

# A Scandal in Bohemia



## INTRODUCTION

### BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE

Arthur Conan Doyle was born into poverty, to an alcoholic father with a history of psychiatric illness. With help from members of his extended family, however, Doyle was able to achieve an excellent education and eventually earn a doctorate in medicine. He would practice medicine in various forms for much of his early adult life. While in medical school, Doyle took up writing as a hobby. By 1886, he had created the character of Sherlock Holmes. The character was a great success with the public, and Doyle soon found himself a wealthy man. However, he felt that Holmes had backed him into a corner, making it impossible for him to write on other topics—such as his interests in spiritualism or the historical novel. By 1893, Doyle had decided to kill Holmes off. There was such a backlash against this, however, that he was forced to bring the character back to life in [The Hound of the Baskervilles](#), which would go on to become Holmes' best-known and best-loved novel. A man of diverse interests, Doyle participated heavily in politics and was knighted by King Edward VII for his writing on the Boer War, whereupon he became Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. He had five children between two wives, but none of these children had children of their own. Thus, Doyle has no direct descendants today. He is often referred to today as Conan Doyle, as though his name were a compound. While this was the name he preferred to be called, Conan was simply his middle name and not a part of his full surname.

### HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The Victorian era in England was a time of immense progress and change, especially in terms of crime and punishment. Crime rates were consistently on the rise during the end of the 18th and throughout the 19th century, especially as more people moved into larger cities like London, and people of varying social classes lived closer together. The first police force in London was established in 1829, and many of the early "bobbies" were hardly qualified to investigate crimes, and there was little trust in the institution for decades. In the counties and boroughs, police forces were not set up until the second half of the 19th century, thanks to the Police Act of 1856. In the absence of a competent police force, many crimes were investigated by the victims themselves, while those who had the means to pay would contract a private investigator. There were also major advancements in science and technology, and many believe that Sherlock Holmes's deductive method is rooted in this burgeoning faith in science to cure social ills. Finally, this was also a time of rapid growth of the middle class

in England, and many readers may have admired and related to the character of Dr. John Watson, a veteran of the Second Afghan War and a member of the new professional class.

### RELATED LITERARY WORKS

While Sherlock Holmes may be the world's most famous fictional detective, he was not the first to use remarkable observational skills and rational deduction to solve mysteries. In the 1840s, Edgar Allan Poe introduced his fictional detective C. Auguste Dupin to the world in a series of three short stories: "Murders in the Rue Morgue," "The Mystery of Marie Roget," and "The Purloined Letter." Meanwhile, the rise of a professional police force ushered in a series of mysteries that were investigated by police detectives, such as Charles Dickens's [Bleak House](#) in 1853 and Wilkie Collins's 1868 [The Moonstone](#). Nevertheless, England's infatuation with private detectives continued throughout the 20th century, most notably with the prolific Agatha Christie, whose two detective protagonists Hercule Poirot and Miss Marple solved over one hundred mysteries between them. In fact, the post WWI period was known as the Golden Age of Detective Fiction, and the genre became immensely popular in England, France, and the United States.

### KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** A Scandal in Bohemia
- **When Written:** 1891
- **Where Written:** England
- **When Published:** 1891 (in the *Strand* magazine) and again in 1892 as part of an anthology of Sherlock Holmes stories
- **Literary Period:** Victorian Period
- **Genre:** Detective Fiction
- **Setting:** London, Victorian Era
- **Climax:** Sherlock Holmes discovers where Irene Adler has hidden her precious photo
- **Antagonist:** Irene Adler
- **Point of View:** Third person limited; perspective of John Watson, who chronicles Holmes's adventures

### EXTRA CREDIT

**Not so elementary:** The famous phrase "Elementary, my dear Watson!" has become synonymous with the Sherlock Holmes stories, but it does not actually appear in any of Conan Doyle's stories. A version of the phrase was used in an 1899 play called "Sherlock Holmes," and was then quoted and misquoted until it finally became famous in the 1939 film series based on the

stories.

**Holmes, the undead:** While the Sherlock Holmes stories are certainly the most famous works by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, the author eventually got sick of his fictional detective and even attempted to kill him off. Holmes was supposed to die at the end of “The Final Problem” in 1893, but popular demand convinced Conan Doyle to revive him four years later in his novel [The Hound of the Baskervilles](#).



## PLOT SUMMARY

The famous London detective Sherlock Holmes is talking with his friend and companion John Watson when he receives a visit from a **masked** man, whom he deduces is actually Wilhelm Gottsreich Sigismund von Ormstein, the king of Bohemia. Once the man is unmasked, he asks for Holmes’s help retrieving a very valuable set of photographs. The King is engaged to a Scandinavian princess, but is worried that the princess’s family would disapprove of his previous relationship with a young American opera singer named Irene Adler. Ms. Adler has evidence of this relationship, namely photographs of the two of them together, and has refused to return them to the King. His agents have offered to buy them from her and have even broken into her home in an attempt to steal them, but neither tactic was successful. Holmes is the King’s last hope of retrieving the photos. Holmes agrees, and invites Watson to join him.

Dressed as an out of work groom, Sherlock goes to Irene Adler’s house and gathers valuable information from her workers: she has a gentleman caller, a lawyer named Godfrey Norton, who can be expected at the house at least once per day. Mr. Norton soon arrives at Ms. Adler’s house and then they both leave for St. Monica’s Church, followed by Holmes, still disguised as a groom. He is swept into the church to witness the marriage of Ms. Adler and Mr. Norton, and then observes them go their separate ways after the ceremony.

Holmes returns to Irene’s house that evening, this time dressed as a clergyman. He stages a fight with some men on the street and Irene brings him in to tend to his injuries. Once inside, he signals to Watson, who throws a small rocket into the house and yells “Fire!” Irene runs to a panel in her sitting room to protect the photographs of her and the King. Holmes observes this, and knows where the photographs are hidden; he informs her that the fire was a false alarm, and he later leaves and meets up with Watson on the street. As the two men walk back to 221B Baker Street, they discuss plans to retrieve the photographs early the next morning. When they get to the front door, a young person walks by and says “Good-night Mister Sherlock Holmes,” in a voice that is familiar to Holmes, though he cannot place it.

Upon arriving at Irene Adler’s home the next morning, the men find that she has already left England, but has addressed a letter to Sherlock. She congratulates him for tricking her into letting him in her home, but notes that she quickly saw through the clergyman disguise. She also reveals that it was she, dressed as a young man, who greeted him the night before at the door of 221B Baker Street. She and her new husband, Mr. Norton, have left England permanently, taking the photographs with them; the King need not worry, however, because she loves her new husband and has no desire to impede the King’s royal wedding.

The King is satisfied with this outcome to the case, and offers Sherlock an emerald snake ring as payment. Sherlock refuses the ring and instead requests a photo of Irene—one that she left behind with the letter—as a memento of the most remarkable woman he has ever met.



