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A SCANDAL IN BOHEMIA

a one-act mystery play

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A SCANDAL IN BOHEMIA:
A ONE-ACT MYSTERY PLAY

adapted by
Bill Amos

from the short story by
Sir Arthur Conan Doyle

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Synopsis

The world's greatest detective is hired by a mysterious visitor to retrieve an item of extreme importance that could cast the shadow of a scandal over the ruling family of Bohemia. "A Scandal in Bohemia" is a one-act mystery adapted from one of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's most popular short stories and introducing one Holmes most notorious adversaries, Miss Irene Adler.

Cast of Characters

SHERLOCK HOLMES	A private consulting detective
DR. JOHN WATSON	Holmes' friend and colleague
IRENE ADLER	The woman; a famed American opera singer in possession of a compromising photograph
COUNT ORMSTEIN	Inherent King of Bohemia; hires Holmes to retrieve the photograph from Irene Adler
GODFREY NORTON	A British lawyer, Irene Adler's fiance
PRIEST	Officiates the wedding of Mr. Godfrey Norton and Miss Irene Adler
HOSTLER	Works in Irene Adler's stable
BUTLER	Employed by Irene Adler
MAN ON STREET	Insights a rabble outside Briony Lodge

Time

The action takes place in Late Victorian London, England.

Director Notes

STAGING AND SETS

“A Scandal in Bohemia” was written with tight budgets and black boxes in mind. Therefore, staging should be simple and move quickly. It is highly advised to keep sets to a minimum, offering only a hint of the location with simple dressing to distinguish one place from another. Some scenes may be best if staged in black with only lighting and no physical sets or dressing whatsoever.

ENTER/EXIT CUES

WATSON serves a dual role as both the narrator and a character within his own narration. The author’s original intent was that he would come and go via spotlight during narration, but this should not limit the director and/or lighting director to be creative on his appearances.

Creative license is encouraged overall for blocking, particularly as characters enter, exit and move between scenes.

ACT I

Scene 1

Setting: 221B Baker Street, evening

At Rise: Lights are down. IRENE ADLER, DR. JOHN WATSON and SHERLOCK HOLMES are all on stage in the dark, unseen. The first two are outside 221B Baker Street, the latter within. Lights up on DR. WATSON

DR. JOHN WATSON

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.

(Lights up on IRENE.)

DR. JOHN WATSON

All emotion, and that one particularly, were abhorrent to his cold, precise but admirably balanced mind. He was, I take it, the most perfect reasoning and observing machine that the world has ever seen, but as a lover he would have placed himself in a false position.

(Lights down on IRENE. She exits.)

DR. JOHN WATSON

He never spoke of the softer passions, save with a give 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. And yet, there was but one woman to him. And that woman was Irene Adler, of dubious and questionable memory.

(Lights up over Baker Street. SHERLOCK HOLMES paces the room deep in thought.)

SHERLOCK HOLMES

One night, on the twentieth of March in 1888, I was returning home from a journey to a patient, for I had now returned to civil practice, and even as I looked up at the windows outside Baker Street, I saw his figure pass twice in a dark silhouette against the blind. His head was sunk upon his chest and his hands clasped behind his back. He was at work again.

(WATSON steps into Baker Street.)

SHERLOCK HOLMES

Watson! Just the man. Since you are interested in these little problems, and since you are good enough to chronicle one or two of my trifling experiences, you may be interested in this.

(HOLMES hands WATSON a neatly folded letter and continues pacing.)

DR. JOHN WATSON

What is it? Nothing serious, I hope.

SHERLOCK HOLMES

It came by the last post. Read it aloud.

DR. JOHN WATSON *(reads)*

"There will call upon you tonight, at a quarter to eight o'clock, a gentleman who desires to consult you upon a matter of the very deepest moment. Your recent services to one of the royal houses of Europe have shown that you are one who may safely be trusted with matters which are of an importance which can hardly be exaggerated. This account of you we have from all quarters received. Be in your chamber then at that hour, and do not take it amiss if your visitor wear a mask." This is indeed a mystery. What do you imagine it means?

SHERLOCK HOLMES

I have no data. It is a capital mistake to theorize before one has data. Insensibly one begins to twist facts to suit theories, instead of twisting theories to suit facts. But the note itself. What do you deduce from it?

