



Adventure XXVII -- The Hound of the Baskervilles

First published in:

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Time frame of story (known/surmised):

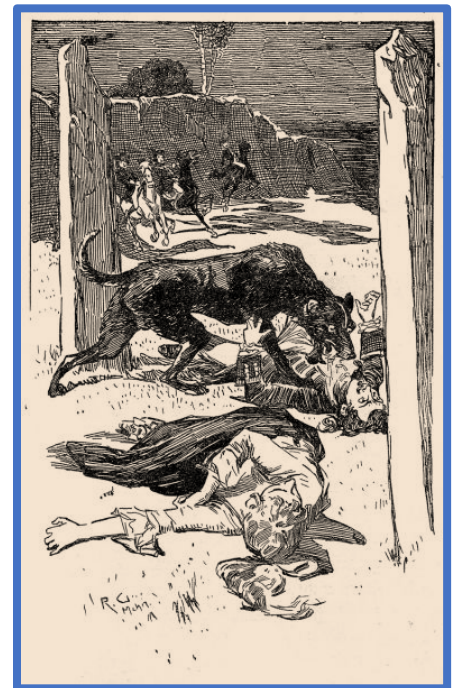
Early October, 1888, '89, or '90.

Holmes & Watson living arrangements:

Sharing quarters at 221B

Opening scene:

Holmes was seated at the breakfast table, and Watson was examining a walking-stick left behind by a caller the previous evening. They made some deductions about the unknown owner of the stick, and then its owner himself arrived to see them. He admired Holmes' skull.



Client:

Dr. James Mortimer (not a doctor actually, but a Member of the Royal College of Surgeons, a humble M.R.C.S.)

Crime or concern:

Death of Sir Charles Baskerville, under circumstances that could have been caused by his dreadful fright of a hell-hound, a family legend going back centuries to the time of the evil Hugo Baskerville who sold his soul to the devil. Sir Charles was superstitious and took the grim legend very seriously. An added concern about what to do with the heir, Sir Henry Baskerville, Sir Charles's nephew, who was arriving that day from Canada.

Villain:

Rodger Baskerville, the son of Sir Charles' brother, also Rodger, who with a sinister reputation had fled to South America and was said to have died unmarried. He did in fact marry and have one child, who in turn married a Costa Rican beauty. Son Rodger got into trouble and changed his name to Vandeleur and fled back to England. After his school floundered, he moved with the remainder of his illicit fortune to the South of England, changed his name again, and keeping his identity secret, established himself in Devonshire and cultivated a friendship with Sir Charles and the neighbors.

Motive:

The villain's plan was to kill off the few remaining Baskervilles and then in some way establish himself as the heir to the Baskerville estate and fortune, close on to £1,000,000.

Logic/clues used to solve:

As usual, Holmes rejected any explanation outside the settled order of nature. "To take on the Father of Evil himself would, perhaps, be too ambitious a task", said he.

In London, on a warning note to Sir Henry, Holmes detected the faint scent of perfume (white jessamine) indicating female involvement. Holmes realized the incident of the stolen boot indicated a real dog was involved. These two things suggested the solution to Holmes before he, Watson, or Sir Henry left London. Holmes also found the person(s) following Sir Henry were not staying at his hotel, indicating they did not want to be seen or recognized.

Cigar ashes at the moor gate indicated an important appointment.

The behavior of Beryl Stapleton and her brother/husband indicated she was wavering in her involvement, and that things were not what they seemed.

Stapleton so far forgot himself as to tell Watson a true piece of autobiography upon the occasion when they first met, enabling Holmes later to fill in some blanks as to the motive, an important link.

Barrymore informed Watson of Sir Charles receiving a note from L.L., implicating Laura Lyons, Frankland's daughter. Lyons in turn told Holmes who had her make the appointment, and then not show up.

On his first visit to Baskerville Hall Holmes observed the family portraits, and saw the amazing throwback, the resemblance of the evil Sir Hugo to the schemer and plotter of the present day.

Policemen:

At the station in Devonshire, by the gate there stood two soldierly men in dark uniforms, warders, looking for an escaped convict. Along the way was another, a mounted soldier, dark and stern, his rifle poised.

Lestrade came down at the end to help with the capture and the arrest. He was characterized by Holmes as “the best of the professionals”.

Holmes’ fees:

No mention. He was hired by Dr. Mortimer, but the man whose life Holmes saved was Sir Henry Baskerville. Presumably Mortimer hired Holmes on Sir Henry’s behalf, and as a result, Holmes could be paid appropriately.

Transport:

A hansom cab with a bearded man inside followed Sir Henry and Dr. Mortimer when they left 221B for their hotel. Later, Holmes & Watson returned home in a cab.

At the start of the trip to Baskerville Hall, Holmes & Watson took a cab to Paddington Station to meet with Baskerville and Mortimer. Sir Henry, Dr. Mortimer, and Watson travelled in a first-class carriage to Devonshire, to a small wayside station. They went on to the Hall in a wagonette pulled by a pair of cobs (small stout work-horses). Then another wagonette ride on the moor the night of the capture.

Food:

Holmes & Watson with Sir Henry and Dr. Mortimer had a pleasant luncheon at the Northumberland Hotel in London.

After a walking tour of the moorland, Sir Henry and Watson on their way back stayed for lunch at Merripit House. Then one evening the Stapletons dined at the Hall. A few days later, Dr. Mortimer lunched with Sir Henry and Watson at the Hall.