## CHARACTERS

**Sherlock Holmes** – Sherlock Holmes is a private detective who has been contracted by Wilhelm von Ormstein, King of Bohemia, to confiscate photographic evidence of the King’s previous affair with a woman named Irene Adler. The King has sought out Holmes and his assistant Dr. John Watson due to their reputation for solving difficult and delicate cases throughout Europe. To address the King’s issue, Holmes and Watson don various **disguises**, gathering information about Irene’s life. Eventually, while disguised as a clergyman, Sherlock tricks Irene into letting him into her home and he discovers where she is hiding the photographs. While he plans to return the next day to steal them, Adler outwits him—she is gone by the time he returns, leaving him a letter that promises never to ruin the King’s life, but keeping the photographs for herself. Above all, Sherlock values intelligence and cunning, and rarely finds another individual whose mental faculties match his own. Even his closest friend Watson can only marvel at his deductions: when the two men are reunited after quite some time apart, Sherlock is able to deduce a number of minute details of Watson’s life within the first few seconds of seeing him. Adler, however, is the only woman he would ever consider his intellectual equal, and he seems to think of her wistfully and almost romantically. Sherlock’s rare intelligence is a boon to his detective work, but it sets him apart from those around him, and his lack of social connection keeps him almost completely isolated. He is also eccentric, eschewing most human interactions and choosing instead to isolate himself in his home at 221B Baker Street, consumed either by cocaine use or a mystery to solve.

**Dr. John Watson** – A medical doctor and close friend of Sherlock Holmes, Watson narrates “A Scandal in Bohemia” and assists Holmes in his investigation. He has also chronicled and published a number of Holmes’s cases, and clearly admires the

detective for his extraordinary powers of observation and deduction. He used to live with Sherlock at 221B Baker Street, but recently got married and moved in with his wife; he had not seen much of Sherlock since then, and he begins “A Scandal in Bohemia” by coming to visit his friend, wherein he is swept up in Sherlock’s latest case. Watson is tolerant of Sherlock’s eccentricities because he truly believes in the detective’s genius, describing him as “the most perfect reasoning and observing machine that the world has seen.” He participates enthusiastically in the investigation, expressing to Holmes that he will gladly break the law and risk arrest for a good cause. While Watson is very intelligent in his own right, it is his admiration for his friend Sherlock that takes center stage in “A Scandal in Bohemia.”

**Wilhelm Gottsreich Sigismund von Ormstein, Grand Duke of Cassel-Felstein** – The King of Bohemia, and Sherlock Holmes’s client in this case. He is currently engaged to the Princess of Scandinavia, but reveals to Holmes and Watson that years ago, while in Warsaw, he had a relationship with Irene Adler, an opera singer and “well-known adventuress.” Irene has a number of letters and photos that would serve as proof of this indiscretion, and that information would likely jeopardize the King’s current engagement. He will do anything to obtain and destroy this evidence, but Irene refuses to hand it over, and she has outsmarted the King’s men more than once. He still admires Irene and notes that she would make an excellent queen, but he is more focused on maintaining his respectability and royal status. The King seems to be unaware of his surroundings and ignorant of his effect on others: when he arrives at 221B Baker Street in a **mask**, he believes himself to be incognito, despite the fact that Sherlock knows exactly who he is. He is also completely ignorant to Sherlock’s general disdain for him, and when the King mentions that Irene is not on his level, he does not recognize it as an insult when Sherlock responds that she “seems indeed to be on a very different level to your Majesty.”

**Irene Adler** – Irene Adler is an opera singer, world traveler, and former lover of Wilhelm von Ormstein, King of Bohemia. She has kept letters and photographs that are evidence of her relationship with the King and, according to him, she plans to use them to blackmail him if he tries to marry the Princess of Scandinavia. While Holmes manages to trick Irene with a **disguise** and gain entry in to her house, she catches on quickly and disguises herself to spy on Holmes and Watson, ultimately outwitting them and fleeing before they can seize her photographs. Irene is initially portrayed as the story’s antagonist, but her intelligence and cunning earn Sherlock Holmes’s admiration, and she proves not to be a malicious person at all. In the end, even though she doesn’t hand over the photographs, she assures Holmes and the King that she means them no harm. Not only does the King of Bohemia proclaim that she would have made an excellent queen if she were not a

commoner, but Sherlock considers her more intelligent than any other women he has met.

**Godfrey Norton** – A lawyer who is Irene Adler’s new husband. Not much is known about Norton, except that he is a lawyer and has been seeing Irene for some time. When Sherlock Holmes dresses as a groom and goes to Irene’s neighborhood to gather information about her, he is somehow brought in to act as a witness to the marriage of Irene and Godfrey. In comparison with the King of Bohemia’s wedding, which will presumably be a lavish royal affair, this ceremony is quick and austere, with the newlyweds driving off in different directions. This quiet ceremony, coupled with the fact that Irene describes Norton as a better man than the King, present a strong contrast to the public but likely loveless royal marriage.



## THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.



### LOGIC VS. EMOTION

Unlike many Sherlock Holmes adventures, “A Scandal in Bohemia” does not present an unsolvable mystery for modern fiction’s preeminent detective. Instead, Holmes must trick a young woman, Irene Adler, into divulging the whereabouts of a photograph that could damage the reputation of his latest client, the King of Bohemia. While Holmes is famous for his use of the powers of observation and deductive reasoning to solve crimes—his assistant, John Watson, portrays Holmes as more machine than man, rejecting emotion in favor of logic and intellect—“A Scandal in Bohemia” provides a brief glimpse of the detective’s human side when he meets the unique and mysterious Adler. When Holmes finds himself bested by Adler, he comes to admire—and perhaps feel a certain affection for—this woman whose cunning matches his own. The story explores the tension between Holmes’s cold and almost inhuman deductive abilities and his uncharacteristic response to Ms. Adler in order to question whether emotion is incompatible with reason.

Watson’s description of Holmes at the beginning of the story establishes him not just as an excellent detective, but as superhuman in his intellectual abilities. Watson, who has accompanied Holmes on many cases and observed his methods, describes him as “the most perfect reasoning and observing machine that the world has seen,” and compares him to a “sensitive instrument.” When Holmes sees Watson again after months apart, he deduces a number of details of Watson’s

life that seem incomprehensible to the doctor. Holmes notes, for example, that Watson has employed a clumsy servant girl based on the cuts on the inside of his left shoe. Watson is astounded by Holmes's ability to know so much about him just based on his outward appearance, which leads to a discussion between the two men in which Holmes tells his friend, "You see, but you do not observe."

Holmes employs this same incredible process of observation and deduction on the "mysterious" masked visitor to 221B Baker Street, whom he identifies as Wilhelm Gottsreich Sigismund von Ormstein, a.k.a. King of Bohemia, well before the man can unmask himself. The detective walks Watson through his process, deducing solely from the short note he has received that the client is a German nobleman living in Bohemia. Together these moments reflect Holmes as an expert collector of what he refers to as "data," again underscoring the methodical, machine-like approach he takes to his work—and suggesting that all human behavior can essentially be boiled down into discrete, observable data points.

