

A Toast to Irene Adler
Bill Mason
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The woman.

How simple is the designation, and how complex is the designee.

The woman.

There was but one woman to Sherlock Holmes, and she was Irene Adler. Oh, yes, she was an “adventuress”—that is, a first-class, presentable mistress, very polished and refined. And she was a singer and an actress. Oh, my! For solid and respectable citizens like Dr. Watson, that did indeed make her “dubious and questionable.”

But she was so much more. No wonder that for both Sherlock Holmes and the King of Bohemia, she eclipsed and predominated the whole of her sex. They saw her only in superlative terms. She was the “most beautiful of women,” with “a face that men might die for.” She had a “superb figure.” She was “the daintiest thing under a bonnet on this planet.”

These, of course, are superficial observations. So might we describe any pill-popping nitwit of a Hollywood starlet careening down Rodeo Drive. Irene Adler had so much more. She had character and personal discipline, and she had strength, and she had daring, and she had compassion, and she had a superior mind. We are told in so many words that she was “quick and resolute” and had a “soul of steel.” Despite what the King of Bohemia thought, she was too good to be a queen, the product of the union of cousins, tethered by traditions and expectations, a prisoner of the accident of birth.

Tonight, we should contemplate Irene Adler as a woman ahead of her time. A feminist who knew she was not just the equal to a remarkable man like Sherlock Holmes, but a superior to most other men. A fearless challenger to a male-dominated society who would in our age shatter any glass ceiling she might encounter. And a credit to the United States of America, a land where strong and fearless and resolute, highly accomplished women are the norm rather than the exception. Had Sherlock Holmes operated on the shores of Irene’s New Jersey or on the American frontier, rather than the staid and stagnant England of Victorian times, he might not have been so surprised about being “beaten by a woman’s wit.”

So lift your glasses to honor a truly exceptional individual:
To *the* one who outwitted Sherlock Holmes,
To *the* feminist ideal,
To *the* proof of our nation’s greatness,
To *the* American of the canon,
To *the* woman,
Irene Adler!