

Arthur Conan Doyle Encyclopedia

Adventure XXVII -- The Hound of the Baskervilles

SUMMARY (Diogenes Club)

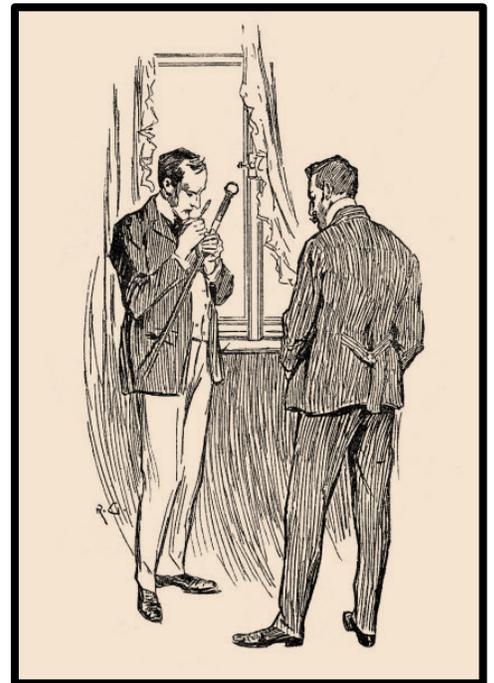
Holmes is consulted by Dr. Mortimer because of some unusual circumstances surrounding the death of Sir Charles Baskerville.

Sir Charles made a large fortune in the South African gold fields and returned to England where he took over the family manor on the edge of Dartmoor. He was preoccupied by a legend popular in his family that because of the indiscretions and cruelties of Sir Hugo, a curse had been placed on the family and any of them who lived in the manor would be killed by a fiendish hound.

Mortimer reads Holmes an account of the legend. Mortimer says that Sir Charles obviously died of a heart attack -- he had had a weak heart for some time -- but feels he was frightened to death and the prints of a gigantic hound were found near his body.

Charles' heir, Henry, son of his next younger brother (unnamed) has been found on a farm in Canada and is due to arrive in London to claim his inheritance.

A second brother of Sir Charles, Rodger, supposedly died childless, but actually had a son (also named Rodger). Rodger, Jr. was an atavistic throwback to Sir Hugo himself. He had become a naturalist, specializing in entomology. He moved to an estate near Baskerville Hall under the assumed name of Stapleton. He purchased a huge dog, half mastiff and half bloodhound, which he kept on an island in Dartmoor, surrounded by a treacherous mire (Grimpen mire). He used the dog to frighten Charles to death and was training it to kill in order to murder Henry after which he planned to make his true identity known and become heir to the fortune.



Holmes solves the case from afar. He tells all concerned that he is in London when actually he is living on the moor in order to better observe Stapleton.

In a dramatic conclusion, the hound is loosed upon Sir Henry and Holmes, Watson and Lestrade kill it at the last moment. Stapleton attempts to reach his island in the mire but loses his path in fog, falls in the mire and drowns.

After the affair is over, Holmes discusses the case with Beryl on two occasions, but we are not told any more about what became of her.

Sir Henry's nerves are shattered by the hound's attack and after recovering from an episode of brain fever, he and Dr. Mortimer travel around the world to restore his constitution.

There are several interesting subplots. (1) Selden is Eliza Barrymore's younger brother; Eliza's maiden name was Selden. He has escaped from prison and she is befriending him and hiding him out on the moor. Henry gives Barrymore some of his American clothes and Barrymore in turn gives them to Selden. Stapleton turns the hound loose and the hound, picking up Henry's scent from his old clothes, kills Selden. (2) Stapleton is supposedly unmarried and woos Laura, getting her to write a note to Charles asking him to meet her at the moor gate. When Charles goes to meet her, Stapleton looses the hound to frighten him to death. (3) Henry falls in love with Beryl, thinking that she is available. She wants nothing to do with her husband's murderous schemes but because of severe ill treatment is forced to remain silent.

