

A Scandal In Bohemia

To Sherlock Holmes she is always *the woman*. I have seldom heard him mention her in any other terms. I had seen little of Holmes lately. My marriage had drifted us away from each other. One night -- it was on the twentieth of March, 1888 -- I was returning from a journey to the north. His manner was not effusive. It seldom was; but he was glad, I think, to see me. "Wedlock suits you," he remarked. "I think, Watson, that you have put on some weight." "Seven!" I answered.

"Indeed, I should have thought a little more. Just a trifle more, I fancy, Watson." "Then, how do you know?"

"I see it, I deduce it. How do I know that you have been getting yourself very fat?" "My dear Holmes," said I, "this is too much. You would certainly have been able to tell me so if I had not been so sure of it." He chuckled to himself and rubbed his long, nervous hands together.

"It is simplicity itself," said he; "my eyes tell me that on the inside of your left hand there is a large, old-fashioned scar, due, I fancy, to a burn in your childhood. I could not help laughing at the ease with which he explained his process of deduction." "Quite so," he answered, lighting a cigarette, and throwing himself down in his chair. "Frequently."

"How often?"

"Well, some hundreds of times."

"Then how many are there?"

"How many? I don't know."

"Quite so! You have not observed. And yet you have seen. That is just my point. The note was undated, and without either signature or address."

"There will call upon you to-night, at a quarter to eight o'clock," it said.

"This is indeed a mystery," I remarked. "What do you imagine that it means?"

"I have no data yet. It is a capital mistake to theorize before one has data. I carefully examined the writing, and the paper upon which it was written."

"The man who wrote it was presumably well to do," I remarked, endeavoring to detain him.

"Peculiar -- that is the very word," said Holmes. "It is not an English paper."

I did so, and saw a large "E" with a small "g," a "P," and a large "G" with a small "t."

"What do you make of that?" asked Holmes.

"The name of the maker, no doubt; or his monogram, rather."

"Not at all. The 'G' with the small 't' stands for 'Gesellschaft,' which is the German word for a company or society."

"The paper was made in Bohemia," I said.

"Precisely. And the man who wrote the note is a German. Do you note the initials?"

As he spoke there was the sharp sound of horses' hoofs and grating wheels.

"A pair, by the sound," said he. "Yes," he continued, glancing out of the window.

"I think that I had better go, Holmes."

"Not a bit, Doctor. Stay where you are. I am lost without my Boswell. A note will do."

"But your client --"

"Never mind him. I may want your help, and so may he. Here he comes."

A slow and heavy step, which had been heard upon the stairs and in the passage.

"Come in!" said Holmes.

A man entered who could hardly have been less than six feet six inches in height.

"You had my note?" he asked with a deep harsh voice and a strongly marked brow.

"Pray take a seat," said Holmes. "This is my friend and colleague, Dr. Watson."

"You may address me as the Count Von Kramm, a Bohemian nobleman."

I rose to go, but Holmes caught me by the wrist and pushed me back into a chair.

The Count shrugged his broad shoulders. "Then I must begin," said he, "with a promise."

"I promise," said Holmes.

"And I."

"You will excuse this mask," continued our strange visitor. "The august name of the Count Von Kramm is not to be lightly uttered."

"I was aware of it," said Holmes drily.

"The circumstances are of great delicacy, and every precaution has to be taken."

"I was also aware of that," murmured Holmes, settling himself down in his chair.

Our visitor glanced with some apparent surprise at the languid, lounging figure.

"If your Majesty would condescend to state your case," he remarked, "I should be glad to do so."

The man sprang from his chair and paced up and down the room in uncontrollable agitation.

"Why, indeed?" murmured Holmes. "Your Majesty had not spoken before I did so."

"But you can understand," said our strange visitor, sitting down once more.

"Then, pray consult," said Holmes, shutting his eyes once more.

"The facts are briefly these: Some five years ago, during a lengthy visit to Washington."

"Kindly look her up in my index, Doctor," murmured Holmes without opening his eyes.

"Let me see!" said Holmes. "Hum! Born in New Jersey in the year 1858. Continued."

"Precisely so. But how --"

"Was there a secret marriage?"

"None."

"No legal papers or certificates?"

"None."

"Then I fail to follow your Majesty. If this young person should produce her name."

"There is the writing."

"Pooh, pooh! Forgery."

"My private note-paper."

"Stolen."

"My own seal."

"Imitated."

"My photograph."

"Bought."

"We were both in the photograph."

"Oh, dear! That is very bad! Your Majesty has indeed committed an indiscretion."

"I was mad -- insane."

"You have compromised yourself seriously."

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

"It must be recovered."

"We have tried and failed."

"Your Majesty must pay. It must be bought."

"She will not sell."

"Stolen, then."

"Five attempts have been made. Twice burglars in my pay ransacked her room."

"No sign of it?"

"Absolutely none."

Holmes laughed. "It is quite a pretty little problem," said he.

"But a very serious one to me," returned the King reproachfully.

"Very, indeed. And what does she propose to do with the photograph?"

"To ruin me."

"But how?"

"I am about to be married."

"So I have heard."

"To Clotilde Lothman von Saxe-Meningen, second daughter of the King of Prussia."

"And Irene Adler?"

"Threatens to send them the photograph. And she will do it. I know that."

"You are sure that she has not sent it yet?"

"I am sure."

"And why?"

"Because she has said that she would send it on the day when the betrothal is announced."

"Oh, then we have three days yet," said Holmes with a yawn. "That is very convenient."

"Certainly. You will find me at the Langham under the name of the Count de Saxe-Meningen."

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

"Pray do so. I shall be all anxiety."

"Then, as to money?"

"You have carte blanche."

"Absolutely?"

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