DR. JOHN WATSON

(examines the note)

The wan who wrote is presumably well to do. Such heavy paper cannot be bought under half a crown a packet. It is peculiarly strong and stiff.

SHERLOCK HOLMES

Peculiar, Watson, is the very word for it. It is not an English paper at all. Hold it up to the light and tell me what you see.

DR. JOHN WATSON

A large "E" with a small "g". A "P" and a large "G" with a small "t" woven into the texture.

SHERLOCK HOLMES

What do you make of that?

DR. JOHN WATSON

The name of the maker, no doubt. Or, his monogram, rather.

SHERLOCK HOLMES

Not at all. The "G" with the small "t" stands for Gesellschaft. The German word for 'Company'. It is a customary contraction like out 'Co.' 'P' stands for "Paper". Now for the 'Eg'. Let us glance at our Continental Gazetteer.

(picks up a heavy book and reads)

"Eglow, Eglownitz … Here we are, Egria. It is a Germanspeaking country in Bohemia. Not far from Carlsbad. Come read here for yourself.

DR. JOHN WATSON

"Remarkable as being the scene of the death of Wallenstein, and for its numerous glass factories and paper mills."

SHERLOCK HOLMES

Ha, ha! My boy, what do you make of that?

DR. JOHN WATSON

The paper was made in Bohemia.

SHERLOCK HOLMES

Precisely. And the author of the note is a German. Do you note the peculiar construction of the sentence, "This account of you we have from all quarters received." A Frenchman or Russian could not have written that. It is the German who is so uncourteous to his verbs. It only remains, therefore, to discover what is wanted by this German who writes upon Bohemian paper and prefers wearing a mask to showing his face.

(to window, looking out)

A carriage has just arrived. And here he comes, if I am not mistaken, to resolve all our doubts. A very nice brougham drawn by a fine pair of horses. A hundred and fifty guineas apiece, I should think.

(turns back)

There's money in this case, Watson, if nothing else.

DR. JOHN WATSON

I think I had better go.

SHERLOCK HOLMES

Stay where you are, Doctor. I am lost without my Boswell. And this promises to be interesting. It would be a pity to miss it.

DR. JOHN WATSON

But your client…

SHERLOCK HOLMES

Never mind him. I may want your help, and so may he. Here he comes. Sit down in that armchair and give this encounter your best attention.

DR. JOHN WATSON

I'll take a few notes.

SHERLOCK HOLMES

No. Write down nothing and commit every detail to your memory for the time being.

(an authoritative knock)

SHERLOCK HOLMES

Come in.

(DUKE ORMSTEIN enters wearing a dark cloak and mask. He looks at WATSON and then at HOLMES.)

COUNT ORMSTEIN

You had my note?

SHERLOCK HOLMES

Pray, take a seat.

COUNT ORMSTEIN

I told you that I would call.

SHERLOCK HOLMES

This is my friend and colleague, Dr. Watson. He is occasionally good enough to help me in my cases. Whom have I the honor to address?

COUNT ORMSTEIN

You may address me as the Count Von Kramm, a Bohemian nobleman. I understand that this gentleman, your friend, is a man of honor and discretion and may be trusted with a matter of extreme importance, but the letter did specify that I was to speak to you and you alone.

SHERLOCK HOLMES

It is both or none. You may say before this gentleman anything which you may say to me.

COUNT ORMSTEIN

Then I must begin by binding you both to absolute secrecy for two years, at the end of which time the matter will be no longer of importance. At present it is not too much to say that it is of such weight it may have an influence upon European history.

SHERLOCK HOLMES

You may rely upon our silence.

(ORMSTEIN stares at WATSON.)

DR. JOHN WATSON

I promise.

COUNT ORMSTEIN

You will excuse this mask, gentleman. The august person who employs me wishes his agent to be unknown to you, and I may confess at once that the title by which I have just introduced myself is not exactly my own.

SHERLOCK HOLMES

I am aware of that.

COUNT ORMSTEIN

The circumstances are of great delicacy, and every precaution must be taken to quench what might grow to be an immense scandal and seriously compromise on of the reigning families of Europe. To speak plainly, the matter implicates the great House of Ormstein, hereditary kings of Bohemia.

