A Scandal in Bohemia

Arthur Conan Doyle · 1891

A masked giant calls at Baker Street; a photograph must be recovered from the one woman who ever beat Sherlock Holmes. The first of the Holmes short stories, complete — the King, the disguises, the smoke-rocket, and Irene Adler.

LISTEN FOR

— Watson tells you in his first paragraph that Holmes was beaten, and by whom; the story is how it happened.

— Three disguises in one day: the groom in the morning, the clergyman at dusk, and the slim youth in an ulster who is not Holmes.

— Who is watching whom: Holmes watches Briony Lodge from eight in the morning, and the letter tells you who was watching him by nightfall.

— The phrase ‘the woman’: it opens the story and closes it, and Watson tells you each time what Holmes means by it.

THE PEOPLE, AS THE BOOK NAMES THEM

Dr. Watson	the narrator · lately married, in practice again
Sherlock Holmes	of Baker Street
Irene Adler	the woman · contralto, of New Jersey
The King Of Bohemia	Wilhelm Gottsreich Sigismond von Ormstein · ‘Count von Kramm’
Godfrey Norton	a lawyer of the Inner Temple
The Maid At Briony Lodge	an elderly woman, sardonic

THE PLACES

Egria · Carlsbad · Prague · New Jersey · Milan · Warsaw · London · Baker Street · Briony Lodge · The mews · St. Monica’s · Charing Cross

CHAPTERS, WITH THEIR TIMES IN THE VIDEO

0:04	Part I · To Sherlock Holmes she is always the woman
2:35	Baker Street, the twentieth of March
7:17	The note on pink paper
11:41	The masked visitor
16:36	The King's confession
22:07	Part II · Three o'clock, Baker Street
24:13	Holmes's morning at Briony Lodge
29:18	The Church of St. Monica
32:37	The plan
36:03	Serpentine Avenue at dusk
40:34	Fire!
45:56	Good-night, Mister Sherlock Holmes
46:24	Part III · The following morning
47:50	Briony Lodge, eight o'clock

49:15	The letter
52:50	The woman

WORDS AND THINGS, FROM THE MARGIN

Bohemian soul Unconventional, artistic, careless of society — from the French name for the Gypsies, once believed to come from Bohemia. The kingdom itself arrives on the next page.

Notepaper The pink-tinted paper is the story's first clue: too heavy and too costly to be English.

Gesellschaft · Papier German: Company; paper. 'Eg' is the town.

Egria · Carlsbad Eger, now Cheb, and Karlsbad, now Karlovy Vary — spa towns of western Bohemia, then in Austria-Hungary.

Holmes's index Commonplace books: every paragraph on men and matters, filed alphabetically. Irene sits between a rabbi and a naval officer.

A cabinet photograph A mounted print about four inches by six — larger than the pocket carte de visite; too big to hide on the person.

Or it won't be legal Marriages had to be solemnised before noon; the law was relaxed to three o'clock only in 1886, and Doyle keeps the old urgency.

A plumber's smoke-rocket Used to trace leaks in pipes: lit at both ends, it pours out smoke — and, in a sitting room, a convincing fire.

Fire! Watson's one word. The cry that makes the woman reach for the thing she values most.

Good-night, Mister Sherlock Holmes The greeting Holmes cannot place. He will place it in the morning.

PASSAGES TO HEAR AGAIN

"You see, but you do not observe. The distinction is clear."
Holmes to Watson over the seventeen steps, before the pink note is read.

"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."
Holmes with the note in hand, when Watson asks what it means.

"She has the face of the most beautiful of women, and the mind of the most resolute of men. Rather than I should marry another woman, there are no lengths to which she would not go—none."
The King on Irene Adler, before Holmes or Watson has seen her.

"When a woman thinks that her house is on fire, her instinct is at once to rush to the thing which she values most. It is a perfectly overpowering impulse, and I have more than once taken advantage of it."
Holmes on the walk back towards the Edgeware Road, explaining the smoke-rocket.

"You really did it very well. You took me in completely. Until after the alarm of fire, I had not a suspicion."
The first lines of the letter left behind the sliding panel.

"From what I have seen of the lady, she seems, indeed, to be on a very different level to your Majesty,"
Holmes's reply when the King asks whether she was not on his level.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Watson says at the start that Holmes felt no emotion 'akin to love' for Irene Adler. What words does he use for her in the first paragraph, and what words in the last? Keep to what the text says.
2. Holmes reads Watson's shoe, his forefinger and his hat before he reads the note. Go through what he deduces from the paper itself, step by step: where does Watson stop and where does Holmes go on?

3. The visitor calls himself the Count Von Kramm. At what points does Holmes say ‘I was aware of it’, and what does the King do with his mask when Holmes addresses him as ‘your Majesty’?
4. List the five attempts the King says were made to recover the photograph. What does Holmes say later about why the burglars failed?
5. Holmes asks one last question of the King: ‘Was the photograph a cabinet?’ What does he say that size tells him, the next evening, about where it must be kept?
6. Holmes goes to the Church of St. Monica to watch and comes out a witness. What was he deciding as the landau drove off, and what does the bride give him?
7. Holmes gives Watson his orders in a list and Watson repeats them back. Compare the two lists. Then, at the window, what does Watson feel when he sees the lady tend the injured man, and what does he tell himself?
8. Everyone in the street at dusk is in Holmes’s pay. Go back through the scene: who is named before the carriage arrives, and what does each of them do when it does?
9. Irene’s letter says she had been ‘warned against you months ago’. According to the letter, what did she know before Holmes arrived, when did she first suspect him, and what did she do between the alarm of fire and midnight?
10. The King says ‘What a queen she would have made!’ in the brougham and again over the letter. How does Holmes answer him the second time, and what does he ask for instead of the ring?

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