Unsurprisingly, the remarkable precision of Holmes's powers of deduction doesn't translate to any sort of similar emotional sensitivity. In fact, Watson portrays Holmes as socially aloof and somewhat marginalized due to his disdain for human emotion or contact. Watson begins his story by noting that he and Holmes had drifted apart prior to its events, largely due to their differing lifestyles: Watson was beginning to enjoy the comforts of married life, whereas Holmes "loathed every form of society with his whole Bohemian soul." He makes these comments without judgement, accepting Holmes's isolation as an essential part of his being. Holmes's social and emotional detachment is further intensified by his drug use. When Watson was not around, the detective would hide away in his apartment, alternating "between cocaine and ambition, the drowsiness of the drug, and the fierce energy of his own keen nature."

When the two men meet again, it is Watson, not Holmes, who initiates contact. Holmes seems uninterested in seeing his friend and hardly speaks to him at first. Watson is used to this treatment, however. He notes that Holmes's "manner was not effusive. It seldom was; but he was glad, I think, to see me." Once again, Watson comments without judgement and ascribes this behavior to Holmes's unique personality, sensing that emotionality would only distract him from his detective work. Strictly logical judgment and reason are thus presented as antithetical to social connection; this is regarded as an acceptable trade-off for Holmes's remarkable talents.

Adler is one of the few characters to elicit anything like emotion from Holmes, and one of the major themes of "A Scandal in Bohemia" is Watson's surprise at his friend's rare and somewhat contradictory behavior towards her. Watson is quick to note that "It was not that he felt any emotion akin to love for Irene Adler." However, Holmes's reaction to Adler is about as

close as the detective would ever get, in this or any other story, to an emotional attachment to a woman.

It is notably Adler's cunning that catches Holmes's attention, and for him, "she eclipses and predominates the whole of her sex." In fact, Watson begins "A Scandal in Bohemia" with a statement about Holmes's feelings for Adler, claiming that to him, "she is always THE woman." When the King attempts to give Holmes a valuable emerald ring for his work, the detective requests the photo of Adler instead, adding that he values it more highly. This kind of sentimental memento is a surprising choice for a man like Sherlock Holmes and suggests more than passing interest on his part. Yet it is not the image of Adler, per se, that attracts Holmes's attention, but rather the fact that she alone is able to dupe one of the world's greatest detectives. In a way, Holmes's interest in Adler only reinforces his single-minded obsession with intellect and cunning.

Adler herself, however, appears much more emotional than her would-be antagonist, getting married midway through the story and then skipping town with her beloved. For Adler, it seems, emotion does *not* prevent her from outwitting the great Sherlock Holmes—and would in fact suggest that feeling and logic are not as incompatible as they may seem. Either way, "A Scandal in Bohemia" presents two sides of Sherlock Holmes: the cold, calculating mind that speaks of emotion "with a gibe and a sneer," and the glimmer of sentimental attachment to another person. While this brief show of emotion is not nearly enough to "throw a doubt upon all his mental results" or truly distract him from his work, his admiration for Adler gives readers a glimpse of the man behind the machine.



## DISGUISE AND DECEPTION

The prolific use of **disguises** in "A Scandal in Bohemia" sends the message that not everything is what it seems, and that appearances are never to be trusted. Sherlock Holmes, the King of Bohemia, and Irene Adler all attempt to disguise themselves in order to get what they want, with varied results; the quality of their disguises, and their ability to fool those around them, is a measure of the intellectual capacity of each character in the story.

The King of Bohemia attempts to disguise himself when he comes to meet Holmes but is unprepared for the detective's powers of observation and detection. When a man arrives wearing a mask and calling himself Count Von Kramm, Holmes quickly recognizes him for who he is: "Wilhelm Gottsreich Sigismund von Ormstein, Grand Duke of Cassel-Felstein, and hereditary King of Bohemia." In his demeanor, Holmes makes clear that he is unimpressed by his visitor's royal status as well as his attempts at trickery. The King does not seem to understand the concept of disguise, believing that a flimsy face mask could somehow render him incognito, despite the opulence of his dress, carriage, and even of the paper he uses to write the note. His inability to hide his true identity is a signal of

the King's lack of intellect and creativity: he is incapable of stepping outside of himself or being anyone other than the King of Bohemia.

Holmes, on the other hand, is a master of disguise, and manages to fool everyone around him, including his friend Watson, with his costumes. He begins by transforming into "a drunken-looking groom, ill-kempt and side-whiskered, with an inflamed face and disreputable clothes" to glean information about Irene Adler from the neighborhood workmen. His second disguise is that of a clergyman, which he uses to trick Adler into inviting him into her house so that he can find out where she has hidden the much-coveted photo of herself with the King of Bohemia. This is an essential part of his method of detection: the disguise allows him to enter into the world of the crime and observe as much as possible without being recognized.

Unlike the King in his ineffectual mask, Holmes embodies the character he is taking on. Watson notes that for Holmes, the disguise was not superficial: his "expression, his manner, his very soul seemed to vary." He then compares his friend's disguises to theater: "The stage lost a fine actor... when he became a specialist in crime." Although the goal of this disguise is to fool Adler, she is impressed to learn that she has been tricked by the clergyman costume. In her final message to the detective, she cheers him on: "You really did it very well. You took me in completely." Holmes's skill with deception, then, reflects his deductive prowess and cunning, as only by closely observing the world can he hope to imitate it.

Adler's use of disguise, meanwhile, serves a complex dual purpose in the story. On one hand, she wants to spy on Holmes and learn more about the investigation without being observed herself; at the same time, she wants Holmes to know that she has tricked him, proving that she too is capable of a superior level of cunning.

Once Holmes has identified the location of the photograph that the King of Bohemia needs so urgently, he and Watson return to discuss their plans to retrieve it. They are still on the street in front of Holmes's apartment at 221B Baker Street when the detective announces that he will go to Adler's house at 8:00 a.m. the following day, before she is awake, taking her by surprise. As reach the door of Holmes's apartment, they are greeted by "a slim youth in an ulster who had hurried by." Holmes has heard the voice before but cannot place it. The youth is Adler in disguise, of course—she had been present during the men's conversation and is now aware of the detective's plans for the next day. Not content to simply leave town undetected, Adler leaves a note for Holmes when he arrives at her house, acknowledging that she was behind the disguise. She is proud of having successfully deceived Holmes, noting that "I have been trained as an actress myself. Male costume is nothing new to me."

Trickery is a form of cunning, and in this detective story it is a

valuable skill, as is the ability to see through another's disguise. The King of Bohemia attempts to take part in this game of disguises and ends up looking foolish and ignorant; ironically, it is his elevated social status that renders him incapable of disguising himself. Holmes and Adler, however, take pride in their ability to mask themselves and infiltrate each other's world, using disguises to prove their intellectual value.



