



The Casebook of Sherlock Holmes

Adventure LIV – The Adventure of the Illustrious Client

As Spring turns to Summer, the Hounds turn to the Case Book, that strange territory where professors go ape, vampires and jellyfish invade Sussex, and Sherlock Holmes writes his own stories. But first, Holmes has to survive a case where he must try to prevent a crime without any cooperation from the intended victim. And what a villain! Baron Gruner, the Austrian murderer, who could take his place with pride beside Professor Moriarty and Grimesby Roylott as one of the Canonical bad guys we most love to despise. I trust that all good Hounds will bone up on their Chinese pottery and join us as we discuss the case of “The Illustrious Client.”

Handle with care: Holmes’s appointment with Sir James Damery was made by a note written in the third person. Who wrote the note? Sir James? A secretary? The illustrious client?

Sir James instantly connected the presence of Dr. Watson with the possibility of violence. Did Watson have such a reputation for handling the rough stuff? Why? Was this an early hint that the illustrious client didn’t much care what might happen to Baron Gruner, just as long as he was prevented from marrying Violet de Merville?

Why did Holmes visit Gruner at home? He must have known it would be useless to threaten or persuade him from his marriage plans. Did he simply want to see Gruner and the layout of his house? Did he accomplish anything else from this visit?

I don’t blame Lomax, the sublibrarian, and since brainwork wasn’t Watson’s department, I don’t really blame Watson either. The only person left to blame is Holmes, and so I will ask: Why didn’t Holmes tell Watson to study Chinese pottery from Gruner’s own book? Did his headache prevent Holmes from thinking straight, or did he have his own reasons for making Watson’s difficult situation even worse?



Flame and Ice: It was Watson who first suggested that Holmes might visit Violet de Merville. Then Holmes jumped to the conclusion that Watson meant for him to try to talk some sense into her. But was that actually Watson's idea? What else might Watson have had in mind as a reason to see the lady in person?

Concerning that visit, Watson wrote that Holmes's "hard, dry statement needs some little editing to soften it into the terms of real life." How so? Did Holmes actually make a big fool of himself in front of Miss de Merville? Did Watson have to clean up the account because of the bluntness with which Holmes expressed his warnings? Or was editing actually necessary because Kitty Winter's remarks couldn't be repeated verbatim in a family magazine?

Holmes's interviews with Baron Gruner and Violet de Merville attained similar results of annoyance and frustration. Were the engaged couple opposites, as Holmes said, or were the two actually a pretty good match in terms of their personalities?

What sort of girl was Kitty Winter before Gruner got hold of her? We think of her as lower class because of her slang, but did she merely learn such speech patterns after her ruin? How old was she at the time Gruner got his hands on her?

How much is Holmes to blame for Kitty's attack on Gruner? Was he simply careless, or was this a case of his silent endorsement of "private revenge?"

What do you think became of Gruner? Did he sail for America as planned? Did he ever catch up with Kitty Winter? Would his deformity inspire him to be even more vicious in the future?

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