SHERLOCK HOLMES

I am also aware of that.

(pause)

If your Majesty would condescend to state your case, I should be better able to advise you.

COUNT ORMSTEIN

(paused by surprise)

You are right.

(He stands and removes the mask.)

I am the King. Why should I attempt to conceal it?

SHERLOCK HOLMES

Why, indeed? Your Majesty had not spoken before I was aware that I was addressing Wilhelm Gottsreich Sigismond von Ormstein, Grand Duke of Cassel-Felstein and hereditary King of Bohemia.

COUNT ORMSTEIN

But you can understand that I am not accustomed to doing business of this kind in my own person. Yet, the matter is so delicate that I could not confide it to an agent without compromising myself. I have come incognito from Prague for the purpose of consulting you.

SHERLOCK HOLMES

Then, pray consult.

COUNT ORMSTEIN

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.

SHERLOCK HOLMES

Kindly look it up in my index, Doctor.

(WATSON removes another book from the shelf and searches for the name.)

DR. JOHN WATSON

Adler, Irene. Born in New Jersey in the year 1858. Contralto… La Scala… Prima Donna at the Imperial Opera of Warsaw. Retired from operatic stage and, according to this, she currently resides in London.

COUNT ORMSTEIN

That is she! That is the woman!

SHERLOCK HOLMES

Your Majesty, as I understand, became entangled with this young person, wrote her compromising letters, and is now desirous of getting those letters back.

COUNT ORMSTEIN

Precisely.

SHERLOCK HOLMES

Was there a secret marriage?

COUNT ORMSTEIN

No.

SHERLOCK HOLMES

No legal papers or certificates?

COUNT ORMSTEIN

None.

SHERLOCK HOLMES

Then I fail to follow your Majesty. If this young person should produce her letters for blackmailing to other purposes, how is she to prove their authenticity?

COUNT ORMSTEIN

They are in my handwriting? My signature…

SHERLOCK HOLMES

Forged.

COUNT ORMSTEIN

Written on my private note paper…

SHERLOCK HOLMES

Stolen.

COUNT ORMSTEIN

My own seal…

SHERLOCK HOLMES

Imitated.

COUNT ORMSTEIN

My photograph.

SHERLOCK HOLMES

Bought.

COUNT ORMSTEIN

We are both in the photograph.

(pause)

DR. JOHN WATSON

Oh dear.

SHERLOCK HOLMES

Your Majesty had indeed committed an indiscretion.

COUNT ORMSTEIN

I was mad – insane!

SHERLOCK HOLMES

You have compromised yourself seriously.

COUNT ORMSTEIN

I was only Crown Prince then. I was young. I am but thirty now.

SHERLOCK HOLMES

It must be recovered.

COUNT ORMSTEIN

We have tried and failed.

SHERLOCK HOLMES

Your Majesty must pay. It must be bought.

COUNT ORMSTEIN

Do you not think that I have tried? I offered many prices, each one more luxurious than the first. She refused to sell.

SHERLOCK HOLMES

Stolen, then.

COUNT ORMSTEIN

Five attempts have been made. Twice burglars in my employ have ransacked her house. Once we diverted her luggage when she traveled. Twice she has been waylaid. There has been no result.

SHERLOCK HOLMES

No sign of it?

COUNT ORMSTEIN

Absolutely none.

SHERLOCK HOLMES

It is quite a pretty little problem.

COUNT ORMSTEIN

On the contrary, it is a very serious one to me.

SHERLOCK HOLMES

What does she propose to do with the photograph?

COUNT ORMSTEIN

To ruin me, of course.

SHERLOCK HOLMES

But, how?

COUNT ORMSTEIN

I am about to be married.

SHERLOCK HOLMES

To Clotilde Lothman von Saxe-Meninger, second daughter of the King of Scandinavia.

COUNT ORMSTEIN

But, how?

SHERLOCK HOLMES

I have my ways.

COUNT ORMSTEIN

You may know the strict principle of her family. She is herself the very soul of delicacy. A shadow of doubt as to my conduct would bring the whole matter to an end.

SHERLOCK HOLMES

And Irene Adler?