## LOVE, FRIENDSHIP, AND. ADMIRATION

"A Scandal in Bohemia" presents a number of intertwined romantic and intellectual pairings: on the one hand, there is the engagement of the King of Bohemia to the Princess of Scandinavia, the marriage of Irene Adler and Godfrey Norton, and the fling between the King and Adler; on the other hand, there is the mutual admiration between both Holmes and Watson and between Adler and Holmes. This juxtaposition of romantic and platonic love establishes a sense of hierarchy in which romantic love, based on passion and emotion, is portrayed as inferior to an intellectual connection. There is a sense of mutual admiration between Sherlock Holmes and Irene Adler that borders on romantic interest but is based entirely in a meeting of two extraordinary minds.

Watson notably chooses to begin his tale by focusing on Holmes's admiration for Adler. Prior to discussing the details of the case itself, he announces, "To Sherlock Holmes she is always THE woman." This establishes their relationship as the fundamental building block of this story, and as the central character in Holmes's world. Holmes generally has a low opinion of women, deeming them of a lesser intellect. While to modern readers this is certainly an unfair judgment, up to this point Holmes had not come into contact with a woman with mental capacities to match his own. Adler, however, manages to trick Holmes with a **disguise**, spy on him to find out his plans, and then foil those plans by leaving England before he can retrieve the King's photos. He is duly surprised and impressed. While this does not change the way Holmes feels about women in general, it places Adler in a different category altogether: "In his eyes she eclipses and predominates the whole of her sex," according to Watson.

Holmes's feelings of surprise and admiration for Irene Adler are not unrequited, as Adler is clearly fascinated by the detective as well. She is equally surprised that Holmes is able to deceive her with his disguises, despite the fact that she had been warned of his extraordinary abilities. Though Adler escapes before Holmes and the King can retrieve the photo they seek, she leaves a letter, not addressed to the King—the man she had previously taken as a lover—but to Holmes, recognizing him as a "formidable [...] antagonist" and seeming to take pleasure in recounting his deception. While she has found her romantic match in her new husband, Godfrey Norton, she has also found her intellectual match in Sherlock

Holmes.

Similarly, there is a sense of mutual admiration between Holmes and Watson that is entirely outside of—and superior to—any romantic sentiment. Watson is a true and loyal friend, devoted to the documentation of Holmes’s detective work out of pure admiration. He explains that it is “a pleasure to me to study his system of work, and to follow the quick, subtle methods by which he disentangled the most inextricable mysteries.” It is this pleasure that kept the two men close during the time before Watson’s marriage. Despite claiming a satisfying life as a married man, Watson clearly misses Holmes, and when he happens by Baker Street, he is “seized with a keen desire” to see his friend. When he arrives, he is undeterred by strange and silent manner, because he is one of the few people who truly understands him.

Holmes may not be expressive or emotional, but he has his own ways of expressing his admiration for his friend. Once he and Watson have discussed the upcoming case, Holmes asks Watson to stay, noting that he needs him: “I am lost without my Boswell,” he says, referring to James Boswell, whose biography of his friend Samuel Johnson is one of the most celebrated biographies of all time. Holmes is at his best when he has an audience, and Watson provides that for him, both through his unflagging admiration and his published chronicles of their adventures together.

In contrast to these celebrated intellectual matches, the romantic entanglements in “A Scandal in Bohemia” are of little consequence and something of a distraction to the main action. The King’s relationship with Adler is presented primarily as a problem to be solved—in fact, the King would like to destroy all evidence of their prior affections by destroying the photograph. He describes himself as having been “mad-insane” at the time, especially considering that as royalty, he could not possibly be linked to a commoner, much less a “well-known adventuress” such as Adler. There is no hint of romance in the King’s planned marriage to a Scandinavian princess, either. He will only note that she is “the very soul of delicacy,” referring to her highly principled nature. He expresses no love for her, nor feels any real loyalty. When Adler has revealed her ultimate plan to get away without giving up the desired photos, the King is reminded of his affection for her: “Would she not have made an admirable queen? Is it not a pity that she was not on my level?” In the King’s context, marriage is separate from romantic sentiment, and suitability is based entirely on social status.

Watson’s recent marriage is also presented as something of a problem, as it has kept the two friends apart for so long. In addition, Watson references married life once at the beginning of the story, yet once he and Holmes are reunited, he returns to his bachelor lifestyle, spending his free time with Holmes while on a case and even sleeping at 221B Baker Street instead of at his marital home.

In “A Scandal in Bohemia,” despite the fact that Holmes’s case

involves saving a royal marriage, romance and love have little value to these characters. Despite being in happy marriages to other people, both Watson and Adler establish their most vital connections to Holmes via their mental capabilities. While it does not preclude the possibility of these characters finding fulfillment in love in their own personal lives, it is clear that this emotion has no place in their dealings with Holmes.



## JUSTICE

In “A Scandal in Bohemia,” as with most of Holmes’s adventures, the detective serves a very unconventional form of justice that is not necessarily in line with state-sanctioned law and order. As a private detective, Holmes is deliberately separate from official law enforcement and is able to take on cases that the police could not—and he is also able to use methods that aren’t available to the police. The story ultimately suggests the justice and the law are not synonymous, and sometimes it requires extralegal measures to solve a tricky case.

The case of the King of Bohemia is not one that would commonly be solved by the London Metropolitan Police, which is why the King has come from Prague himself to consult with Holmes directly. The King emphasizes the importance of secrecy in this case, as exposure would be shameful for the royal family. Despite the fact that Dr. Watson chronicles many of Holmes’s adventures, the detective himself is considered more discreet than the local authorities would be. More importantly, he is known for “clearing up those mysteries which had been abandoned as hopeless by the official police,” according to Watson. This establishes a hierarchy of investigative work, in which Holmes is not only separate from, but also better than, the police. This means that he is often employed by the rich and powerful, such as the King of Bohemia and “the reigning family of Holland.” In essence, while most Londoners are at the mercy of the Metropolitan Police, who may or may not have the capacity to bring about justice, Sherlock Holmes’s extraordinary detective work is reserved for a privileged few.

Because he is not connected to any official police force, Holmes is not bound by the same moral codes of behavior, and often spends much of his time breaking the law in the pursuit of truth. Holmes is unfazed when, in the course of their discussion, the King of Bohemia admits that he has resorted to bribery and attempted robbery to retrieve the photographs from Irene Adler. Unlike the police, Holmes is unconcerned about the letter of the law, especially when it involves a mystery that interests him. The detective is unconcerned about his client’s crimes in part because his own methods of investigation are unethical, if not outright illegal. He uses **disguises** and trickery to gain information about Adler, and even employs accomplices to stage an authentic-looking ruse to get him into Adler’s home.