SUMMARY (Wikipedia)

Dr James Mortimer recounts to Sherlock Holmes in London an old legend of a curse that reportedly runs in the Baskerville family since the time of the English Civil War, when Sir Hugo Baskerville was killed by a huge demonic hound, with the same creature haunting the mires of Dartmoor ever since, causing the premature death of many Baskerville heirs. He reveals that his friend Sir Charles Baskerville, who took the legend of the hound seriously, was found dead in the yew alley of his estate, Baskerville Hall, in the midst of Dartmoor. The death was attributed to a heart attack, but Mortimer reveals that Sir Charles's face retained an expression of horror, and not far from his body were the footprints of a gigantic hound. Mortimer now fears for the next in line, Sir Henry Baskerville.

Though he dismisses the curse as nonsense, Holmes agrees to meet Sir Henry, who is arriving from Canada, where he has been living. A young and jovial man, Sir Henry he is sceptical about the legend and is eager to take possession of Baskerville Hall, in spite of receiving an anonymous note, warning him to stay away from the moor.

When someone shadows Sir Henry while he is walking down a street, however, Holmes asks Watson to go with the Sir Henry and Mortimer to Dartmoor, in order to protect Sir Henry and search for any clues about who is following him.

The trio arrive at Baskerville Hall. It has a married couple, the Barrymores, as butler and housekeeper. The estate is surrounded by the moor and borders the Grimpen Mire, where animals and humans can sink to death. The news that a convict named Selden, a murderer, has escaped from nearby Dartmoor Prison and is hiding in the nearby barren hills adds to the gloomy atmosphere.

There are inexplicable events during the first night, keeping the Sir Henry and Watson awake, and only in the daylight do they relax while exploring the neighbourhood and meeting the few residents. Watson keeps searching for any lead to the identity of whoever is following Sir Henry, and faithfully sends details of his investigations to Holmes. Among the residents, the Stapletons, brother and sister, stand out: Jack is overfriendly and too curious toward Sir Henry and Watson, while Beryl, a beautiful woman, seems all too weary of the place and attempts to warn Sir Henry, via Watson, of danger.

Distant howls and strange sightings trouble Watson during his long walks among the hills, and his mood is no better inside Baskerville Hall. Watson grows suspicious of the butler Barrymore, who at night is signalling from a window of the house with a candle, to someone on the moor. Meanwhile, Sir Henry is drawn to Beryl, who seems to be afraid of her brother's attitude to any relationship. To make the puzzle more complex there is Dr. Mortimer, who is all too eager to convince Sir Henry that the curse is real; Frankland, an old and grumpy neighbour, who likes to pry on others with his telescope; his estranged daughter Laura, who had unclear ties to Sir Charles; and even a unknown man roaming free on the moor and apparently hiding on a tor where ancient tombs have been excavated by Mortimer.

Watson investigates the man on the tor, and discovers that it has been Holmes, who has been hiding on the moor all the time and is close to solving the mystery. He reveals that the hound is real and belongs to Stapleton, who promised Laura marriage and convinced her to lure Sir Charles out of his house at night, in order to frighten him with the hound. Beryl is in fact Jack Stapleton's wife, abused and forced into posing as his sister so as to influence Sir Henry and expose him as well to the hound. The hound kills a man on the moor whom Holmes and Watson fear is Sir Henry, but Barrymore had given the former's clothes to Selden, who is his brother-in-law, and Selden dies instead.

Holmes decides to use Baskerville as bait to catch Stapleton red-handed by having Sir Henry accept an invitation to Stapleton's house and walk back after dark, giving his enemy every chance to unleash the hound on him. Holmes and Watson pretend to leave Dartmoor by train, but instead they hide near Stapleton's house with Inspector Lestrade of Scotland Yard. Despite the dark and a thick fog, Holmes and Watson are able to kill

the hound when it attacks Sir Henry. They find in Stapleton's house the bound and badly abused Beryl, while Stapleton, in his panicked flight from the scene, seemingly drowns in the mire. Back in London, Holmes remarks to Watson that not only was Stapleton a physical and spiritual throwback to Hugo Baskerville, being a lost relation of Sir Charles, but also he was one of the most formidable foes Holmes had ever encountered.
