



Arthur Conan Doyle Encyclopedia

The Casebook of Sherlock Holmes Adventure LIV – The Adventure of the Illustrious Client

SUMMARY (Diogenes Club)

Gruner has completely infatuated Violet and has explained away all of his past love affairs (which have become public).

General de Merville has been very loyal to the crown and the king wishes to spare Violet the heartbreak which a marriage to Gruner is sure to produce, so he has Damery hire Holmes to put some sense into Violet's head so she will break her engagement.

Holmes in turn engages Johnson who turns up Kitty. Kitty and Holmes meet with Violet but Gruner

has brain washed her well and Violet feels that Kitty herself caused the end of her affair with Gruner and that Kitty's fate is her own doing.

Gruner hires a pair of assassins to murder Holmes. Only Holmes' boxing/single-stick skills save his life. Holmes has his surgeon, Oakshott, and Watson tell the press that he is at death's door and his life despaired for.

Holmes learns from Kitty that Gruner has a very private diary in which he brags about all of his former love affairs. He keeps this diary in an inner study.

Gruner is also an avid collector of ancient Chinese pottery.

Damery acquires a rare piece of Chinese pottery which Holmes gives to Watson. Watson has crammed about Chinese pottery and visits Gruner pretending that he wants to sell his collection. This engages Gruner's attention long enough that Holmes can burglarize the inner study and steal the secret diary.



Gruner sees through Watson's façade, deduces that he is an agent of Holmes and enters his inner study just as Holmes is getting away through the window. Gruner attempts to follow Holmes through the window but Kitty, who has been hiding in the shrubbery, throws vitriol in his face, maiming and disfiguring him for life.

Holmes gives the diary to Damery and Violet, confronted with indisputable evidence, now sees that Gruner is truly evil and breaks her engagement. Holmes is charged with burglary and Kitty with vitriol throwing. The illustrious client gets the charges dropped against Holmes and gets Kitty off with the lightest possible sentence.

SUMMARY (Wikipedia)

Sir James Damery comes to see Holmes and Watson about his illustrious client's problem (the client's identity is never revealed to the reader, although Watson finds out at the end of the story; it is heavily implied to be King Edward VII). General de Merville's young daughter Violet has fallen in love with the roguish and sadistic Austrian Baron Adelbert Gruner, who Damery and Holmes are convinced is a shameless philanderer and a murderer. The victim was his last wife, of whose murder he was acquitted owing to a legal technicality and a witness's untimely death. She met her end in the Splügen Pass. Holmes also finds out that the Baron has expensive tastes and is a collector and a recognised authority on Chinese pottery.

Holmes's first step is to see Gruner, who is amused to see Holmes trying to "play a hand with no cards in it". The Baron will not be moved and claims that his charm is more potent than even a post-hypnotic suggestion in conditioning Violet's mind to reject anything bad that might be said about him. Gruner tells the story of Le Brun, a French agent who was crippled for life after being beaten by thugs after making similar inquiries into the Baron's personal business.

Holmes gets some help with his mission in the form of Shinwell Johnson, a former criminal who now acts as an informer for Holmes in London's underworld. Johnson rakes up Miss Kitty Winter, the Baron's last mistress, who was ruined because of it. She is bent on revenge and will do anything to help Holmes. Kitty tells Holmes that the Baron "collects women" and chronicles his conquests in a book. Holmes realises that this book, written in Gruner's own hand, is the key to curing Violet of her devotion to the scoundrel. Kitty tells Holmes that this book is kept in the Baron's study.

First, Holmes goes to see Violet, bringing Kitty with him, but Violet is proof against Holmes's words. Kitty then makes it clear that Violet might end up dead if she is foolish enough to marry Gruner. The meeting ends with Holmes narrowly averting a public scene involving the enraged Kitty.

Next, Holmes is attacked by two men, and the newspapers imply that he is near death. Watson goes to 221B Baker Street only to discover that Holmes's injuries have been exaggerated to give the impression that he will be out of action for quite a while. Several days later, Holmes is sufficiently recovered to be out of bed. The Baron is planning a trip to the United States just before the wedding and will be leaving in three days. Holmes knows that Gruner will take his incriminating book with him, never daring to leave it behind in his study.

Holmes orders Watson to learn everything that he can about Chinese pottery in the next 24 hours. The next day, Holmes presents Watson with a fake business card styling him as "Dr. Hill Barton" and an actual piece of Ming pottery, a saucer. He is to go to Baron Gruner's house, pose as a connoisseur of Chinese pottery, and try to sell the saucer. Watson does as Holmes tells him but cannot fool the Baron for very long. Gruner realises who has sent him.

As Watson faces his murderous captor, a noise from another room alerts the Baron and he rushes into his study just in time to see Holmes jump out of the window. The Baron rushes to the window, but Kitty Winter, who has been hiding outside, throws oil of vitriol in his face. Watson applies treatment to his injuries. During Holmes' visit he manages to steal the book.

The Baron is now hideously disfigured, but Holmes says this will not put Violet off him. They still need the book to cure her. When Violet sees the book of conquests, written in her fiancé's handwriting, she realises what a rogue he is. An announcement in *The Morning Post* says that the marriage between Baron Adelbert Gruner and Miss Violet de Merville is off. It also says vitriol-throwing charges are being pressed against Kitty Winter. Extenuating circumstances reduce her sentence to the lowest possible for such an offence.