As morally questionable as they may be, such methods of

investigation prove effective, and Holmes is proud of the fact that he is not bound by law in the course of his investigation. When he asks Watson to help him, he asks him, “You don’t mind breaking the law... nor running a chance of arrest?” Both Holmes and Watson seem to enjoy the freedom that comes with private investigation, and Watson justifies tricking Adler by telling himself that they “are not injuring her. We are but preventing her from injuring another.” Holmes, on the other hand, feels no need to make justifications whatsoever.

The conclusion of the investigation, in which Adler leaves England without giving up the photo, raises the question of whether or not justice has been served in this case. Adler has clearly outsmarted the detective and his client, and Holmes is forced to admit as much to the King, noting: “I am sorry that I have not been able to bring your Majesty’s business to a more successful conclusion.” Yet his apology is insincere, as Holmes is more interested in Adler’s wit than the fate of the King’s marriage. The King’s response highlights the ultimately subjective nature of justice, however. He is satisfied with the outcome of the case because Adler has pledged not to expose their past relationship and ruin his chances of a royal wedding. In the end, the objective was not to obtain the photographs or even to punish for any crimes she may have committed; the ultimate goal was to make the King of Bohemia feel that his secret was safe. He closes the case by announcing that the “photograph is now as safe as if it were in the fire.” The fact that the King and Holmes are willing to take Adler at her word establishes this woman as an extraordinary character who is somehow more trustworthy than an ordinary criminal.

In contrast to a police investigation, in which solving the case and administering justice are one in the same, the adventures of Sherlock Holmes often place law and order into question. More importantly, “A Scandal in Bohemia” is reflective of a historical period in which modern investigation was mysterious—and therefore not part of orthodox police work—and a set of experimental methods that were only available to those who could pay for a private detective. Holmes sees the work of police, who worked to keep the streets of London safe and clean, as beneath him, and is content to take on more “interesting” cases that engage his mental capacities and allowed him to break the law, if need be.



## SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.



## DISGUISES

In “A Scandal in Bohemia,” masks and other forms of disguise represent the power to deceive through cunning and trickery. Nearly all of the characters in this story

attempt to disguise themselves, with varying degrees of success—success that, in turn, is directly linked with their intelligence. For example, the brilliant Sherlock Holmes is a master of disguise, and he is even able to deceive his closest companion, John Watson, early in the story when he arrives home to his apartment dressed as a drunken groomsman. Watson notes that Holmes doesn’t simply dress differently when disguising himself; he goes so far as to take on the personality and mannerisms of the character he is portraying, much like an actor on a stage. Similarly, Irene Adler manages to trick Holmes with her own disguise as a young man who casually greets Holmes and Watson as they discuss their plan to retrieve the photograph—an act that demonstrates her own remarkable cunning. Both of these characters use disguises to observe without being identified, and thus maintain power over those around them. The King of Bohemia, on the other hand, proves unsuited to the art of disguise, utterly failing to hide his true identity behind a mask when he first appears in the story. His pitiful attempt at disguise instead reveals more about his real character—namely, that he is unobservant and self-absorbed and does not have the depth of intellect to take on a role outside of himself. Consequently, despite his money and royal status, the King of Bohemia has little power in the story and is at the mercy of characters who are far more intelligent—and adept at disguise—than he is.



## QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Bantam Dell edition of *Sherlock Holmes: The Complete Novels and Stories, Vol. 1* published in 2003.

### Part 1 Quotes

●● You see, but you do not observe.

**Related Characters:** Sherlock Holmes (speaker), Dr. John Watson

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 241

### Explanation and Analysis

This conversation between Sherlock Holmes and John Watson occurs shortly after Watson has arrived to visit his friend Holmes, whom he has not seen for quite a long time. Despite their time apart and the fact that Holmes has not had any news from Watson, the detective is able to deduce a number of significant facts from his friend’s appearance, including the fact that he has gone back to practicing

medicine, that he has a clumsy servant girl, and that he had gotten soaked in the rain recently.

Though Watson is aware of his friend's superior deductive abilities, he is still taken aback by this display of observation. He comments that he believes his eyes to be as good as Holmes's, yet he would never be able to produce that kind of information from what he sees in front of him. In his response, Sherlock marks the essential difference between seeing as a passive activity, and observing as an active mental process.

☛ There will call upon you to-night, at a quarter to eight o'clock... a gentleman who desires to consult you upon a matter of the very deepest moment... Be in your chamber then at that hour, and do not take it amiss if your visitor wear a mask.

**Related Characters:** Wilhelm Gottsreich Sigismund von Ormstein, Grand Duke of Cassel-Felstein (speaker), Sherlock Holmes

**Related Themes:** 

**Page Number:** 242

### Explanation and Analysis

The King of Bohemia sends a letter to Sherlock Holmes, requesting his assistance on an important and confidential matter. In an attempt to disguise himself, the writer of the letter does not mention his identity and plans on arriving wearing a mask. It is reasonable that this man would want to arrive incognito, but there is no way that he can keep his identity a secret from Holmes, who has shown himself to be a master of observation.

The letter itself provides important clues to the man's identity, and Holmes walks Watson through the deductive process as a kind of training. He asks guiding questions of his friend, leading him to some of the same conclusions about the mystery visitor. For example, the paper itself is a kind only found in Bohemia, the letter writer's grammar suggests German origin, and the sound of his coach on the street outside leads Holmes to believe that the man has money to spend on this particular case. By the time he arrives, the mystery man is no mystery to Holmes, and the mask is entirely unnecessary.

☛ Not a bit, Doctor. Stay where you are. I am lost without my Boswell. And this promises to be interesting. It would be a pity to miss it.

**Related Characters:** Sherlock Holmes (speaker), Dr. John Watson

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 243

### Explanation and Analysis

Watson and Holmes are discussing the mystery visitor as he arrives at 221B Baker Street, and Watson asks if he should leave so that Holmes can meet privately with the man. Holmes doesn't want Watson to leave, and Watson ends up staying and participating quite actively in the investigation.

Holmes's reasons for wanting Watson to stay shed light on his view of the detective work he does. First of all, he refers to Watson as his "Boswell" in reference to James Boswell, the famous biographer of Samuel Johnson. In the early days of their friendship, John Watson began to publish accounts of Holmes's cases, drastically increasing the detective's fame. To be "lost" without Watson suggests a strong sense of loyalty and partnership, feelings that Holmes does not often express. Secondly, Holmes evaluates his cases by how interesting they are to him, as if they are games to play rather than true injustices to be corrected.

☛ "Your Majesty had not spoken before I was aware that I was addressing Wilhelm Gottsreich Sigismund von Ormstein, Grand Duke of Cassel-Felstein, and hereditary King of Bohemia."

