of the fact that Royals at the time of our adventure had to maintain appearances to an extreme that would be completely foreign to their descendants today, still, back in Good Queen Victoria's time considerable "Nod-nod-wink-wink" was going on. Even a brief review of the matter reveals that the nobility's marriage fidelity was a hothouse rarity. When one considers all the royal houses of the time, it appears that Albert, the Prince-Consort, was probably the only faithful husband of the lot. Austrian Emperor Franz-Joseph and his heir Prince Rudolph, the Bonapartes (both Napoleon and Napoleon III) and others displayed very little affection towards the marriage bed. And when it came to bachelor royalty, well, boys will be boys. It was not unusual for princesses and queens to receive from their philandering husbands the unwelcome present of STDs.



All of this leads one to wonder just what sort of cloistered life was led by the would-be bride of the King of Bohemia, Princess Clotilde, the daughter of the King of Scandinavia. When Wilhelm pretentiously asserts that what he is about to reveal to our friends might influence European history, the principal concern seems to center around the possibility that his little escapade with Irene might become known to the princess, who "is renowned by her delicacy," thus derailing the coming marriage.

Early in life farm boys and girls learn that there is no such thing as the stork. The same applied to princesses (and queens) who were well-aware that almost without exception it was not only the eyes that did the roving when it came to their noble male counterparts. And in any case, why would a

princess (or any woman as far as that goes) regardless of delicacy be shocked over the fact that bachelor males in good health crave intimate female companionship?



The time may have been discreet; however, the realities—and abuses—of real life were understood. Although Bertie’s escapades (before and after his marriage) did not amuse his Royal Mother, who was painfully aware of them, the Heir Apparent’s (and later King’s) escapades were shrugged off by his peers and a discreet press. By these standards, the unmarried King of Bohemia’s activities with Irene Adler would have fallen far short from attaining the level of a true scandal.

So the remaining question is what would have happened two years later that would have made the delicate by then Queen of Bohemia feel less appalled?

That the King of Bohemia was a swine in male form is more than adequately proven by his certainty that Irene Adler was an honorable person, when he cynically expresses relief upon learning that she intended to use the photograph only if he moved against her: “I know that her word is inviolate. The photograph is now as safe as if it were in the fire.” The fact that he left her photograph might have been intended as a reminder of what he had had, could have kept, and lost.

It is almost certain that Holmes did not feel particularly proud of himself at the end of the case. Not because she bested him, but because he must have realized what sort of a man the King was and to what extent he had wronged Irene Adler. It must be noted that at the end he refused to shake the noble hand. He obviously came to respect Irene for the extremely capable person that she was. This is proven by the fact that from then on, as Watson put it, she eclipsed and predominated the whole of her sex, moving Holmes to refer to her “always under the honourable title of *the woman*.”



Sadly, she never knew how deeply she affected the immutable Thinking Machine of Baker Street.

The Money in the Case

At the sound of the arrival of the King of Bohemia's brougham, Holmes looks out the window and admiringly (and somewhat atypically) comments, "A nice little brougham and a pair of beauties. A hundred and fifty guineas apiece (\approx \$59,000). There's money in this case, Watson, if there is nothing else."

There can be no question that 300G-worth of horseflesh back then (\approx \$118,000 today) for a couple of carriage-pulling hayburners would indicate an owner who was very well off; much like owning a

couple of top-of-the-line Teslas.

Regarding the "expense money" left for Holmes by the King, purely in terms of just mass, it is interesting to consider that £300 in gold would have weighed slightly over 5 lb. Obviously, the Bohemian's cloak pockets must have been reinforced!

Had all the £1,000 been in gold, it would have weighed about 18 lb.