COUNT ORMSTEIN

She threatens to send them the photograph. And she will do it. I know she will. You do not know her, but she has a soul of steel. She has the face of the most beautiful of women and the mind of the most resolute of men. Rather that I should marry another woman, there are no lengths to which she would not go.

SHERLOCK HOLMES

You are sure that she has not sent it yet?

COUNT ORMSTEIN

I am sure.

SHERLOCK HOLMES

Why?

COUNT ORMSTEIN

Because she has said that she would send it on the day of when the betrothal was publicly proclaimed. That will be next Monday.

SHERLOCK HOLMES

Then we have three days, still. That is very fortunate. I have one or two matters of importance to investigate at present. Your Majesty is, of course, staying in London for the time being?

COUNT ORMSTEIN

You will find me at the Langham Hotel under the name of the Count Von Kramm.

SHERLOCK HOLMES

Then I shall drop you a line to let you know how we progress.

COUNT ORMSTEIN

Pray do so. I shall be all anxiety.

SHERLOCK HOLMES

Then, as to money?

COUNT ORMSTEIN

You have carte blanche.

SHERLOCK HOLMES

Absolutely?

COUNT ORMSTEIN

I tell you that I would give one of the provinces of my kingdom to have that photograph.

SHERLOCK HOLMES

And for personal expenses?

(ORMSTEIN produces two large satchels from beneath his cloak and places them on the table.)

COUNT ORMSTEIN

There are three hundred pounds in gold and seven hundred in notes.

SHERLOCK HOLMES

And Mademoiselle's address?

COUNT ORMSTEIN

Briony Lodge, Serpentine Avenue, St. John's Wood.

(WATSON writes it down.)

SHERLOCK HOLMES

One other question. Was the photograph a cabinet?

COUNT ORMSTEIN

It was.

SHERLOCK HOLMES

Then, good night, Your Majesty. I trust we shall soon have some good news for you.

COUNT ORMSTEIN

Thank you.

(ORMSTEIN exits.)

SHERLOCK HOLMES

Get your rest, Watson. Tomorrow begins a most unique adventure. I may be out for most of the morning. If you'll be good enough meet me here tomorrow afternoon at three o'clock, I should like to chat this little matter over with you.

DR. JOHN WATSON

I am at your disposal, Holmes.

SHERLOCK HOLMES

Incidentally, I requested that dinner be postponed until after this meeting has concluded. I trust Mrs. Hudson will be along shortly.

DR. JOHN WATSON

Thank you.

SHERLOCK HOLMES

Good night.

(HOLMES exits. Lights down over Baker Street.)

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Scene 9

Setting: Briony Lodge, street

At Rise: Lights rise. HOLMES, WATSON, and ORMSTEIN enter.

COUNT ORMSTEIN

You have really got it!

SHERLOCK HOLMES

Not yet.

COUNT ORMSTEIN

But you have hopes?

SHERLOCK HOLMES

I have hopes.

COUNT ORMSTEIN

Then, come. I am all impatience to be gone.

SHERLOCK HOLMES

It will interest Your Majesty to know that Irene Adler is married.

COUNT ORMSTEIN

Married? When?

SHERLOCK HOLMES

Yesterday.

COUNT ORMSTEIN

But to whom?

SHERLOCK HOLMES

To an English lawyer named Norton.

COUNT ORMSTEIN

She could not love him!

SHERLOCK HOLMES

I am hopeful that she does.

COUNT ORMSTEIN

Why?

SHERLOCK HOLMES

Because it would spare Your Majesty all fear of future annoyance. If the lady loves her husband, she does not love Your Majesty. If she does not love Your Majesty, there is no reason to interfere with your Majesty's plan to also wed.

COUNT ORMSTEIN

It is true. And yet, how I wish that she was of my own station. What a queen she would have made.

(Shift to next scene.)

Scene 10

Setting: Briony Lodge, sitting room

At Rise: A BUTLER waits to greet them.

BUTLER

Mr. Sherlock Holmes, I believe?

SHERLOCK HOLMES

I am Mr. Holmes.

BUTLER

My mistress told me that you were likely to call. She left this morning with her husband by the 5:15 train to Charing Cross for the continent.