**Related Characters:** Sherlock Holmes (speaker), Wilhelm Gottsreich Sigismund von Ormstein, Grand Duke of Cassel-Felstein

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 245

### Explanation and Analysis

The masked mystery visitor has arrived and is attempting to explain himself to Holmes and Watson. He asks them to call him Count Von Kramm, still believing himself to be incognito at this point. However, the King is not a very clever man, and in addition to revealing himself through various clues in his letter, he arrives wearing rich and regal attire that is so conspicuous it makes his mask almost laughable.

As he begins to present the case to Holmes without revealing himself, the detective makes it clear that he is two

steps ahead of the man and is not fooled by the disguise at all. The King is shocked and impressed by Holmes's skill as a detective, throws off his mask, and begins to tell the whole story. Holmes, on the other hand, is thoroughly unimpressed by the King and makes no attempt to hide it. His use of the King's full name and title shows the man that he is aware of his royal status, but that he is, after all, at the mercy of this detective.

“The facts are briefly these: Some five years ago, during a lengthy visit to Warsaw, I made the acquaintance of the well-known adventuress, Irene Adler. The name is no doubt familiar to you.”

**Related Characters:** Wilhelm Gottsreich Sigismund von Ormstein, Grand Duke of Cassel-Felstein (speaker), Sherlock Holmes

**Related Themes:** 

**Page Number:** 246

### Explanation and Analysis

The King of Bohemia is recounting his tale to Holmes and Watson, and finally arrives at the issue at hand: his past relationship with Irene Adler, an opera singer. It is this indiscretion that threatens his plans to marry the Princess of Scandinavia. As a commoner, Ms. Adler is obviously an unsuitable partner for the King; what's more, he refers to her as an “adventuress,” referring to the fact that she is young, unmarried, and traveling the world on her own. Although the Victorian era was a time of greater independence for women, there was still a social stigma attached to women who chose careers or adventure over marriage and family.

When the King of Bohemia mentions Irene's name, he notes that the name should be familiar to Sherlock, as she is a “well-known” woman. At this point in the narrative, however, Sherlock does not know of Irene, and he asks Watson to look her up in his index of people, getting some of the basics about her life. What he does not know at this point is that he will come to know Irene very well, and admire her enough to consider her “THE woman,” according to Watson.

## Part 2 Quotes

“That is excellent. I think, perhaps, it is almost time that I prepare for the new role I have to play.”

**Related Characters:** Sherlock Holmes (speaker), Dr. John Watson

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 254

### Explanation and Analysis

Sherlock Holmes is in the middle of his investigation of Irene Adler, and has just returned from a mission in which he dressed as a horse groom in order to find out as much information about the woman as possible from her neighbors and the local workmen. He and Watson are discussing the next phase of his plan, in which he will don yet another disguise and trick his way into her home to look for the photographs. Holmes has just asked Watson if he will be a part of his plan, a complex setup that will involve many actors, and will possibly require Watson to break the law. Watson is, of course, willing and ready to participate.

Sherlock refers to this next part of his investigation as a “role to play,” suggesting that he takes his disguises very seriously and likes to embody them fully, as an actor might. Watson also notes that when Sherlock went into private investigation, the theater lost an exceptional actor. Again, this distinguishes Holmes from a member of law enforcement, as he is able to use methods that would be inappropriate for police, and often some that are illegal.

“He's a brave fellow,” said a woman. “They would have had the lady's purse and watch if it hadn't been for him. They were a gang, and a rough one, too. Ah, he's breathing now.” “He can't lie in the street. May we bring him in, marm?” “Surely. Bring him into the sitting-room. There is a comfortable sofa. This way, please!”

**Related Characters:** Irene Adler (speaker), Sherlock Holmes

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 256-257

### Explanation and Analysis

This is a conversation between Irene Adler and an unidentified woman, in the aftermath of a scuffle that left a clergyman seriously injured on the street in front of Irene's house. The clergyman had stepped in when a group of men rushed at Irene's coach in the hopes of earning a small tip for helping her out. The unknown woman points out the

clergyman's bravery and altruism, and Irene offers to let him rest on her couch.

What Irene does not know until afterwards is that the clergyman is really Sherlock Holmes in disguise, and all of the other people on the street are his accomplices. They have staged this fight in front of Irene's house (and faked Sherlock's injuries) so that Irene will admit him into her house. Once inside, he is able to find out where Irene has hidden the photographs of herself and the King of Bohemia. This complex staged scene is a good example of the kind of investigation that Sherlock can conduct as a private detective, without regard for the ethical implications.

☛ Good-night, Mister Sherlock Holmes.

**Related Characters:** Irene Adler (speaker), Sherlock Holmes

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 259

### Explanation and Analysis

As Holmes walks back to 221B Baker Street with Watson, discussing his plans to wrap up the Irene Adler case in the morning, a "slim youth" greets him by name and quickly walks away. Holmes is confused by this, and notes that he has heard the voice before but cannot place it. That voice, of course, is Irene Adler's. She had followed the two men from her home and heard the entirety of their conversation. Based on what she has heard, Irene is able to thwart Holmes's plans to retrieve the photos that the King so desperately wants.

Irene's trickery, and her ability to disguise herself so completely that Holmes does not recognize her, is what sets her apart from the other women and makes her so deserving of Holmes's admiration. When he was able to trick her into letting him into her house, Sherlock let his guard down, underestimating Irene's intelligence.

## Part 3 Quotes

☛ I wish she had been of my own station! What a queen she would have made!

**Related Characters:** Wilhelm Gottsreich Sigismund von Ormstein, Grand Duke of Cassel-Felstein (speaker), Irene Adler

**Related Themes:** 

**Page Number:** 260

### Explanation and Analysis

The King of Bohemia is discussing Irene as he, Holmes, and Watson travel to her house to retrieve her photos. Although the case itself is based on the King's desire to erase all evidence of his relationship with Irene in order to marry the more suitable Princess of Scandinavia, it is clear that the King still likes and admires Irene.

This statement highlights the disconnect between love and marriage in high society, but especially among nobility. Social status and royal lineage are the only prerequisites for marriage, leaving the King of Bohemia with little choice in the matter. The woman he plans to marry is of little interest to him, while the woman he admires has become his main adversary. In contrast, Irene has chosen to marry Godfrey Norton, and describes him as "a better man" than the King, despite the fact that he is a commoner like her. While the King of Bohemia maintains a romantic attachment to Irene, she does not reciprocate those feelings and has no interest in becoming Queen.

☛ "From what I have seen of the lady she seems indeed to be on a very different level to your Majesty"

**Related Characters:** Sherlock Holmes (speaker), Wilhelm Gottsreich Sigismund von Ormstein, Grand Duke of Cassel-Felstein, Irene Adler

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 262

### Explanation and Analysis

Once the King, Holmes, and Watson realize that they have been tricked by Irene, the King of Bohemia reiterates his earlier claim, that Irene would have made an exceptional queen had she been on his level. The King is referring, of course, to his noble lineage, which again reinforces the importance of status over love. However, Sherlock's response to the King, that Irene is on a very different level, conveys a different idea altogether.

