



The Adventure of Charles Augustus Milverton

B1 Version

Part 1: The Worst Man in London

One cold winter evening, Holmes and Watson returned to their Baker Street rooms to find a visiting card on the table. Holmes picked it up, and his face showed immediate disgust. The name on the card was Charles Augustus Milverton, and Holmes described him as the worst man in London — worse, he said, than any of the fifty murderers he had dealt with in his career.

Milverton was a blackmailer — someone who threatens to reveal damaging secrets about a person unless they pay large sums of money. He had a particular method: he paid servants, former lovers, and dishonest acquaintances to bring him private letters and personal documents belonging to wealthy and prominent people. Then he held those documents over his victims and squeezed them for money, sometimes for years.

Holmes had been hired by a client to recover letters on her behalf. The client was Lady Eva Blackwell, a beautiful young woman about to be married to an earl — a high-ranking British nobleman. Milverton had obtained some imprudent letters she had written years earlier to a young man in the country. The letters were not scandalous in themselves, but they were affectionate enough that if her future husband read them he would almost certainly break off the engagement. Milverton was demanding seven

thousand pounds — an enormous sum — or he would send the letters to the earl before the wedding.

Part 2: A Meeting and a Decision

Milverton arrived punctually, a plump, comfortable-looking man of fifty with gold-rimmed glasses and a permanent frozen smile. He was charming in manner but utterly ruthless beneath the surface. Holmes argued that Lady Eva could not pay such a sum. Milverton shrugged and said that ruining her would actually benefit his business, because other victims would see the consequences of refusal and become more cooperative.

When Holmes tried to physically prevent Milverton from leaving, the blackmailer calmly opened his coat to reveal a revolver, explained that he was armed and that the law would support him in defending himself, and departed without hurry.

Holmes sat in silence for half an hour after Milverton left. Then he announced his decision: he was going to burgle Milverton's house. Watson was appalled — Holmes was a consulting detective, not a criminal. But Holmes argued that burglary to recover documents being used for an illegal purpose was morally justified, even if technically against the law. Watson refused to stay behind, and the two men planned their operation for that very night.

Part 3: Inside Appledore Towers

Holmes had spent the preceding weeks in disguise, pretending to be a plumber named Escott who had become engaged to Milverton's housemaid. In this way he had learned the layout of the house, the location of the safe, Milverton's sleeping habits, and the position of every door. Dressed in dark clothes and masks of black silk, Holmes and Watson made their way to Milverton's large house on the edge of Hampstead Heath — the great open park in north London — slipped through the greenhouse, and found their way to the study.

Holmes set to work on the safe with a set of specialist burglary tools — a jemmy, a glass-cutter, skeleton keys, and a small dark lantern. After thirty minutes of careful work, the safe opened. Inside were bundles of letters, each tied and labelled. Holmes was about to begin removing them when he heard footsteps. In an instant he swept his tools into his pockets and both men hid behind the heavy curtains.

Milverton came in, settled into his leather armchair, and began reading documents. To their horror, they were trapped. But worse was to come. After some time, a woman entered through the garden door. She was veiled and clearly agitated. She claimed to have letters to sell about a Countess. Milverton relaxed and reached for his notebook — and then the woman lifted her veil.

Part 4: Justice

It was not a servant with letters to sell. It was a woman Milverton had destroyed. He had sent her husband damaging letters about her, and her husband — a man she described as the noblest she had ever known — had died of a broken heart. She had come seeking revenge, not money. Before Milverton could call out, she shot him repeatedly at

close range. He fell and died. The woman looked at him once more, ground her heel into his face, and disappeared into the night.

Holmes seized Watson's wrist and held him still — this was not their affair, he communicated silently, and justice had been done. The moment the woman left, Holmes moved with extraordinary speed. He opened the safe fully, gathered every packet of letters, and threw them into the fireplace. Again and again he fed documents to the flames until the safe was empty and every piece of blackmail material was ash.

As the household woke and footsteps approached, Holmes and Watson locked the study door, escaped through the garden, scaled a six-foot wall — Watson nearly caught by a gardener's hand grabbing his ankle — and ran two miles across the dark expanse of Hampstead Heath until they were safe.

Part 5: The Morning After

The next morning, Inspector Lestrade called to ask for Holmes's help with a dramatic murder at Hampstead. Holmes declined. He told Lestrade honestly that he had known Milverton, considered him one of the most dangerous men in London, and believed there were crimes the law could not touch — crimes that might therefore justify private revenge. He would not help catch the woman who had killed him.

Later that day, walking down a London street, Holmes stopped at a shop window displaying photographs of society ladies. He pointed silently at one — a regal, beautiful woman in court dress — and put his finger to his lips. Watson looked at the name beside the photograph and caught his breath. The avenger had been a great lady, and her secret was safe. Safe forever.