This is not as unwieldy as it seems. Victorians generally avoided paper money—the denominations were impractically high. At that time, the Bank of England issued notes of £5 (\approx \$1,900), £10 (\approx \$3,800), £20 (\approx \$7,500), and £100 (\approx \$38,000) denomina-

tions. Amounts too hefty for everyday use; imagine handing the supermarket cashier a \$10,000 bill to pay for a pound of butter! Even the popular *Baedeker's London and its Environs* guide advised against the impractical bank notes:

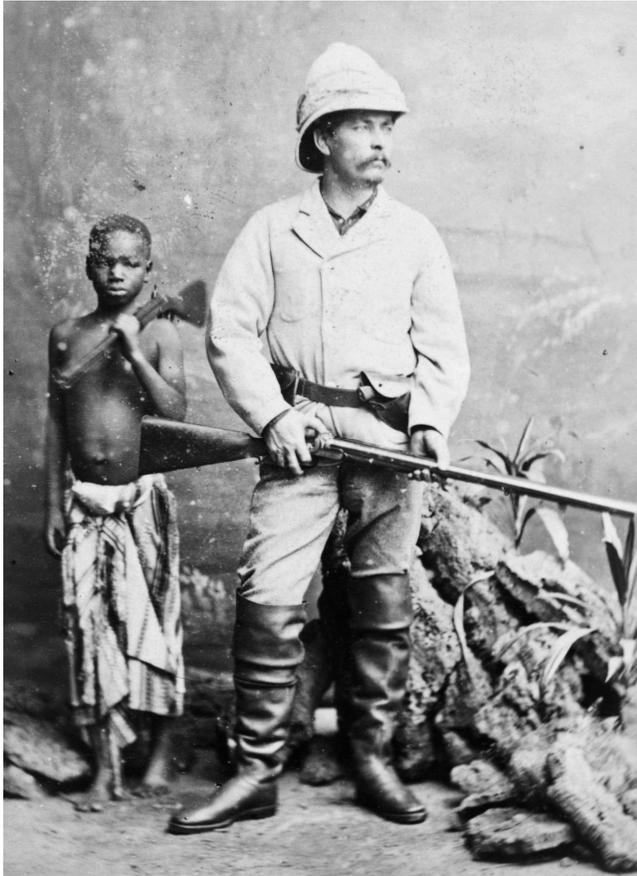
These are useful in paying large sums; but for ordinary use, as change is not always readily procured, gold is preferable. The number of each note [i.e., the serial number] should be taken down in a pocket-book, as there is a bare possibility of its being in this way traced and recovered, if lost or stolen.

Regarding his fee, Holmes does not seem to have done too badly. He had the £1,000 (\approx \$380,000) that the King gave him for expenses, which was later to be augmented by the gift of a "small snuff-box of old gold, with a great amethyst in the centre of the lid." The cost of the players in Irene's neighborhood has to be deducted from this, but it could not have run too much over £100. Irene's gold sovereign does not qualify as part of his fee, because it was given to him by her in gratitude for serving as witness at her wedding. Holmes himself confirmed this: "I mean to wear it on my watch-chain in memory of the occasion."



What else happened in 1889:

Empire



Great Seal of the United Kingdom is affixed to the charter of the British South Africa Company. Company is assigned trading and other rights over a vast territory, with the express reservation to the Crown to take over at any time the works and buildings of the Company.

Transvaal claimed to be “encircled” by Rhodes’ concessions in East Africa. Rhodesia established.

◀ At Cairo, Henry Stanley ends his three-year African expedition. He is knighted upon his return to England. Writes *In Darkest Africa*.

Colonel Woodehouse defeats Dervish horde in Sudan. General Grenfell, commanding British troops on the Nile attacks and defeats Dervish troops, with 500 killed and wounded, and as many taken prisoner.

The Canadian Pacific Railway is completed from coast to coast.

Britain

Great London Dockers’ Strike; the “Dockers’ Tanner”; growth of unskilled workers’ unions; New Unionism; Gasworkers’ Union formed. Strike is

finally arbitrated in the workers’ favor by the popular Catholic Cardinal Henry Manning.

Parnell vindicated as all charges are revealed as false. *The London Times* apologizes.

Clissold Park, Stoke Newington, opens.

Technical Education Act: County Councils to levy 1d for technical and manual education.