From the beginning, Sherlock has had little interest in the King himself, and has shown little reverence for his royal status. He is concerned exclusively with intellect and cunning, and the King displays neither. Irene, on the other

hand, is able to match Sherlock's wit, and has thoroughly impressed him. Thus, when the King notes that Irene is not on his level, Sherlock uses this opportunity to subtly insult him, though the King is completely unaware of it.

“Your Majesty has something which I should value even more highly,” said Holmes. “You have but to name it.” “This photograph!”

**Related Characters:** Wilhelm Gottsreich Sigismond von Ormstein, Grand Duke of Cassel-Felstein, Sherlock Holmes (speaker), Irene Adler

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 262

**Explanation and Analysis**

Irene Adler has escaped with the photographs that the King so desperately wanted, and Sherlock must apologize for not bringing the case to a more successful conclusion. The King, however, is thoroughly satisfied with this outcome, as Irene has vowed not to expose the King or impede his marriage to the Princess of Scandinavia. He offers to pay Sherlock with an emerald ring, presumably an item of value, but the detective has no interest in that form of payment. Irene has left behind a photograph of herself, not the one that the King was looking to destroy, but one of just her. It is this photograph that Sherlock wants as payment for his work.

Although Sherlock would never admit to having feelings for Irene, he deeply admires her and will never forget the woman who bested him. The photograph of Irene, then, serves as a symbol of her cunning (as a replacement for the photographs Sherlock was not able to obtain), as well as a memory of the most remarkable woman the detective has ever met.



## SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

## PART 1

Doctor John Watson declares that his friend and former housemate, Sherlock Holmes, is a man with a “cold, precise, but admirably balanced mind,” especially when it comes to the topic of women and emotional attachments. Yet despite his abhorrence of anything akin to “love,” Watson recalls, there is one woman, Irene Adler, who “eclipses and dominates the whole of her sex.” To Holmes, “she is always *the woman*.”

Recalling when Holmes met Adler, Watson notes that he had recently gotten married, and their difference in lifestyles had, for a time, kept them apart: Watson was enjoying life as a married man, while Holmes continued to cloister himself in his apartment, either in a drug-induced haze or working tirelessly on a new case. Watson misses Holmes, so when he happens to be walking nearby 221B Baker Street, he stops in to visit.

Watson can tell that Holmes is happy to see him, despite his typical cold and calculating manner. Holmes greets Watson and immediately lists off details of Watson’s life that Holmes has gleaned from his exceptional observational skills: he informs Watson that he has gained seven pounds, has recently been in the rain, has a clumsy servant girl, and that he has been practicing medicine again. Watson is astounded by the accuracy of Holmes’s observations and deductions, all of which are correct. Holmes insists that it is all a simple process of observation—Watson only *sees*, while Holmes *observes* the world around him.

Holmes invites Watson to read the letter he has received from a potential client, who announces that he will visit the detective wearing a **mask** to hide his true identity. The two men discuss the peculiarities of the letter, deducing that it was written by a native German speaker using paper made in Bohemia. As they finish this intellectual game, the client pulls up in an expensive coach.

*Watson prefaces his narrative with an explanation of Holmes’s relationship with Irene, offering readers essential insight into Holmes as a character: he is intelligent and unemotional, except in the case of one woman who impressed him. It also establishes that this story is not so much about the events that transpired, but rather about setting the stage for this monumental matching of wits between Holmes and Irene.*



*The relationship between Holmes and Watson is also an essential aspect of all of the Sherlock Holmes stories, although it seems slightly distant here due to their differences in lifestyle. Watson notes both Holmes’s dedication to detective work and his cocaine addiction (an affliction that was common in the late Victorian era), painting Holmes as a reclusive obsessive.*



*Watson is deeply loyal to Holmes, and accepts his personality flaws as a necessary element of his genius. In this scene, Holmes demonstrates that genius by deducing specific pieces of information from some of the smallest details, and Watson delights in the display. This interaction also establishes the dynamic between the two men, in which Watson is clearly Holmes’s sidekick, unable to replicate the detective’s genius.*



*Holmes takes on the role of the teacher and mentor in this scene, guiding Watson (and, by extension, the reader) through his process of deduction, illustrating how nearly everything they observe could contain a valuable clue. Holmes also makes it clear that he is already one step ahead of his visitor, who believes himself to be incognito.*



The man enters the apartment wearing a **mask** and dressed luxuriously, calling himself Count von Kramm, a Bohemian nobleman. Holmes insists that Watson be allowed to stay for the consultation, and the man begins to tell his story. He has come to see Holmes due to his reputation as an exceptional detective, and he needs help with a case that could “seriously compromise one of the reigning families of Europe.” When Holmes says he knows he is speaking with Wilhelm von Ormstein, King of Bohemia, the man tears off his mask and acknowledges his real identity.

*The visitor comes to Holmes for help with a case, yet he somehow believes that he can deceive the brilliant detective by wearing a mask and offering a false name. Holmes quickly unmasks him as the King of Bohemia, illustrating his deductive skills and the power that those skills bring. The King is portrayed as oblivious and self-centered, and Holmes is unimpressed with him, even as he acknowledges the King’s royal status.*



The King explains that he is engaged to marry the Princess of Scandinavia, but that when he was younger, he had a short relationship with a “well-known adventuress” and opera singer, Irene Adler. He sent her a number of letters and a photograph of the two of them together, and she is now threatening to use these items to ruin the King’s marriage to the Princess of Scandinavia. The King’s men have tried to buy and even steal the photo and letters but have had no luck. Holmes takes the case, telling Watson to return at three o’clock the following day.

*The case revolves around the King’s past indiscretion and its impact on his future marriage plans, but more importantly, the case introduces Holmes to the most important woman in his life, Irene Adler. The word “adventuress” may be an apt term for Adler, a young, unmarried woman on her own, touring Europe and meeting royalty. Yet she is also portrayed from the beginning as formidable, having resisted and fooled the King’s men up to this point.*



## PART 2

Watson arrives at 221B Baker Street at exactly three o’clock the next day, but Holmes has not returned. Watson waits for an hour, when a “drunken-looking groom” arrives. Watson finally recognizes Holmes in his **disguise**, and the two men discuss the progress of the investigation up to that point. That afternoon, Holmes took on the persona of a horse-groom and socialized with the other grooms at the mews near Irene Adler’s house, in order to get information about her. He heard from the men that Irene has a suitor, a lawyer named Godfrey Norton, who calls on her regularly.

*Holmes begins this adventure in disguise, in order to get as close as possible to Irene and collect data for the case. The fact that Watson is fooled by Holmes’s disguise shows the detective’s extraordinary skill at transforming himself into another person, even if it is for something as simple as information-gathering. This scene also demonstrates the unorthodox methods Holmes uses in his cases.*



While Holmes was still observing Irene’s house, Godfrey Norton arrived, spent about half an hour in the house, and then hopped in to a carriage, asking the driver to take him to St. Monica’s Church as fast as he can. Holmes followed him and found both Godfrey and Irene inside the church already, with a clergyman. To his surprise, the three of them turned to him to ask if he would witness their marriage ceremony.

