



Adventure XXVII -- The Hound of the Baskervilles

For the next two weeks we read that pet story of Sherlockians everywhere, a frightening tale called *The Hound of the Baskervilles*. Our Q's and comments for the first seven chapters:

Holmes thinks the Baskerville family history is a fairy tale. How well does the legend fit the fairy tale genre?

Mortimer is a medical man and an author. He also has useful powers of observation which draw praise from Sherlock Holmes. Should Watson suddenly retire, what sort of sidekick would Mortimer make for the Great Detective? Would Mortimer be interested in the job?

Cerberus (Greece), Garm (Germany), Xoltl (Mexico), Anubis (Egypt) to name but a few — why are dogs so closely identified with death?

Watson appears to genuinely like Sir Henry, and despite their dissimilar backgrounds they quickly settle into a comfortable companionship. Would Watson be happy staying on at Baskerville Hall with his new friend?

In February, 1979 my friend Kay York traveled to remote Maryhill, Washington (USA), on a cliff over the Columbia River, to join a group of several hundred modern Druids observing a total solar eclipse. Maryhill was chosen for their ritual because it's home to a suitably-spooky replica of Stonehenge. Network TV was there in full force, and the local stations in Portland (the nearest major city, and where I happened to be watching that day) carried the entire event live. The sun rose, and 30 minutes later it dimmed and went black. As the Druids chanted and swayed the TV announcer suddenly exclaimed "IT'S A HOUND! A GIANT HOUND!" I looked closer at the TV screen, and sure



enough, there was Kay's big, doofy dog, Willow. He had leaped atop the stone altar and was tearing hungrily into the Druids' "sacrifice," which Kay told me later was a basket of sausages. There was a lot of human-squealing and doggy-whimpering as the reluctant Willow was dragged off the altar. Funny as it was, I still remember the chill I felt at the spectacle of a dog, even one I knew well, ripping into meat against the shadowy background of the megaliths.....

Reports.....diaries.....letters.....Watson is so busy writing, it's a wonder he has time to investigate! As we read the thrilling conclusion of *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, here are my questions and comments for the pack:

Sir Henry "offered in as many words to marry" Beryl Stapleton. It doesn't sound very romantic! Had they not been interrupted, she would have had to give him some kind of answer right there in Chapter Nine, before any of the subsequent information came out. How do you think she might have replied?

How do you think Watson rates as a detective?

Who is treated worse by Stapleton: Beryl or the hound?

Why is Lestrade, a veteran of countless criminal investigations, so terrorized out there on the moor? Is he simply afraid of dogs? Of ghosts? Of something else?

It was one of SH's peculiarities that in the intensity of a case, he seldom ate. "I cannot spare energy and nerve force for digestion," he explained in *NORW*. However, in *HOUN* we presume his appetite is good because of the litter of empty cans in his hut. Watson made a note of Holmes' next meal: a loaf of bread, tinned tongue, and two tins of peaches. Bread and peaches sound good to most people, but tongue is a delicacy many of us try and cut back on. Way back. Mr. Grice Paterson offers some food for thought. He claims Holmes would only consume something that gross as part of a powerful, self-abusive, purification ritual prior to doing battle with the other-worldly dog. Sort of like flagellating oneself. Mr. GP is rare in that he has never actually read *HOUN*, but he does have a modicum of experience with tinned tongue. His veddy proper parents were enthusiastic tongue-eaters, and forced him to join them in eating the stuff when he was a small child. The texture and flavor were bad enough, he recalls. Still worse was the emotional trauma he suffered when his parents wouldn't answer the horrible question that formed in his young mind: "Does the cow taste me?"

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