



Arthur Conan Doyle Encyclopedia

The Return of Sherlock Holmes Adventure XXXIX -- The Adventure of the Abbey Grange

SUMMARY (Diogenes Club)

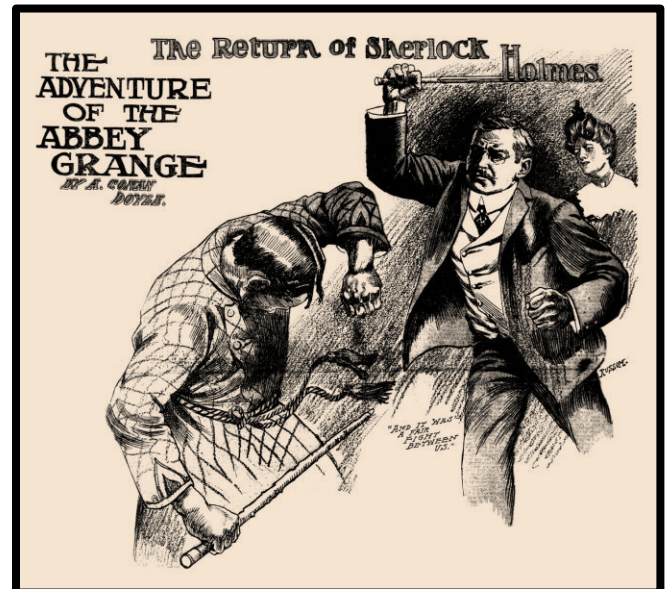
Watson is living at Baker street. Holmes awakens him in the middle of the night because he has just received a wire from Stanley Hopkins asking him to come to Abbey Grange at once.

Crocker is captain of a passenger ship traveling between England and Australia. He met Mary when she was coming to England aboard his vessel and fell in love with her. Although Mary was very fond of Crocker there was no agreement between them.

During the time Crocker returned to Australia and back again to England, Mary and Eustace were married. Eustace was a brutal drunkard who abused his wife severely.

Crocker had a lay-over of several weeks. Although he knew Mary was married, he traveled to the vicinity of Abbey Grange, hoping to meet her. First he met Theresa who told him of Mary's unfortunate status, and then he met with Mary. After a second rendezvous, Mary refused to meet with him again.

That night Crocker peeped into Mary's living room window and found her alone. He pecked on the glass and Mary admitted him. While they were conversing, Eustace came upon them. He loudly and profanely accused Mary of infidelity and struck her viciously with his cane. Crocker grabbed a poker, the two men fought and Eustace was killed.



With the aid of Theresa, they make it look as though the Randalls had broken into the house, beat up Mary, tied her to a chair, stole a bunch of silver plate, were surprised by Eustace, whom they killed and then left. After their story was arranged, Crocker left because his presence would have been difficult to explain.

Mary feigns unconsciousness and Hopkins, being confused by the crime scene, summons Holmes. By the time Holmes arrives, Mary has regained (?) her senses and told the concocted story outlined above.

Initially Holmes believes the story but as he examines the scene, his doubts multiply. He returned to Baker Street but immediately returned to the grange and asked Mary if she wanted to change her story. She refused.

Holmes tracks down Jack and he confesses all. Holmes does not turn them in for he feels Eustace got his just desserts. He tells Jack that unless the law charges an innocent man with the crime, he will do nothing.

The Randalls were arrested in New York the day after the affair at the grange so they could not have been guilty. Hopkins is left with an unsolved case.

Holmes suggests that Jack contact Mary again in about a year.

SUMMARY (ACD Encyclopedia)

On a winter morning, Holmes and Watson go off to Abbey Grange, in Kent in response to a request for help from Inspector Stanley Hopkins. It appears that during a burglary, Sir Eustace Brackenstall had been killed by a blow to the head.

Holmes interviews Lady Mary Brackenstall, a young Australian who has been unhappily married to Sir Eustace, who was a drunkard and an abusive husband, for the past year. She tells him that three men broke into the house as she entered the dining room and tied and gagged her, and that they killed Sir Eustace with a poker blow when he came, alerted by the noise. They took few pieces of silverware and each drank a glass of wine before they ran away. Her testimony suggests that the burglary is the work of the Randalls, a gang of burglars known to have been operating in the region lately. Holmes also has a chat with Theresa, Lady Brackenstall maid since childhood, who tells she didn't hear anything until her mistress screamed.

Holmes is puzzled by some facts that don't fit with the story - the knots around Lady Mary's wrists were nautical, and only one of the wineglasses has beeswing in it - and comes to the conclusion that the two women lied, but they stick to their version. Holmes and Watson return to London and visit the shipping office of the Adelaide-Southampton line, to get information about the crew that had travelled from Australia to England with Lady Mary. He summons then an officer named Jack Crocker, who finally admits he's guilty for the murder. He's in love with Lady Mary, and had recently seen Theresa, who told him about her mistress's miserable fate. He decided to go to the Abbey Grange to comfort her, but Sir Eustace caught them and

attempted to beat his wife. Crocker fought to stop him and unintentionally killed him. With the help of Theresa, they decided to make up a story to conceal the manslaughter. Crocker doesn't want to leave his love in trouble and so takes full responsibility. Touched by his honesty, Holmes and Watson decide not to denounce him and let the official version be considered as truth, guessing true justice and law wouldn't run along the same lines on this case.

