



Arthur Conan Doyle Encyclopedia

The Casebook of Sherlock Holmes Adventure LVII – The Adventure of the Lion’s Mane

SUMMARY (Diogenes Club)

Holmes is living in retirement in Sussex. He and Stackhurst are walking along the high chalk cliff which borders the ocean when McPherson comes staggering toward them. He is dying and his last words are, “The lion’s mane.” His torso is covered with welts, “as from a fine wire scourge.”

Holmes discovers that McPherson is engaged to Maude. They have kept their engagement a secret because Maude gets no encouragement from either Tom or William and because Fitzroy’s uncle would disinherit him if he were to become engaged without his consent.

Holmes is very impressed with Maude – almost as with Irene Adler.

Fitzroy’s dog, which has been haunting the seashore at the site of his mother’s death, dies in a manner very similar to McPherson.

Murdoch has been searching the shore of the crime scene and decides to explore aquatically. He staggers into Holmes’ house in a state of collapse. Simultaneously, Holmes has independently solved the case!

The killer is a huge jellyfish.

Murdoch quickly recovers from his injuries.

Holmes finds the culprit caught in a tidal pool and smashes it with a boulder.



SUMMARY (Wikipedia)

The story takes place towards the end of July 1907. Holmes is enjoying his retirement in Sussex when one day at the beach, he meets his friend Harold Stackhurst, the headmaster of a nearby preparatory school called The Gables. No sooner have they met than Stackhurst's science teacher, Fitzroy McPherson, staggers up to them, clearly in agony and wearing only an overcoat and trousers. As he collapses, he mutters "lion's mane", and then dies. They see welts all over his back, possibly administered by a flexible weapon of some kind, for the marks curve over his shoulder and around his ribs.

Moments later, Ian Murdoch, a mathematics teacher at The Gables, comes up behind them. He has not seen the attack and has only just arrived at the beach from the school. Holmes sees a couple of people far up the beach, but thinks they are much too far away to have had anything to do with McPherson's death. Likewise, the few fishing boats off the beach are too far out.

It emerges that Murdoch and McPherson were friends, but had not always been. Murdoch is an enigmatic fellow with an occasional bad temper. He once threw McPherson's dog through a plate-glass window, for instance. Despite this, Stackhurst is sure that the two were on good terms with each other.

McPherson had a lover; Maud Bellamy was McPherson's fiancée. A note confirming a meeting with her was found on McPherson.

Holmes looks at the lagoon formed by a recent storm that local men have been using as a bathing pond. He sees McPherson's towel lying there dry and concludes that he never went into the water. Holmes arranges to have the caves and other nooks at the foot of the cliffs searched. Nothing and no-one turns up, which is what Holmes expected would be the case.

Stackhurst and Holmes visit Miss Bellamy, to see whether she can shed any light on this perplexing mystery. Just as they are approaching The Haven, the Bellamys' house, they see Ian Murdoch emerge. Stackhurst demands to know what he was doing there, and an angry exchange ensues with Murdoch declaring that it is none of Stackhurst's business. Stackhurst loses his temper and sacks Murdoch on the spot. Murdoch then storms off to get ready to move out.

They visit the Bellamys and find a beautiful woman in Maud Bellamy, and two extremely unpleasant men in her father and muscular brother. Mr Bellamy and his son do not approve of the liaison between Maud and McPherson; indeed, they learn of the engagement at this meeting, so secret had been the affair. Maud says that she will help however she can. She says that Murdoch admired her. This, in turn, causes Holmes to suspect that he may be responsible for McPherson's death, out of jealousy.

Then McPherson's dog is found dead at the pool where McPherson met his end. It obviously died in agony, much as its master had. At this point, Holmes begins to suspect something else. The dead McPherson's dying words, "lion's mane", have triggered a memory, but he cannot quite place it.

Inspector Bardle of the Sussex Constabulary visits Holmes to ask if there is enough evidence to arrest Murdoch. Holmes is sure that there is not. Murdoch has an alibi. He also could not have single-handedly overcome McPherson, who was quite strong, despite having heart trouble. The two men consider McPherson's wounds. The weals looked as though they might have been administered by a hot wire mesh, or perhaps a cat o' nine tails. Holmes is poised to go back to the bathing pond to test a theory he has formed which might explain McPherson's death. As he is about to leave, Murdoch arrives, helped in by Stackhurst, who is afraid that Murdoch might be dying; he fainted twice in pain. He has the same wounds on him that McPherson had. In great agony, he passes out, but finally recovers due to his having a stronger heart than McPherson's had been.

At the bathing pond, Holmes spots the murderer: a lion's mane jellyfish (*Cyanea capillata*), a deadly creature about which Holmes has read. Holmes pushes a boulder off a cliffside and crushes the creature underneath it. Murdoch is exonerated. Given his former relationship with Maud, he had helpfully acted as a go-between for her and McPherson to avoid her unfeeling father's learning of the romance, but for the same reason, did not wish to discuss it with anyone. Upon Murdoch's learning of McPherson's death, he had gone to tell Maud, and then asked her if he himself could resume his previous romance with her now that McPherson was no longer alive. Maud was too heartbroken over her fiance's sudden demise to want a relationship with anyone for the time being, however, and so she had turned Murdoch down, which explained his sour mood when confronted by Stackhurst a few days earlier. Stackhurst forgives Murdoch and gives him his job back.