The night of the convict’s death, Holmes & Watson were too late for dinner, but were both ready for their suppers.

Holmes & Watson and Lestrade had two hours for dinner before heading out to the moor to spring their trap.

Drink:

One Michaelmas centuries before, Sir Hugo Baskerville and five or six of his idle and wicked companions kidnapped a maiden and brought her to the Hall where they sat down to a long carouse, singing and shouting terrible oaths. The words used by Hugo Baskerville, when he was in wine, were such as might blast the man who said them. More companions got involved, and some thirteen of them called for more wine and set off to pursue the maiden, who had escaped.

On the night of Sir Charles' death, one Murphy, a gipsy horse-dealer, was on the moor at no great distance, but he by his own confession had been the worse for drink. He heard cries but was unable to state from what direction they came.

On a mission to track down the man on the tor, Watson passed Mr. Frankland's house. Frankland told Watson to give the horses a rest, and come in to have a glass of wine to celebrate his successful litigation. Frankland said they would empty the decanter in honour of the great occasion. But having gotten a clue as to the stranger's location, Watson declined.

Watson found the prehistoric hut to be empty, but there were signs someone had been living there, including a pannikin (a small metal pan or cup) and a half-full bottle of spirits standing in the corner.

At Merripit House, coffee and wine were in front of Stapleton and Sir Henry as they sat.

After Sir Henry was attacked by the hound, Lestrade thrust his brandy-flask between the baronet's teeth, and his two frightened eyes were looking up at the rescuers. Then Sir Henry recovered his courage and asked for another mouthful of brandy.

They rescued Beryl, who was in the attic, tied to a post. She had fainted from ill-usage and exhaustion, but Lestrade took care of that with his brandy-bottle.

Vices:

While discussing Dr. Mortimer's Penang lawyer with Watson, Holmes pushed back his chair and lit a cigarette. He leaned back and blew little wavering rings of smoke up to the ceiling.

Holmes observed from Mortimer's forefinger that he made his own cigarettes. Holmes invited him to smoke one, and the man drew out paper and tobacco and twirled the one up in the other with surprising dexterity, using his long, quivering fingers, which were as agile and restless as the antennae of an insect.

After hearing the legend of the hound, Holmes yawned and tossed the end of his cigarette into the fire.

Before his death Sir Charles Baskerville had smoked at the wicket-gate leading onto the moor. Dr. Mortimer observed that the ash had twice dropped from the cigar.

After hearing the story of the Hound, Holmes told Watson to have Bradley's send up a pound of the strongest shag tobacco. When Watson returned from his club that evening he found the room filled with the acrid fumes, which took him by the throat and set him coughing. Through the haze he saw Holmes in his dressing-gown coiled up in an armchair with his black clay pipe between his lips. Holmes had consumed an incredible amount of tobacco.

After lunch and the meeting with Sir Henry and Dr. Mortimer, back at 221B, Holmes all afternoon and late into the evening sat lost in tobacco and thought.

During their first evening meal at Baskerville Hall, Watson and Sir Henry Baskerville talked little. When the meal was over they retired into the modern billiard-room and smoked a cigarette.

While in Sir Henry's room waiting for Barrymore to sneak by, Watson and the baronet sat smoking cigarettes without making the least sound.

Watson approached the prehistoric hut where he believed the stranger might be lurking, and threw aside his cigarette.

Upon finding the convict's body, Holmes and Watson observed a figure approaching over the moor, and saw the dull red glow of a cigar.

When Holmes, Watson, and Lestrade went to Merrit's house to chase down the hound, they could look straight through the uncurtained window and observe Sir Henry and Stapleton sitting on either side of the round table. Both of them were smoking cigars, and coffee and wine were in front of them. Sir Henry filled his glass and leaned back in his chair, puffing at his cigar. As the evening wore on, they continued to chat over their cigars.

Other cases mentioned:

The little affair of the Vatican cameos, and Holmes' anxiety to oblige the Pope. That of one of the most revered names in England who was being besmirched by a blackmailer; the analogous incidents in Godno, in Little Russia, in the year '66; and the Anderson murders in North Carolina. The atrocious conduct of Colonel Upwood in connection with the famous card scandal of the Nonpareil Club, and the unfortunate case of Mme. Montpensier, charged with murder over the death of her step-daughter, Mlle. Carere, the young lady who was found six months later alive and married in New York.

Notable Quotables:

“The more outre and grotesque an incident is the more carefully it deserves to be examined, and the very point which appears to complicate a case is, when duly considered and scientifically handled, the one which is most likely to elucidate it.” – Holmes

“A devil with merely local powers like a parish vestry would be too inconceivable a thing.” – Holmes

“Watson, this time we have got a foeman who is worthy of our steel.” – Holmes

Holmes to Sir Henry at the station: “Bear in mind, Sir Henry, one of the phrases in that queer old legend which Dr. Mortimer has read to us, and avoid the moor in those hours of darkness when the powers of evil are exalted.”

Other Interestings:

Check out the “Baskerville Serial Challenge” in the sidebar on the right. See if you can identify the break points in the original serialized version of the story.

When all was said and done:

The villain disappeared in the end, after his exposure. He had tried to flee across the great Grimpen Mire, but could not be found. He was most likely down in the foul slime of the huge morass which had sucked him in, forever buried there. Nary a tear was shed.

The plan to establish himself as an heir was not made clear, but Holmes outlined several methods that might have been used.