*While still in information-gathering mode, Holmes is swept up into the action, becoming part of Irene and Godfrey’s wedding. The wedding is strangely rushed, and Irene and Godfrey have not even brought a friend along to witness the ceremony.*



Holmes took part in the ceremony, still dressed in the **disguise** of the out-of-work groom, and when they finished, Irene gave him a sovereign coin, which he still keeps with him as a souvenir of the strange occasion. He hoped to follow them out of the church, but each of them got into a different carriage and departed in a different direction. Holmes then returned to plan the next phase of his investigation with Watson.

Holmes asks Watson if he will help, even if it means breaking the law and running the risk of arrest. Watson agrees enthusiastically and Holmes explains the plan. Holmes and Watson will be at Irene Adler's house when she returns home at 7:00 p.m. Sherlock will be involved in "some small unpleasantness," and Watson must not interfere in any way. If all goes to plan, Holmes will be brought into Irene's house, at which point Watson will shoot off a rocket and call fire. Finally, Watson must wait for Holmes at the end of the street once the plan has been completed.

Once Watson has agreed to the plans, Holmes changes into his **disguise**—that of a clergyman. Watson notes that his friend does not simply dress the part; he embodies it, transforming "his expression, his manner, his very soul" with each new disguise.

As they wait for Irene, Holmes and Watson discuss her marriage to Godfrey Norton, guessing that she will not want her new husband to see the photo and will have hidden it well. The King had twice employed men to burgle her house to find the photo but, as Holmes notes, "they did not know how to look." He then informs Watson that Irene will show him where the photo is hidden.

At that moment Irene's carriage pulls up, and as she exits, she is rushed by two men hoping to earn money by helping her. The situation quickly turns into a fight among the men. Holmes, still in **disguise** as the clergyman, steps forward to help Irene and is struck to the ground. The fight breaks up, and a passerby asks if Irene will let the man into her house to lie down. Irene agrees. While Holmes is on her sofa, he asks for some fresh air; when the window is opened, Watson throws the rocket into the house and shouts fire. After a few moments of confusion, Holmes announces that it is a false alarm, and he leaves shortly after that.

*The wedding of Irene and Godfrey presents a strong contrast to what one would imagine a royal wedding might be like. This ceremony is sparse and rushed, and when the newly-married couple exit the church, they leave in different directions, as if this were a minor part of their day. Irene's marriage complicates the notion that she is planning to sabotage the King's relationship out of jealousy, although Irene's unorthodox ceremony certainly raises questions about what she's up to.*



*Energized from his earlier adventure, Holmes forms a new plan that is even more unorthodox, dangerous, and theatrical. Watson takes up his role as sidekick and loyal partner, cheerfully agreeing to break the law for the sake of an interesting case. This exchange highlights the fact that this is neither a mystery to be solved nor a case for the police, but rather a fun adventure for Holmes and Watson*



*Once again, Holmes's disguise is an opportunity for him to transform himself and demonstrate his extraordinary cunning (and for Watson to admire his friend for it).*



*Holmes and Watson spend some time trying to get into Irene's mind and understand her thinking. This is part of Holmes's method of investigation: rather than searching her entire house, as the King's men have done in the past, he will think like Irene in order to discover the hiding place.*



*This staged scene is the climax of the adventure, giving Holmes a grand stage for his theatrical work. His choice of costume (a clergyman) helps to establish him as beyond suspicion, and when he is injured while trying to help Irene, she feels obligated to let him into her house. And it is a testament to Holmes's transformation that Irene does not recognize him as the drunken groomsman who witnessed her wedding earlier that day.*



Once the men are reunited on the street, Holmes explains to Watson that he employed everyone on the street, other than Irene, as part of his plan. He orchestrated the fire alarm because he knew that Irene would immediately save her most valuable possession, the photograph of her and the King. When she ran to a sliding panel in her wall, Holmes knew that must be where she kept it.

*Once Holmes and Watson are reunited, the detective finally reveals his secrets to his companion. While he does not yet have the photos themselves, he was able to find their location without even letting Irene know he was looking for them—or so he thinks.*



Holmes and Watson make plans to retrieve the photo the following day, in the company of the King, at 8:00 a.m. They will arrive early to catch Irene by surprise. As they arrive at the door of 221B Baker Street, a youth passes by and bids them goodnight. Sherlock is sure he has heard the voice before, but he cannot place it.

*Holmes openly discusses his plans for the next day with Watson as they walk through London, naively presuming the same kind of anonymity that the King of Bohemia felt at the beginning of the story.*



### PART 3

Watson spends the night at 221B Baker Street. In the morning, he and Holmes are met by an excited and impatient King, who asks if they have the photo yet. Holmes explains his plan and the three men hop into the King's carriage and make their way to Irene's. On the way, Holmes informs the King that Irene is married—this is good news, because she will not likely interfere with the King's wedding plans.

*This adventure has brought Holmes and Watson back together. Watson's loyalty is so strong that he must spend the night in his old apartment with Holmes instead of going home to his beloved wife. While Watson claimed to enjoy married life, it will take a backseat to adventures with his friend and companion, Holmes.*



As the men arrive at Irene's house, her housemaid informs them that she has already left England for Europe, never to return. Holmes rushes to the hiding spot in search of the photo and finds instead a different photo of Irene along with a letter addressed to "Mr. Sherlock Holmes."

*The men's expectations are dashed as they arrive at Irene's house. While they hoped to surprise her by arriving so early in the morning, they find themselves one step behind—not a common occurrence for Sherlock Holmes.*



In her letter, Irene explains that she realized too late that Holmes had tricked her into revealing her hiding spot, but that she had turned the tables on him by **disguising herself** and eavesdropping on his conversation with Watson. She and Norton decided they must leave England immediately, and have taken the photo with them only as a safeguard. She promises not to expose the King's indiscretion, as she is "loved by a better man than he" and has no need to prevent him from marrying another woman.

*Sherlock Holmes has been outwitted by a woman, and Irene's letter details how she did it. It also portrays Irene as a thoughtful and intelligent woman who has chosen the love of a good man over her feelings of jealousy and abandonment. She proves the quality of her character so much that the King takes her word that she will not blackmail him with the photo, which she is keeping.*



Holmes apologizes to the King for an unsatisfactory ending to the case, but the King is satisfied with Irene's promise. He offers Holmes a valuable emerald ring as payment, but the detective asks only to keep the photo of Irene, as a memory of the woman who bested him.

*The King's satisfaction with this outcome, and the strange form of payment—a photo of Irene—highlights the very minor role that justice played in this game of cunning and deception.*





## HOW TO CITE

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