

A Scandal in Bohemia Character Analysis

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 Sigismond 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.