



Arthur Conan Doyle Encyclopedia

The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes Adventure III -- A Scandal in Bohemia

SUMMARY (Diogenes Club)

Watson is married and in civil practice. Holmes still uses cocaine.

The King of Bohemia is engaged to Clotilde Lothman, princess of Scandinavia. Formerly, the king was informally engaged to Irene. The king jilted Irene because he felt that she was greatly inferior to him socially and Irene felt much misused. She has letters which the king wrote to her including a photo of the two of them together, and threatens to send them to Clotilde on the day that her (Clotilde's) and the king's betrothal is announced publicly.

Holmes is hired to recover the photo and letters. The king tells him that several attempts have been made to do this but all have failed.

Holmes, disguised as a drunken groom, is casing Irene's house and is roped into being a witness at her and Godfrey's wedding. Irene gives Holmes a gold sovereign for his services which he plans to wear on his watch chain.

Holmes stages an elaborate con and determines that Irene keeps the photo and letters in a secret compartment beside her fireplace.

Returning to Baker Street in deep twilight, Holmes is unlocking his door when he hears a passing voice say, "Goodnight Mister Sherlock Holmes." He knows he has heard the voice before, but can't place it. The speaker is Irene, dressed in male costume.

Early next morning, Holmes, Watson and the King call on Irene, planning to take the photo. But Irene and Godfrey have fled to the continent, taking the photo with them. She leaves another photo of herself for the king and a letter for Holmes, in which she says that she was cleverly tricked into betraying the photo's



hiding place but instantly realized what she had done and followed Holmes back to Baker Street to confirm her suspicions.

Since she is now married, sending the photograph to Clotilde would involve Irene and Godfrey in the ensuing scandal so Irene plans to keep it as a souvenir.

Holmes refuses a heavy emerald encrusted ring but accepts Irene's photograph as payment for his services – plus the remainder of the £1,000 the King advanced him for expenses.

SUMMARY (ACD Encyclopedia)

The King of Bohemia asks Sherlock Holmes to retrieve an incriminating photo where he appears with his former mistress, Irene Adler. The release of the photo could irreparably ruin the King's marriage. Holmes (disguised as a groom) spies and tracks Irene, and finds himself as the best man of the marriage between Miss Irene Adler and Mr. Godfrey Norton.

The same evening, Holmes (disguised as a clergyman) feigns to be wounded in a street battle in front of Briony Lodge and succeeds to enter in Irene's house. With the complicity of Watson and a smart stratagem of false fire alarm, he makes Irene Adler betray herself. Because of the smoke, she rushed to a secret panel which was hiding the photograph.

Holmes can't take the photo because the coachman was in the same room, so he decides to come back the next day with the King. Unfortunately, when they came back to Briony Lodge on the next morning, they learn that Irene, who understood the stratagem of Sherlock Holmes, has left the country a few hours before with her husband.

However, she addressed a letter to the detective, explaining that she will use the photo only for defensive purpose. She attached a photo of herself for the King as a souvenir. Holmes refused the royal reward from the King but asked him a more valuable present: the photo of Irene Adler.

SUMMARY (Wikipedia)

The King of Bohemia engages Holmes to recover an indiscreet photograph showing him with the renowned beauty, adventuress and opera singer Irene Adler—the revelation of which would derail his marriage to a daughter of the King of Scandinavia. In disguise, Holmes witnesses Adler marry the man she truly loves, then by means of an elaborate stratagem discovers the photograph's hiding place. But when Holmes and the king return to retrieve the photo, they find Adler has fled the country with it, leaving

behind a letter for Holmes and a portrait of herself for the King. The king allows Holmes to retain the portrait as a souvenir.

On 20 March 1888, Dr. Watson is visiting Sherlock Holmes when a masked gentleman arrives at 221B Baker Street. Initially introducing himself as Count von Kramm, he reveals himself as Wilhelm Gottsreich Sigismund von Ormstein, Grand Duke of Cassel-Felstein and hereditary King of Bohemia, after Holmes deduces his true identity. The King explains that, five years earlier, he engaged in a secret relationship with American opera singer Irene Adler, who has since retired and now lives in London. He is set to marry a young Scandinavian princess but worries that her strictly principled family will call the marriage off should they learn of this impropriety.

The King further explains that he seeks to regain a photograph of Adler and himself together which he gave to her as a token. His agents have failed to recover the photograph through various means, and an offer to pay for it was also refused. With Adler now threatening to send the photograph to his fiancée's family, the King requests Holmes and Watson's help in recovering it.

The next morning, a disguised Holmes goes to Adler's house. He discovers Adler has a gentleman friend, barrister Godfrey Norton, who calls at least once a day. On this particular day, Norton visits Adler and soon afterward takes a cab to a nearby church. Minutes later, the lady herself gets into her landau, bound for the same place. Holmes follows in a cab and enters the church, where he is unexpectedly asked to be a witness to Norton and Adler's wedding. Curiously, the newly-weds go their separate ways after the ceremony.

Returning to Baker Street, Holmes recounts his tale to Watson and expresses his amusement at his role in Adler's wedding. He also asks whether or not Watson is willing to participate in an illegal scheme to figure out where the picture is hidden in Adler's house. Watson agrees, and Holmes changes into another disguise as a clergyman. They depart Baker Street for Adler's house.

When Holmes and Watson arrive, a group of jobless men meanders throughout the street. When Adler's coach pulls up, Holmes enacts his plan. A fight breaks out between the men on the street over who gets to help Adler. Holmes rushes into the fight to protect Adler and is seemingly struck and injured, though it is later revealed that this is a self-inflicted splatter of red paint. Adler takes him into her sitting room, where Holmes motions for her to have the window opened. As Holmes lifts his hand, Watson recognizes a pre-arranged signal and tosses in a plumber's smoke rocket. While smoke billows out of the building, Watson shouts "Fire!" and the cry is echoed up and down the street.

Holmes slips out of Adler's house and tells Watson what he saw. As Holmes expected, Adler rushed to get her most precious possession at the cry of "fire"—the photograph of herself and the King. Holmes observes that the picture was kept in a recess behind a sliding panel just above the right bell pull. He was unable to steal it at that moment, however, because the coachman was watching him.

The following morning, Holmes explains his findings to the King. When Holmes, Watson, and the King arrive at Adler's house at 8 am, her elderly maidservant sardonically informs them she had left the country via train earlier that morning. Holmes quickly goes to the photograph's hiding spot, finding a photo of Irene Adler in an evening dress and a letter addressed to him, dated at midnight. In the letter, Adler tells Holmes he did very well in finding the photograph and taking her in with his disguises. Adler has left England with Norton, "a better man" than the King, adding she will not compromise the King, despite being "cruelly wronged" by him; she had kept the photo only to protect herself from further action he might take.

Thanking Holmes effusively, the King offers a valuable emerald ring from his finger as a further reward. Holmes declines and says there is something he values even more highly: the photograph of Adler, which he keeps as a reminder of her cleverness. Watson concludes the story by noting that, since their meeting, Holmes always referred to Adler by the honourable title of "the woman."

In the short story's opening paragraph, Watson calls her "the late Irene Adler," suggesting she is deceased. However, it has been speculated that the word "late" might actually mean "former." She married Godfrey Norton, making Adler her former name. (Doyle employs this same usage in "The Adventure of the Priory School" in reference to the Duke's former status as a cabinet minister.)