SUMMARY (Wikipedia)

Sherlock Holmes wakes up Dr. Watson early one winter morning to rush to a murder scene at the Abbey Grange near Chislehurst, Kent. Sir Eustace Brackenstall has been killed, apparently by burglars. Inspector Stanley Hopkins believes that it was the infamous Randall gang who have committed several other burglaries in the neighborhood.

At Abbey Grange, Lady Brackenstall tells Holmes that her marriage was not happy; Sir Eustace was a violent, abusive drunkard. She then tells that about 11 o'clock, in the dining room, she encountered an elderly man coming in the French window, followed by two younger men. The older man struck her in the face, knocking her out. When she came to, she was gagged and tied to an oaken chair with the bellrope, which they had torn down. Sir Eustace came into the room and rushed at the intruders, one of whom struck and killed him with a poker. Lady Brackenstall fainted again for a minute or two. She saw the intruders drinking wine from a bottle taken from the sideboard. Then they left, taking some silver plate.

Sir Eustace's corpse is still lying at the murder scene. Hopkins tells Holmes some unsavoury things about Sir Eustace: that he poured petroleum over his wife's dog and set it alight, and once threw a decanter at her maid Theresa. Theresa corroborates Lady Brackenstall's account of Sir Eustace being an abusive alcoholic.

Examining the bellrope, Holmes notes that if it was tugged hard enough to tear it down, the bell would have rung in the kitchen, and asks why nobody heard it. Hopkins answers that it was late, and the kitchen is at the back of the house, where none of the servants would have heard. This suggests that the burglars must have known this, indicating a link between them and one of the servants. Oddly, the thieves stole only a few items of silver plate from the dining room. The half-empty wine bottle and glasses interest Holmes - the cork had been drawn with the corkscrew of a "multiplex knife", not the long corkscrew in the drawer, and one of the glasses has beeswing dregs in it, but the others have none.

Annoyed at being called to investigate a case that apparently has a ready-made solution, Holmes decides to catch the train back to London. However, after having mulled things over during the journey, Holmes thinks that Lady Brackenstall's story has too many holes in it and that probably she and Theresa have lied deliberately, staging a false crime scene. Upon returning to the Abbey Grange, Holmes, after examining

again the supposed crime scene, reaches this conclusion: the killer cut the bellrope with a knife, and frayed the loose end to make it look broken. Holmes confronts Lady Brackenstall and Theresa, telling them he knows they are lying and demanding the truth, but they stand by their story. On the way out, Holmes notices a hole in the ice on the pond, and writes a note for Hopkins.

Holmes searches for the killer: almost certainly a sailor (indicated by the knots and the active physique) who was previously acquainted with Lady Brackenstall, and whom she and Theresa would protect. Lady Brackenstall traveled by the ocean liner *Rock of Gibraltar* of the Adelaide-Southampton Line, which is now halfway to Australia. However, the ship's first officer, Jack Crocker, who has been promoted to captain, has remained in England and in two days will take command of the company's new ship, *Bass Rock*. Holmes takes a cab to Scotland Yard but does not go in. He tells Watson he is reluctant to name the criminal to the police until he knows more.

That evening, Hopkins calls at 221B Baker Street, with two items of news:

As suggested in Holmes' note, the stolen silver was found at the bottom of the pond. Holmes suggests that the theft was a blind—a deliberate false clue. However, Hopkins rationalises that the pond was chosen as a temporary hiding place.

The Randall gang was arrested in New York that morning, so they couldn't have committed a murder in Kent the previous night.

Later that evening, Captain Crocker comes to Baker Street, summoned by a telegram from Holmes. Holmes demands a full account of what happened at the Abbey Grange, warning Crocker that Holmes will summon the police if he lies or conceals anything.

Crocker met a woman named Mary (Lady Brackenstall) on the voyage from Australia. He fell in love with her, but not she with him. Then he happened to meet Theresa, who told him of Sir Eustace's abusive behaviour. He met secretly with Mary at the house; the last time on the previous night. They were in the dining room when Sir Eustace burst in, insulted Mary, and struck her with a cudgel. He then attacked Crocker, who killed him with the poker in self-defence. Crocker adds that he has no regret whatever. To avoid the scandal that could ensue, Crocker and Theresa concocted the cover story of burglars caught in the act. He cut down the bellrope exactly as Holmes deduced; he opened the wine bottle with his pocket knife's corkscrew; he took some silver plate and dropped it in the pond.

Holmes tells Crocker that the police don't yet know the truth, and that he will wait 24 hours before revealing it, allowing Crocker to get away. Crocker indignantly refuses the offer, insisting that he will only agree to any version of the case that will leave Mary out of it. But Holmes was only testing Crocker, and is impressed by his loyalty to Mary. He has given Hopkins "an excellent hint" and doesn't feel he must do more.

He designates Watson as the "jury", and asks him to "render a verdict." Watson declares Crocker "not guilty." Holmes tells Crocker he will keep silent unless someone else is charged, and that he may come back to Mary in a year.