Establishment of the telephone company.

John Bright, orator and politician, leading spirit in the Anti-Corn Law League, dies.

Board of Agriculture becomes government department with minister.

Metropolitan Board of Works replaced by London County Council.

Clissold Park, Stoke Newington, opens.

General Booth publishes *Survey of London Life and Labour*.

Early used of photographs in newspaper: *Illustrated London News* runs Cambridge and Oxford boat crews competition.

Woolwich Ferry starts.

White Hart Inn, Borough High Street, one of the last coaching inns, demolished.

Act to prevent cruelty to children.

Board of Agriculture becomes government department with minister.

World

Japan's Meiji constitution. Arinori Mori, minister of education assassinated by Shinto fanatic.

Wall Street Journal begins publishing.

Italy takes Somalia and Ethiopia. Yohannes IV (Kasa) Emperor of Ethiopia dies in battle.

Moulin Rouge opens in Paris.

North and South Dakota, Montana and Washington admitted as U.S.A. states.

U.S.A. Senate, in secret session, passes resolution declaring against European control of the Panama Canal.

Congress of French Revolutionary Labor Party at Bordeaux.

President Harrison, of the U.S.A., closes Bering Sea to all nations; issues proclamation prohibiting the killing of fur animals within Alaska without a special government permit.

Crown Prince Archduke Rudolph of Austria-Hungary and Baroness Maria Vetsera are found dead at the hunting lodge of Mayerling, outside Vienna, allegedly a murder-suicide. (In 1983, former Austrian empress Zita claimed it was an assassination by two conspirators when Rudolf refused to take part in a plot to oust his father Emperor Franz Josef.)



Treaty of Acciali: Ethiopia made Italian protectorate.

◀ King Ferdinand II of Portugal dies at age 73.

Ivory Coast is declared a protectorate of France.

Part of Oklahoma Indian lands open to homesteading.

Portuguese under Pinto try to extend influence in Zambesi Valley; Anglo-Portuguese dispute.

End of Portuguese Empire in Brazil; republic proclaimed and Dom Pedro, the emperor, exiled.

Abdication of King Milan of Serbia; accession of Alexander.

Uprising in the island of Crete. Turkish authorities expelled and public archives destroyed. Turkey calls up 80,000 reservists, but promises to inquire into legitimate grievances.

Russian jurors to be nominated by government.

Stanley's expedition reaches Bagamoyo in Indian Ocean.

Aristocratic "Land Captains" replace elected JPs in Russia.

Father Damien, worker among lepers in Molokai, Hawaii, dies of the disease.

Influenza reaches Europe and America from Siberia.

General Boulanger, former French War Minister leaves country, addresses manifesto to his party that he left the country to avoid arrest, French Chambers authorize the Senate to try Boulanger and others in absentia, for high treason. The general and his staff are found guilty and condemned to life imprisonment.

Jefferson Davis dies in Mississippi.

Paris Exhibition: proof of industrial development in France. Continental monarchies abstain from all official representation. English and American ambassadors attend. Eiffel Tower built for the event is

dedicated in a ceremony presided over by Gustave Eiffel, the designer, and attended by French Prime Minister Pierre Tirard. At 985 feet high, taller than the Great Pyramid, the Eiffel Tower becomes highest structure on Earth.

Lectures at Dorpat University to be in Russian; German forbidden in schools.

Brunner-Mond Salt Union formed; combine of 64 firms.

Private tolls abolished on French Canals.

New York World's Nellie Bly (Liz Cochrane) begins world trip to beat Jules Verne's Phileas Fogg (*Around the World in 80 Days*). Takes 72 days.

The Pemberton Medicine Company (later the Coca-Cola Company), is incorporated in Atlanta, Georgia.

Work on Panama Canal stopped; French company bankrupt, U.S.A. takes over, finishes canal.

Johnstown flood kills more than 6,000, losses climb to \$40,000,000.

Civil war in Haiti ends. General Légitime defeated by General Hippolyte, who becomes president.

Bismarck introduces Old Age Insurance in Germany.

