



Arthur Conan Doyle Encyclopedia

The Return of Sherlock Holmes Adventure XXXVIII -- The Adventure of the Missing Three-Quarter

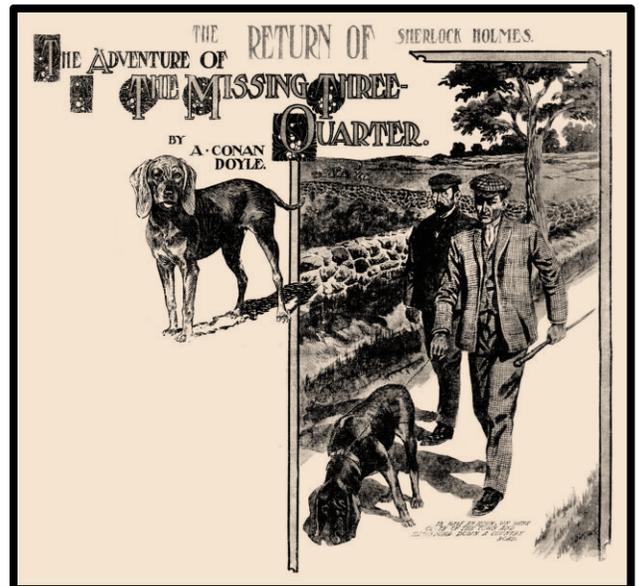
SUMMARY (Diogenes Club)

Staunton is a rugby player for Cambridge with an international reputation. He disappears a few days before a key game with Oxford. Overton contacts Holmes to find him.

Staunton is secretly married and both he and his wife are friends of Dr. Armstrong. The marriage has been kept a secret because of Lord Mount-James who is an extremely wealthy miser. Godfrey is Mount-James sole heir but he would certainly disinherit Godfrey if he learned of the marriage.

Shortly after their marriage, Mrs. Staunton was stricken with an extremely virulent form of consumption (tuberculosis) and is on her death bed. It is to be with her in her final moments that Godfrey has disappeared.

As the story ends, Godfrey's wife has just passed away. We are not told if he returned to play the game or not. Holmes promises Armstrong that he will not reveal the secret marriage.



SUMMARY (ACD Encyclopedia)

Cyril Overton, Cambridge student and rugby team skipper, comes and see Holmes and Watson at Baker Street on the advice of Inspector Stanley Hopkins. Godfrey Staunton, the irreplaceable three quarter of the team, is missing on the eve of a major match against Oxford. Overton had already wired to Staunton's only remaining family - his uncle, Lord Mount-James - but the rich old man hasn't replied. In any case, the young man didn't get on with his miserly uncle, who kept him in poverty.

Holmes interviews the hotel porter who tells them that on the previous night, the rugby player got a telegram at 6 PM and took his reply to the post office himself. At around 10 PM a man came around and Staunton left with him. By dint of a little trickery at the post office, Holmes learns that the telegram has been sent to a Doctor Leslie Armstrong in Cambridge. Holmes therefore decides to visit the physician, who turns to be Staunton trusted friend, but he's coldly received, the doctor fearing that the detective was hired by Lord Mount-James.

Holmes and Watson check into an inn in front of Armstrong house to monitor his doings and the detective tries to tail the doctor, but loses him. Furthermore, the doctor, who spotted Holmes, sends a telegram enjoining the detective to go back to London.

The next day, Holmes pours aniseed on Armstrong's carriage wheels so that, using a dog, he can track him to his destination. Holmes and Watson arrive at a house where they find Staunton in tears, kneeling beside his just-deceased wife. A year ago, they had married in secret so as not to cause Staunton to be disinherited by Lord Mount-James. Unfortunately, she contracted consumption. Staunton suffered during all the months when, to keep the marriage secret, he had to continue playing rugby and wasn't able to be at her side. When the end was near, the young woman's father picked him up and Staunton had rushed to her without a second thought.

SUMMARY (Wikipedia)

Mr. Cyril Overton of Trinity College, Cambridge, comes to Sherlock Holmes seeking his help in Godfrey Staunton's disappearance. Staunton is the key man on Overton's rugby union team (who plays at the three-quarters position, hence the story's title) and they will not win an important match the following day against Oxford if Staunton cannot be found. Holmes has to admit that sport is outside his field, but he shows the same care he has shown to his other cases.

Staunton had seemed a bit pale and bothered earlier in the day, but late in the evening, according to a hotel porter, a rough-looking, bearded man came to the hotel with a note for Staunton which, judging from his reaction, contained rather devastating news. He then left the hotel with the bearded stranger and the two of them were seen running in the direction of the Strand at about half past ten. No one has seen them since.

Overton has wired to Cambridge to find out if Staunton has been seen there; he has not. He has also wired Lord Mount-James, Staunton's very wealthy uncle and nearest living relative, but has heard no answer. Staunton is the almost-eighty-year-old Lord Mount-James's heir, but he must meanwhile live in relative poverty owing to his uncle's miserly behaviour. Meanwhile, Holmes questions the porter. The bearded man who brought the note was neither a gentleman nor a workman, and he seemed to be bothered by something

too, for his hand was trembling as he handed Staunton the note. The only word that the porter overheard of their short conversation was "time".

At six o'clock, the porter had brought Staunton a telegram, and he saw Staunton write a reply. Staunton told the porter that he would send it himself. Holmes looks at the telegraph forms in Staunton's room, and then at the blotter, finally finding a clue. The impression on the blotter yields a part of the message that Staunton sent: "Stand by us for God's sake". Obviously at least one other person is involved ("us"), and there is some kind of danger. Other papers left in the room yield clues.

Lord Mount-James also briefly visits, but can give Holmes no useful information as to his nephew's whereabouts. The old miser seems utterly aghast at the possibility that it might be a kidnapping whose object would be to extort his wealth. Holmes and Watson then go to the telegraph office where Holmes uses a ruse to get the woman there to show him the counterfoil of the message that Staunton sent. It was addressed to Dr. Leslie Armstrong, a medical academic at Cambridge. They go to see him.

Armstrong tells Holmes that Staunton is an intimate friend of his. He does not react when told that Staunton has disappeared, and claims not to know where he is, and not to have seen him recently. He also says that Staunton is very healthy, but Holmes then produces one of Staunton's papers, a thirteen-guinea bill from Armstrong. Furious, Armstrong refuses to answer any more questions, denies that he had the telegram from Staunton, and has his butler show Holmes and Watson out. They lodge at an inn just across the street from Armstrong's office, where they can watch him.

Holmes conducts some inquiries. A man in the yard before the inn tells Holmes that Armstrong, although not in actual medical practice, regularly rides in his brougham out into the country somewhere. The round trip seems to take about three hours. Holmes tries following the brougham on one of its outings, hiring a bicycle for the purpose. He is thwarted by Dr. Armstrong, who makes it quite clear that he is aware that Holmes is following him. He gives Holmes the slip. The next day, Holmes's inquiries in all the local villages come to naught; no one has seen the doctor's brougham passing through their village.

The mystery is at last unlocked by Pompey, a beagle-foxhound cross by appearance, who tracks the doctor's brougham to a cottage in the countryside after Holmes had coated the wheels in aniseed oil. What Holmes finds is not pleasant. Staunton is there, but is grieving over his young wife, who has just died of consumption.

Her existence was kept secret, because Lord Mount-James would not have approved of the marriage and would have disowned his nephew. Armstrong had told the woman's father about her condition, and he, the bearded stranger, had unwisely told Staunton, who felt compelled to rush off forthwith.