



Arthur Conan Doyle Encyclopedia

The Casebook of Sherlock Holmes Adventure LX – The Adventure of Shoscombe Old Place

SUMMARY (Diogenes Club)

Watson is living at Baker St. A page is on duty.

Shoscombe Old Place came to Lady Beatrice from her late husband. It reverts to her husband's brother upon her death.

Robert is deeply in debt. He has placed his entire hope of financial salvation on winning the derby with Shoscombe prince. He worries about touts and runs the prince's half brother when they are about. Since the half-brother is much slower, this keeps the odds long on the prince.

Mason comes to Holmes with the story that Robert has been acting strangely. He has driven Lady Beatrice to drink. Lady Beatrice never visits the stable anymore and only goes out for an afternoon ride in the presence of her maid. Robert gave Beatrice's favorite Spaniel away to Barnes. He was seen visiting an ancient "haunted" crypt late at night in the presence of a strange man with a mean yellow face. He brings Holmes a piece of charred bone which was found in the ashes of the furnace by Harvey. Watson identifies the bone as part of a human femur.



Holmes ascertains the facts. Lady Beatrice, who has been extremely ill with heart and kidney disease, dies of natural causes two weeks before the derby. If Robert let this fact be known, Shoscombe Old Place would revert to his brother-in-law and the money lenders would ruin him. Therefore, he digs up the remains of one of his wife's ancient ancestors from the crypt and buries her there. He burns the disinterred remains in the furnace. That's where the femoral fragment came from. To carry off the illusion that Beatrice is alive, he has Norlett veil himself heavily and impersonate Beatrice on a

drive every afternoon, accompanied by his wife. The spaniel raises such a fuss that Robert gives him to Barnes.

Shoscombe Prince wins the derby. Robert pays off his debts and has enough left to situate himself comfortably and the magistrates forgive him for everything.

SUMMARY (Wikipedia)

Head trainer John Mason from Shoscombe Old Place, a racing stable in Berkshire, comes to Sherlock Holmes about his master, Sir Robert Norberton. Mason thinks he has gone mad. Sir Robert's sister, Lady Beatrice Falder, owns Shoscombe, but it will revert to her late husband's brother when she dies. The stable has a horse, Shoscombe Prince, who Sir Robert hopes will win the Derby. He would be out of debt if that actually happened.

Mason is not quite sure what he wants Holmes to investigate, but a number of odd changes have happened at the stable:

- Why has Lady Beatrice suddenly forgone her usual habit of stopping to greet her favourite horse?
- Why does she just ride on by in her carriage?
- Why has Sir Robert become so wild-eyed lately?
- Why has he given his sister's dog away to a neighbourhood innkeeper?
- Why does he go to the old crypt at night, and who is that man whom he meets there?
- Why have burnt human bones been found in the furnace at Shoscombe?

Holmes decides to investigate on the spot. He and Dr. Watson go to Berkshire posing as anglers and learn some interesting things. The keeper of the inn where they are staying is the one who now has Lady Beatrice's dog, and it is quite an expensive breed, one that an innkeeper ordinarily could never afford.

With the innkeeper's permission, Holmes takes the dog for a walk, and goes to Shoscombe, where he releases it as Lady Beatrice's carriage comes out of the gate. The dog dashes forward enthusiastically at first, but then flees in terror. Then, even though a maid and Lady Beatrice are supposedly the only two people in the carriage, it is a male voice that yells "Drive on!"

Then there is the crypt. John Mason observes that a heap of bones there earlier is now gone. Holmes finds a coffin with a fresh, swathed body in it. Just then, Sir Robert arrives, catching Holmes and Watson in the act.

After Holmes makes it plain that he has deduced most of the odd goings-on, Sir Robert invites him and Watson back to the house and explains everything.

About a week earlier, Lady Beatrice died of dropsy, and Sir Robert felt compelled to keep the fact secret so that the creditors would not swoop down on Shoscombe before he had a chance to win the Derby and pay off all his debts. He and the maid's husband hid the body in the crypt, but also found that they had to dispose of an older body—in the furnace. This same man also dressed up in Lady Beatrice's clothes and took her place in the carriage each day. The dog knew what had happened and might have given the game away if its noise had aroused suspicion.

Holmes refers the matter to the police, but the story ends happily. Shoscombe Prince wins the Derby, Sir Robert escapes any major judicial penalty for what he did to his sister's body, and he pays off all his debts with a great deal left over.