



The Casebook of Sherlock Holmes

Adventure LIV – The Adventure of the Illustrious Client

Publishing History

54 of the 60 stories

First published in *The Strand Magazine*, February & March, 1925

In the US *Collier's Weekly*, November 8, 1924

Part of *The Case Book of Sherlock Holmes* collection by John Murray, London, 1927

George D. Doran, New York, 1927

Chronology

Baring-Gould places the dating of the story at Wednesday, September 3 to Tuesday, September 16, 1902 making it 53rd of the 60. This means that Holmes was 48 and Watson 50.



Christopher Morley Says

“The last collection of tales, the *Case-Book*, put the zeal of Watson lovers under some strain: a few of the dozen stories seem to show the old magic. This is one of the best: Holmes undertakes to rescue the beautiful Miss de Merville from her infatuation for the Austrian Baron Gruner, “perhaps the most dangerous man in Europe.” He has “waxed tips of hair under his nose,” like some other dangerous Teutons. Holmes’s special agent in the underworld, Porky Shinwell, is called upon for help, and Dr. Watson masquerades as a collector of Chinese porcelain, but the dénouement comes by still another hand.”

Dummies Short Summary

“When the daughter of a member of high society falls under the spell of the *Austrian murderer* Baron Gruner, an *illustrious client* hires Holmes to prevent the marriage. This dark tale takes Holmes and Watson into the underbelly of London life in a story of violence, sexual abuse, and revenge.”

How Many Words

At 9,834 words ILLU has the 49th most words (#1 is VEIL – 4,499, #56 if NAVL – 12,701)

Classifying This Case

This case is one of 3 classified as fear of retribution. The others are CROO and REDC.

The Best Of Sherlock Holmes

- 1927 – Arthur Conan Doyle did not have it on his list of 12 favorites.
- 1999 – The Baker Street Irregulars vote it 30th of the 56 short stories.
- 1999 – The Sherlock Holmes Society of London voted it 24th of the 56 short stories.

What Else Happened That Year (1902)

- Joseph Chamberlain advocates return to Protection and Imperial Preference.
- Peace of Vereeniging, ends Boer War.
- Salisbury resigns, succeeded as PM by Arthur Balfour.
- Anglo-Japanese Treaty, for mutual defense and to maintain status quo in Far East.
- Institution of the Order of Merit for distinguished service to the state; limited to 24 holders at one time.
- Esperanto introduced to England.
- Establishment of Metropolitan Water Board, supplying London.
- Arthur Conan Doyle is knighted.
- Franco-Italian secret treaty; Italy to remain neutral if France were attacked by a third power.
- Triple Alliance (Germany, Austria, Italy) renewed to 1914.
- Italian designs on Tripoli conditionally approved by France and Austria.
- Russo-Japanese Convention, Russia agrees to evacuate Manchuria in 18 months.
- French work day reduced to 9 1/2 hours.
- White settlement of Kenya begins.

- St. Pierre, Martinique, destroyed by earthquake.
- F.A. Krupp takes over Germania shipbuilding yard at Kiel; great armaments firm develops.
- Conan Doyle publishes *The Hound of the Baskervilles*.
- Kipling publishes *Just So Stories*.
- Arthur Edward Woodley Mason publishes *The Four Feathers*.
- Beatrix Potter publishes *Peter Rabbit*.
- Enrico Caruso makes his first gramophone record--154 recordings in all.
- Picasso paints *Nude, Back View*.
- Wireless telegraphy applied to ships.
- Trans-Pacific Cable laid.
- Completion of Aswan Dam in Egypt.

Holmes And Watson – Personal Information

Sherlock is, of course, in residence at 221B. Watson was living in his own rooms in Queen Anne Street at the time.