Erection of Tacoma Building in Chicago. First skyscraper, 13 storeys high.

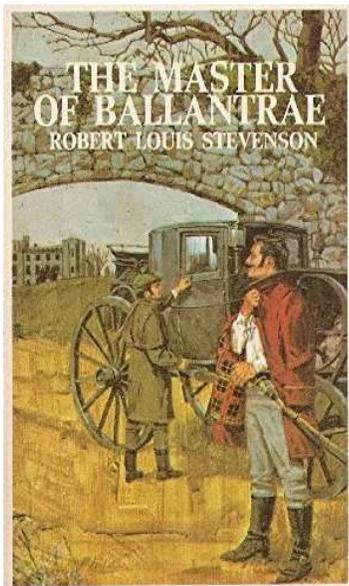
Mirza Ghulam Ahmad establishes the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community, a reform sect of Islam.

Conference at Berlin guarantees an autonomous government to the Samoan Islands under the joint control of the United States, Great Britain, and Germany.

Art

Sir James Barrie's *A Window in Thrums*, sketches of Scottish village life.

Robert Browning publishes *Asolando*, a poem. Dies later in the year.



Sir Arthur Conan Doyle publishes *A Sign of Four*.

Jerome K. Jerome publishes stories, *Idle Thoughts of an Idle Fellow*, *Three Men in a Boat*.

Mark Twain publishes *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*.

◀ Robert Louis Stevenson publishes *Master of Ballantrae*.

William Butler Yeats publishes *The Wanderings of Oisín*.

Paul Bourget publishes *Le Disciple*, a psychological novel.

Gerhart J. Hauptmann publishes *Vor Sonnenaufgang*, German realistic play.

Sudermann publishes *Die Ehre*, a German play.

Dvorak presents *Symphony No. 4 in G Major*.

Gilbert and Sullivan present *The Gondoliers*.

Renoir paints *Girls Picking Flowers*.

Seurat paints *The Side Show*.

Van Gogh paints *Man with a Pipe* (self-portrait), *The Olive Grove*, and *Starry Night*.

Cézanne paints *Harlequin*.

Tchaikovsky introduces *The Sleeping Princess* ballet.

Richard Strauss introduces *Tod und Verklärung*, tone poem.

Science and Technology

Hollerith's punched-card system widely used in industry.

First ship-to-shore wireless message is received in the U.S., at San Francisco.

The first General Conference on Weights and Measures (CGPM) defines the length of a meter as the distance between two lines on a standard bar of an alloy of platinum with ten percent iridium, measured at the melting point of ice.

Eastman's Kodak camera comes into production, using photographic film.

Astronomical Society of Pacific holds first meeting in San Francisco, California.

Ferdinand von Zeppelin patents his "Navigable Balloon."

The first jukebox makes its debut at the Palais Royale Saloon in San Francisco, California. For a nickel, one can listen to a few minutes of music through a tube of an Edison tinfoil phonograph.

In Potsdam, Germany, Ernst von Rebeur-Paschwitz makes the first known recordings of a distant earthquake, taken place in Tokyo, Japan, an hour earlier.

The brassiere is invented.

First dishwashing machine marketed in Chicago.

Mering and Minkowski show that the pancreas prevents diabetes.

Daniel Stover and William Hance patent bicycle with back pedal brake.

William Gray patents coin-operated telephone.

First linotype machine in use.

Thomas Edison shows his first motion picture.

Aspirin patented in Germany by Bayer Laboratories, first introduced in powder form.

Panhard and Levassor begin using Daimler's engines in French cars, using modern layout.

Next week's case: REDH.

Respectfully submitted,

Murray, the Courageous Orderly

(a.k.a. Alexander E. Braun)

"I should have fallen into the hands of the murderous Ghazis had it not been for the devotion and courage shown by Murray, my orderly..."

All Sherlock Holmes illustrations have been published by courtesy of ITV Granada.

If you would like to join the Hounds of the Internet, email us at CourageousMurray@aol.com.

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