SHERLOCK HOLMES *(shocked)*

You mean she has left England?

COUNT ORMSTEIN

Holmes, the photograph. All is lost!

SHERLOCK HOLMES

We shall see.

(HOLMES pushes by the BUTLER and opens the secret compartment where he finds a photograph and a letter.)

COUNT ORMSTEIN

Is it there?

(HOLMES shows the photograph to ORMSTEIN and WATSON.)

COUNT ORMSTEIN

This is not the photograph I described to you.

SHERLOCK HOLMES

No, it isn't. There is also a letter.

COUNT ORMSTEIN

Give it here, man.

SHERLOCK HOLMES

It is addressed to me.

(HOLMES opens it as IRENE ADLER enters in the dark and then appears in special lighting.)

SHERLOCK HOLMES

(begins reading letter aloud)

My dear Mr. Sherlock Holmes, You really did it very well…

IRENE ADLER

(narrates letter)

…You took me in completely. Until after the alarm of fire, I had not a suspicion. But then, when I found how I had betrayed myself, I began to think. I had been warned against you months ago. I had been told that if the King employed an agent, it would certainly be you. And your address had been given me. Yet, with all this, you made me reveal what you wanted to know. Even after I became suspicious, I found it hard to think evil of such a dear, kind old clergyman. But, you know, I have been trained as an actress myself. Male costume is nothing new to me. I often take advantage of the freedom which it gives. I sent John, the coachman, to watch you, ran upstairs, got into my walking-clothes, as I call them, and came down just as you departed. Well, I followed you to your door, and so made sure that I was really an object of interest to the celebrated Mr. Sherlock Holmes. Then I, rather imprudently, wished you good-night, and started for the Temple to see my husband.

We both thought the best resource was flight, when pursued by so formidable an antagonist; so you will find the nest empty when you call to-morrow. As to the photograph, your client may rest in peace. I love and am loved by a better man than he.

IRENE ADLER (CONT)

The King may do what he will without hindrance from one whom he has cruelly wronged. I keep it only to safeguard myself, and to preserve a weapon which will always secure me from any steps which he might take in the future.

SHERLOCK HOLMES

(finishes reading letter aloud)

I leave a photograph which he might care to possess; and I remain, dear Mr. Sherlock Holmes, very truly yours. -IRENE NORTON, née ADLER.

(Lights down on IRENE ADLER. She exits.)

COUNT ORMSTEIN *(astonishment)*

What a woman- oh, what a WOMAN! Did I not tell you how quickand resolute she was? Would she not have made a truly admirable queen? Is it not a pity that she was not on my level?

SHERLOCK HOLMES

From what I have seen of the lady she seems indeed to be on a very different level to Your Majesty. I am sorry that I have not been able to bring Your Majesty's business to a more successful conclusion.

COUNT ORMSTEIN

On the contrary, my dear sir, nothing could be more successful. I know that her world is inviolate. The photograph is now as safe as if it were in a fire.

SHERLOCK HOLMES

I am glad to hear your majesty say so.

COUNT ORMSTEIN

I am immensely indebted to you. Pray tell me in what way I can reward you. This ring, perhaps?

(ORMSTEIN removes a ring from his hand and gives it to HOLMES.)

SHERLOCK HOLMES

Your Majesty has something which I should value even more highly.

COUNT ORMSTEIN

You have but to name it.

SHERLOCK HOLMES

This photograph.

COUNT ORMSTEIN

(gives it to HOLMES)

Irene's photograph! Certainly. It is yours if you wish it.

SHERLOCK HOLMES

I thank Your Majesty. Then there is no more to be done in the matter. I have the honor of wishing Your Majesty a very good morning.

(HOLMES exits without noticing that ORMSTEIN offers his hand in gratitude. WATSON shakes it instead as lights fade out. ORMSTEIN exits in the dark.)

(Lights up on WATSON as he appears.)

DR. JOHN WATSON

And that was how a great scandal threatened to affect the kingdom of Bohemia, and how the best plans of Mr. Sherlock Holmes were bested by a woman's wit. He used to make merry over the cleverness of women, but I have not heard him do it of late. And when he speaks of Irene Adler, or when he refers to her photograph, it is always under the honorable title of the woman.

(Curtain)



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