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A Toast to the Woman

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Jaime Mahoney

According to Kevin Spacey's character in *The Usual Suspects* (no spoilers): "The greatest trick the devil ever pulled was convincing the world he did not exist." And so, in that same vein, I would suggest that the cleverest thing Irene Adler ever did, was convincing the world that she was actually clever.

Over the years, much has been made of Ms. Adler's supposed "cleverness," and likewise much is known of what I think of that supposed cleverness. I won't belabor my point (even though I really, really could), but here are just a few ways in which readers have supposedly found her clever:

1. **She can hide things.** Regarding attempts to recover the scandalous photograph, the King says, "Five attempts have been made. Twice burglars in my pay ransacked her house. Once we diverted her luggage when she travelled. Twice she has been waylaid. There has been no result." So, what does this mean about Miss Adler? That she was good at hiding things. You know who else is good at hiding things? My toddler -- she's hidden many things from me: cups of milk, car keys, and my sanity. All this means is that Ms. Adler possesses a basic life skill, not cleverness.

2. **She had nerves of steel.** Except, not really. She is not really the portrait in granite of an unflappable woman that time has given us. For example, when she believes her house on fire, she does exactly as Sherlock Holmes predicted. He says, "She responded beautifully. The photograph is in a recess behind a sliding panel just above the right bell-pull. She was there in an instant, and I caught a glimpse of it as she half-

drew it out." This is to say, she reacted normally. This is not a bad thing, but it's also not especially clever.

3. **She confronted Sherlock Holmes**. Except (again), she didn't. After realizing she'd been found out, she dons a disguise, and makes a passing quip at Holmes. This is her supposed cleverness. But what does she do next? She takes her metaphorical ball and runs away. This is not cleverness, but I would call it common sense.

Yet despite all this, Irene Adler goes down in history as special and clever and a match for Sherlock Holmes, when truthfully she was none of those things. Nevertheless, the King of Bohemia says, "What a woman — oh, what a woman! Did I not tell you how quick and resolute she was?" And well… we all know how Sherlock Holmes refers to her.

So, I would propose a toast to the Woman -- who may not have actually been the cleverest woman who ever lived, but who at least possessed a modicum of common sense. But her "dubious and questionable memory" is one of cleverness, which is actually quite the accomplishment.