Dramatis Personae

- **The Illustrious Client**, although never named, it is strongly inferred to be King George V (the story is dated by Watson as 1911)
- **Sir James Damery**, agent for the illustrious client who brought Holmes into the case, procured the sample of Chinese pottery, and took Gruner's diary after Holmes obtained it.
- **General De Merville**, father of ...
- **Violet De Merville**, fiancée of ...
- **Baron Adelbert Gruner**, a notorious collector of women. He murdered one of his wives but made it look like an accident and was never prosecuted.
- **Shinwell "Porky" Johnson**, an ex-con gone straight who is a snitch for Holmes.
- **Kitty Winter**, a former mistress of Gruner who is now a ruined, soiled dove because of his treatment of her.
- **Sir Leslie Oakshott**, a surgeon who attended Holmes after he was beaten by Gruner's minions.
- **Lomax**, librarian who got Watson information about Chinese pottery.
- **Dr. Hill Burton**, Watson's alias when he called on Gruner.

Quotable Sherlock

- “It may be some fussy, self-important fool; it may be a matter of life or death.”
- “I should say that there is no more dangerous man in Europe.”
- “I have several opponents to whom that flattering term has been applied.”
- “I am sorry. I am accustomed to have mystery at one end of my cases, but to have it at both ends is too confusing. I fear, Sir James, that I must decline to act.”
- “A complex mind. All great criminals have that.”
- “Who knows, Watson? Woman’s heart and mind are insoluble puzzles to the male.”
- “I thought of her for the moment as I would have thought of a daughter of my own.”
- “I’m a bit of a single-stick expert, as you know”
- “I have my plans. The first thing is to exaggerate my injuries. They’ll come to you for news. Put it on thick, Watson. Luckily if I live the week out – concussion – delirium – what you like! You can’t overdo it.”
- “There was a curious secretive streak in the man which led to many dramatic effects, but left even his closest friend guessing as to what his exact plans might be.”
- “The wages of sin, Watson – the wages of sin! Said he. Sooner or later it will always come.”
- --“ “It is a loyal friend and a chivalrous gentleman,” said Holmes, holding up a restraining hand. “Let that now and forever be enough for us.”

Holmes’ Fee

No fee is mentioned in the story. Unless Holmes was still serious about the statement he made a year or two earlier, in THOR, regarding his fees, “I do not vary them, save when I remit them altogether.” To me “illustrious” means “big money,” therefore I bet Holmes got enough in this case to pay for that retirement place on the Sussex Downs just 2 years later.

Unrecorded Cases

2 more unexplained cases to drive Sherlockians craz(ier) wanting to know more.

- Charlie Peace, the violin virtuoso
- Wainwright the artist

Sherlock Holmes On The Big And The Little Screen

This one has only been done twice.

- 1965 *The Illustrious Client* with Douglas Wilmer as an episode in his *Sherlock Holmes* TV series
- 1991 *The Illustrious Client* with Jeremy Brett as an episode in his *Sherlock Holmes* TV series

Fainting In The Canon

Baron Grunner's unnamed servant faints.

Newspapers

Morning Post - The oldest London newspaper. It was strongly Conservative and heavily influenced fashions of the day.

Annotated Sherlock

- **"doss-house"** a common lodging-house; a flop-house
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- **"lassitude"** listlessness
- **"mendicants"** beggars
- **"erysipelas"** also called St. Anthony's Fire; acute disease of the skin caused by streptococcus and marked by localized inflammation and fever
- **"vitriol"** sulphuric acid

Weapons

- **Sticks** - Which the two agents of Baron Adalbert Gruner used in their murderous attack upon Holmes.
- **Stick** - Which Holmes used to defend himself against the Baron's two agents.
- **Vitriol (Sulphuric Acid)** - Hurling into the face of Baron Adalbert Gruner by Kitty Winter, quite spoiling his devilishly good looks.

- **Diary** - Of Baron Adalbert Gruner, which contained all the secrets of the Baron's exceedingly disreputable life, used by Holmes to make sure that the Baron would not marry Violet de Merville.
- **Arranged Accident** - By way of Baron Adalbert Gruner was able to rid himself of his unwanted wife.

Frank Mentzel